User practices and perceptions regarding platform workings and matters of privacy on social medium TikTok

A qualitative study of young adult TikTok users in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

These days short-video platform TikTok is one of the most popular social media. While some research has already been done about how specific users use TikTok and how they think about issues such as privacy, a research gap exists between adolescents and older users, with a focus on English-speaking and Scandinavian cultures. To close this gap, this research project looked into young adult TikTok users in the Netherlands, particularly those aged 21-30, through four research questions: (1) How do young adult users in the Netherlands use TikTok in their day-to-day lives? (2) How do they perceive and interpret TikTok's platform workings? (3) How do they perceive privacy issues surrounding TikTok? And lastly, (4) Do they use specific practices to manage their privacy on TikTok, and if so, how do they do that precisely? To answer these questions, I have conducted twelve qualitative in-depth interviews with active TikTok users aged 21-30 in the Netherlands. Afterward, the transcript data were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis.

The main findings recall that this group of TikTok-using young adults portrays specific ways of usage, of which entertainment and fun is the most significant, alongside gathering knowledge and insights they can use for their benefit, and documenting experiences. When they consume videos, they do so primarily by scrolling through the app and, in some cases, actively searching for content. Furthermore, all participants portray significant levels of TikTok insights into its platform workings, though to varying degrees, ranging from user activity and information collection and usage to quite technical algorithmic processes. The fact that TikTok has an extensive amount of control over its content, and the platform's lack of transparency regarding data collection and usage, are points of critique that trouble a significant number of users, alongside the fact that the platform is subject to several lawsuits.

Moreover, all participants find privacy important and seem rather knowledgeable about ways to protect their privacy on TikTok. Mentioned tactics are denying access to their location, confusing the platform by going against their habits, looking up random content to cloak their actual interests and identity, and keeping a close eye on their followers to keep out strangers. However, not all of them actually use these insights and tactics, or only to some extent. As such, there exist a number of paradoxes, such as the infamous privacy paradox, between what these young adult TikTok users think regarding privacy and what they

do to protect it. Forces that seem to enforce this paradox are sentiments of nonchalance, circular reasoning that all social media collect data and therefore it is 'ok' and that TikTok cannot possibly be doing anything wrong since they have to follow regulations and are under strict observation by institutions such as privacy watchdogs.

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Abstract and keywords

1. Introduction

1.1. Topic of interest

       Much of social life happens on social media these days. One of the most popular ones currently is the short-video platform TikTok. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its extensive periods of self-isolation and quarantines, the app's popularity grew extensively among people all over the world, but especially, among young people (Abidin, 2020, p. 77, 82). According to Wallaroo Media (2023), TikTok is currently the sixth most popular social platform as of March 2023, with over 1 billion users worldwide and an availability in over 150 countries (Statista, 2023a). Many users find the platform enjoyable because it seems to be fascinatingly apt at finding the right, exciting content 'for them.' Before you know it, you have spent a whole afternoon just scrolling and laughing at videos. Besides that, it is very easy to reproduce the content you love by using the same filters, sounds, or other features. While such stories and statements about TikTok's potential and strong suits sound rather good, looking at the platform's workings through a more critical lens is essential.

       TikTok is often put into the same sentence as concerns about privacy and transparency. This is the case because, as Lin (2021) states, TikTok collects an extensive amount of data from both users and their devices. It does so by collecting personal information users provide, such as their name and date of birth. But it also infers information about them based on their activity on the platform and by using data from third parties they have partnerships with (TikTok, 2022). While this is the case for every social media platform, it has been proven that TikTok, especially the Chinese company behind it ByteDance, does so on an unprecedented scale (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1451). Such findings have led to concern amongst governments and governmental organizations worldwide, leading to several lawsuits. Namely, the American government shared plans to by law forbid the civil population from using TikTok altogether (Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2023). Due to the fact that the platform is owned by a tech company from China, government officials fear it poses threats to security and possibly access to and use of user data by the Chinese government. TikTok's CEO in the United States has denied the existence of ties with the Beijing government in court and stated TikTok has not and never will share data with the Chinese government (Slawson, 2023).

       Nonetheless, because of the mentioned heavy data collection, privacy issues are likely to eventually happen and increase with social media apps such as TikTok. And legislation on such evolving platforms is lagging behind, due to the fact that law enforcement

is often developed and adjusted after the fact, after such technological development has taken flight. The question is, whether or not users are aware of potential privacy issues surrounding TikTok and their use of said platform, and whether they regard those worrisome.

1.2. Research questions

As the research by Marwick & boyd (2014) has shown, social media users are often highly capable of managing their online privacy on specific social platforms in specific ways by means of certain tactics and interpretations of content and practices. Their research and findings stem from almost a decade ago and focuses on Facebook specifically, though, therefore I wanted to extend said research and look into if such tactics also exist on TikTok. In other words, I wanted to investigate user practices and potential privacy practices taken up by TikTok users, as well as their views on privacy issues that are at hand when you use said platform. Because the total population of users of TikTok is too large for this project's scope, I want to focus on users of the social media platform in the Netherlands, with a specific age range between 21-30 years. This leads me to the formulation of the following research questions:

RQ1: How do young adult users in the Netherlands use TikTok in their day-to-day lives?

RQ2: How do young adult users in the Netherlands perceive and interpret TikTok's platform workings?

RQ3: How do young adult users in the Netherlands perceive privacy issues surrounding TikTok?

RQ4: Do young adult users in the Netherlands use specific practices to manage their privacy on TikTok, and if so, how do they do that precisely?

1.3. Societal relevance

This research's topic is societally relevant because TikTok is one of the most popular social media platforms of contemporary times, whose usage numbers are still rising. While it is an exciting social medium, with many positive and enriching possibilities, some pitfalls exist due to TikTok's excessive data collection practices. With this research, I hope to bring knowledge to a broader audience to make them aware of the extension of TikTok's data collection as well as gather insights into possible practices users can deploy to not so much protect but, more importantly, improve their privacy on the platform. In doing so, I hope to extend users' existing knowledge about and perceptions regarding TikTok's workings.

1.4. Scientific relevance

This research project and topic are also scientifically relevant because its focus provides us with an opportunity to apply theoretical concepts about privacy and platformization to both the workings and usages of social medium TikTok. Secondly, while there already has been research done on TikTok, the existing research and literature often centers around either ethnographies of the platform and technical studies or focuses on users that are much younger, namely pre-adolescent or adolescent users, in combination with their parents. With this thesis, I wished to investigate a slightly older segment of TikTok users, namely the exact group behind/after the aforementioned youngsters: young adults. (Young) adults are age-wise often more aware of the dangers of social media, but it remains the question whether or not they actively protect themselves and their privacy from those potential dangers. The latter is precisely what I wish to find out with this study. Finally, while promising research has been conducted about TikTok users in several countries, the focus has mostly been on English-speaking or Scandinavian countries, alongside Asian cultures. By looking into users in the Netherlands, I hope to add new insights by means of a new segment of TikTok users with specific user practices, perceptions and beliefs.

1.5. Chapter outline

The first chapter of this paper includes the study's introduction, which provides the topic of interest, the research questions, and the relevance of the study both societally and scientifically. It is followed up by the second chapter, where the theoretical framework is presented with useful concepts for the current study. Then in chapter three, the methodology is discussed through argumentations to justify the chosen method, as well as transparency about the research process, including the design of the research instrument, the data collection and analysis methods and procedures, the sampling techniques, and matters of reliability and validity. After this, chapter four presents the findings that were obtained through the various steps of the data analysis and a discussion of its meanings. Lastly, in the fifth chapter, the key results are interpreted and used to answer the research questions in order to present new insights. Besides that, the study's implications are taking into account, followed by a consideration of its and rounding up with a number of suggestions for lines of inquiry for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, relevant literature is discussed. Here useful concepts will be discussed and explained, followed by the ways in which they relate to the study at hand in the accordingly following sections and subsections. A short overview of relevant research that has already been done on TikTok and its many facets is provided in the final section of this chapter.

2.1. Platforms and platformization

2.1.1. Platforms as mediators

In the age of social media, many people spend a lot of time on various platforms. While these platforms claim to be merely intermediaries, providing people with the means to communicate with others online, they are, in fact, mediators (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 29-30). As Gillespie (2018) states that what they have in common is that they do not create or commission any content themselves but provide the place and organizing means for the circulation of user-generated content (pp. 254, 257). While these online spaces have little part in the creation of content, they do have an important say about its distribution, specifically if and to who it will be shown, how to connect users to it, what they, in turn, can do with it, and how they can interact with it (Gillespie, 2018, p. 254). By including and excluding certain digital features, the specifically chosen or developed platform design can 'request, demand, encourage, discourage, refuse, and allow particular lines of action and social dynamics' (Davis, 2020, p. 11).

The designs of platforms thus curate and police content and users' behavior, and they do so for several reasons. Amongst the reasons, the protection of the company that is behind the platform's public image, avoidance of loss of users due to offensive and harassing content, taking into account the wishes and image of advertising partners and their brands, and keeping in line with institutional moralities are most important (Gillespie, 2018, pp. 255, 262). They can police content and users by two measures, namely, removing and hiding/restricting visibility. Said forms of moderation can take place in various ways, from employees to providing users options to flag and report content and users themselves (Gillespie, 2018, pp. 264-265, 267) to algorithms and bots (Lin, 2021, p. 59).

2.1.2. Platform logics

The platforms, in combination with the companies and the algorithms behind them, shape how we interact with others and with content. Said algorithms show you the most popular content and content tailored to your personal characteristics based on the data they

have collected about you (De Los Santos & Klug, 2021; Gillespie, 2018; Van Dijck, 2013). In general, on social media, not every piece of content gets treated equally; instead, there is an algorithmic bias toward content that produces a lot of likes and shares. It follows the so-called popularity principle, which prefers popularity over quality, which can lead to the overshadowing of other content (Bucher, 2017, p. 36; Van Dijck, 2013, p. 61). In other words, networked technologies reconfigure the ways in which information flows online and how people can interact with information and other people (boyd, 2011, p. 41). They develop new means to amplify, record and spread information and sociality practices, which can shape publics and ways to negotiate them (boyd, 2011, pp. 45-46). In general, users interact with user-generated platforms in three ways: watching, participating, and contributing (Bossen & Kotassz, 2022, p. 465). Of these practices, passively consuming, and thus watching, is the most sought-after reason to use any social platform. Here it recalls mostly relaxation, entertainment, information seeking, and social surveillance of close ones and celebrities (Bossen & Kotassz, 2022, p. 465). The same counts for TikTok, though Omar and Dequan (2020) found that escapism is another essential driving force to use TikTok.

2.1.3. The platform that is TikTok

TikTok is such a platform. According to the company itself, TikTok 'is a short-video platform that helps users express themselves and record a good life' (Zhao, 2021, p. 1). It is owned by Chinese tech company ByteDance, and is, in fact, identical to Douyin, their Asia-tailored platform, only with a different focus, as TikTok serves international users (Kaye et al., 2020; Lin, 2021). In 2018 ByteDance bought the American lip-sync video platform Musical.ly and pivoted and rebranded it as TikTok (Kaye et al., 2020, p. 231). They did so to combine their own algorithm and tracking metrics for generating profit with Musical.ly's product innovation ideas and their insights into the tastes of Western users (Fannin, 2019, p. 1).

TikTok centers around watching, producing, editing, and sharing short video clips of up to 60 seconds in which users display all kinds of talents, knowledge, jokes, and so on (Bossen & Kotassz, 2022, pp. 463-464). The consumption side of the platform works by showing brand and sponsored content on top, content that is especially found and tailored to each user on the so-called 'For You' page. In contrast, the 'Discover' page shows you the current content with the most popular hashtags, trending topics, and paid-for brand content (Abidin, 2020, p. 81). In a vertical carousel manner, the user is fed an endless list of videos (Abidin, 2020, p. 81). Through clever and visually attractive buttons such as the rotating 'Use This Sound' circle, users can make their own version of their favorite TikTok videos and so become part of a larger base of people who all used the same sound or sound effect cataloged together in repositories (Abidin, 2020, p. 80; Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 1880). Here

videos remain accessible even after watching, as they are programmed by default to loop, through which once a video is at its end, it automatically restarts at the beginning, where the next is eagerly waiting to replace the current one (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1439).

Furthermore, as stated above, the design of platforms can, through the use and omission of specific digital features, 'request, demand, encourage, discourage, refuse, and allow particular lines of action and social dynamics' (Davis, 2020, p. 11). In the case of Twitter, it is the 128-character restriction of Tweets and its focus on text. While for TikTok it, thus, requires visual content, and centers around a limited duration. For a video that is created on TikTok, the maximum time can be up to 60 seconds, while a video that is only uploaded can have a length of 3 minutes at most (TikTok, 2023). Previously, TikTok added the option for a duration of 10 minutes, however as of April 2023, this feature is no longer available, and thus the time maximum is now 3 minutes (Birney, 2023).

2.2. From networked publics to imitation publics?

2.2.1. Networked publics

Social media has created new forms of sociality and community. Before Web 2.0, people's personal network comprised family, friends, colleagues, and others with whom they shared a (close) connection in daily life. Besides that, due to the various media and the distribution of information through press and books, people could come together through and around a common belief, interest, or way of thinking and so form a community around said commonality. This kind of community practice and community forming is what Anderson later conceptualized as imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). Because people do not have just one interest and their identity as such exists of various parts, it is not just one but many publics to which person belong and of which they are a part of (Blommaert & Varis, 2011, p. 3; boyd, 2011, p. 40). The occurrence of social media has made it even easier to connect to others all around the world who share a common interest in one way or another.

As a consequence, social networks helped develop so-called networked publics. Networked publics are places created by networked technologies, and online communities emerged as the coming together of people, technology, and practices (boyd, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2014). They are both a place and a gathering of people (boyd, 2011, p. 39). And because of that, they extend but also complicate notions of public engagement. Social media have developed such networked publics to provide users with new ways of seeing and being seen, to organize information flows and how users interact with information and each other (boyd, 2011, p. 41). Their essence has forced users to reconsider their privacy mentalities in a networked society of sharing (Marwick & boyd, 2014, p. 1052).

While a revolutionary concept, the conceptualization of networked publics stems from the first half of the 2010s, and since then, countless new platforms and practices surrounding them have emerged. Because of that, several scholars have put in the effort to build on Marwick & boyd's concept, redefining and conceptualizing an updated version of networked publics as fractured publics (Abidin, 2021) and imitation publics (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) amongst others. In the current line of inquiry, Zulli & Zulli's conceptualization of imitation publics proves very relevant. Even more so because the study in which they defined imitation publics focused on platform TikTok, the same platform as the current study.

2.2.2. Imitation publics

Zulli & Zulli (2020) looked into the content consumption and (re)creation allure of TikTok for online publics. Their findings show that where other social media platforms are centered around the formation of networks and interactions with other users, TikTok is mainly centered around content, and especially remixing and imitating already existing content. TikTok allures users to watch videos on their algorithmically recommended 'For You' page rather than look at posts from friends. Besides that, TikTok invites users to use the sounds of their favorite TikTok videos and create their own version, as such becoming part of a larger mimetic network of users who have all used the same sound or done the same dance, et cetera (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1440; Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 1880). TikTok thus provides a so-called templatibility (Abidin, 2020, pp. 80-81) for its users to edit and post content, and so extend a content-centered network of users (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1440; Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 1880). On the one hand, sociality is thus discouraged, at least sociality in the old sense, which focused on interactions between friends, expressions of sentiments and opinions, or lived experiences. Yet at the same time, new socialities that gather around mimicking specific content are nurtured and developed, which Zulli & Zulli aptly term 'imitation publics' (Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 1882). As such, mimesis functions as the basis of sociality on TikTok, extending the internet meme as a platform structure (Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 1873).

2.3. Algorithms

As mentioned before, many networked technologies make use of algorithms. Regarding academic research regarding algorithms, two lines of inquiry stand out: research about what algorithms are actually doing, and research into what users and creators think algorithms are doing (Bishop, 2018, p. 73).

2.3.1. Algorithms and how they work

To start with the first, it is crucial to know and include how these algorithms work. In general, social media platforms use a so-called recommendation system algorithm. The goal

of such systems is to fit the right content to the right user; in other words, these algorithms create opportunities for users to consume and interact with the exact content that is interesting for them or has the potential of being interesting for them (Ramos et al., 2020, p. 3; Ricci et al., 2015, p. 1; Zhang & Lou, 2021; p, 846). Recommendation system algorithms thus predict and detect the best suitable item, in the case of TikTok a video, based on user preferences, constraints, and user information (Ricci et al., 2015, p. 2). In order for the algorithm to do so, it needs to collect user data that makes their preferences, both implicitly and explicitly, knowable, readable, and interpretable (Ramos et al., 2020; Zhao, 2021). This information is then combined and interpreted in relation to personal information users provided when setting up their accounts, including names, dates of birth, locations, and user names (Zhao, 2021, p. 4). The main procedure behind recommender systems, in general, consists of collaborative filtering, which entails the principle that in case a user has agreed with another user in the past, that other user's recommendations are treated as being relevant for said earlier user too (Chen & Shi, 2022, p. 13; Ricci et al., 2015, p. 2). In short, an RS algorithm takes into account similarities between people to recommend a specific item to a specific person.

2.3.2. The algorithms of TikTok

The above-mentioned procedure and principle are also the basis of how TikTok's algorithm functions, or at least in part. TikTok namely has three processes at work; collaborative filtering, user connections, and a content traffic pool (Chen & Shi, 2022, p. 13). For its collaborative filtering practice, the algorithm analyzes user information such as gender, age, and location provided by the users themselves and the consumption level and consumption patterns of user groups with the same interests. It uses these analyses to decide which content it should recommend to which user (Chen & Shi, 2022, p. 13). A possible scenario might be that if user A uses TikTok quite frequently but only for a few minutes each time, the algorithm might decide to recommend short videos to this user. The second practice, user relation recommendations, is two-folded. On the one hand, it determines strong ties, consisting of users' relations to other users and their interactions with each other (Chen & Shi, 2022, p. 14). On the other hand, it determines weak ties, made up of user behavior, including liking, commenting, browsing, and so on (Chen & Shi, 2022, p. 14). Based on these interactive relations, it then recommends specific content. The last practice, the content traffic pool, uses the video's content weights as evaluative indicators. Through multiple rounds of recommendations which take into account its popularity and feedback, the algorithm pushes a video exponentially to more users, generating increasing traffic (Chen & Shi, 2022, p. 14). The content that comes out of these rounds then gets pushed to newly registered users.

However, it is important to state that both the users and TikTok's algorithm mutually influence one another. On one side, the algorithm controls and decides what users can see on the 'For You' page. On the other side, users can train and optimize the algorithm with their user behavior (Zhao, 2021, p. 8). This training is important but can demand a lot of time and effort from the user to train it to accurately recommend the content they are interested in (Kang & Lou, 2022; Siles et al., 2022). This problem is often encountered when interacting with a new platform, termed 'the cold start problem.' Because users have only just set up their accounts, the algorithm does not know enough about them to recommend them the content they like, content that aligns with their interests. After training, however, the participants from both mentioned studies reported to have succeeded in getting TikTok to understand their tastes. They even recalled it as being 'incredible' how good the algorithm worked and how amazed and surprised they were by its accurate recommendations for specific videos and kinds of content (Kang & Lou, 2022; Siles et al., 2022).

However, there came a turning point. After a considerable amount of time, participants from Siles et al. (2022)'s study stated that the algorithm's recommendations were either no longer accurate or showed a clear influence from commercial parties and popularity principles (Siles et al., 2022). Siles et al. (2022) quite accurately termed this 'oversaturation.' Non-accurate and even biased recommendations have been shown to decrease trust in both the algorithmic system and the platform operating it (Chao et al., 2013, p. 189; Ramos et al., 2020, p. 2). Furthermore, such bad suggestions portray a non-understanding of users' interests and wishes, and biased ones result from commercial parties pushing paid-for content (Chao et al., 2013, p. 189). While it seems logical that TikTok, like every other social platform, fosters its ties with advertisers and partners to generate profit, it can discredit their integrity and competence when the algorithm provides bad recommendations because, as discussed above as it can lead to users decreasing the time they spend on the medium or leaving all together (Chao et al., 2013, pp. 187-188). Users can, of course, give the platform feedback on its bad recommendations, such as by not liking the videos, reporting them, or simply moving on to the next video faster than usual. Due to the feedback-loop nature of social platforms, such user input can help evolve the system as its machine-learning characteristics learn from its data (Bucher, 2017, p. 41). When users start acting in ways that disrupt their usual practices as a response to unsatisfaction with the system, said reactions are not only affected by the algorithm, but they can thus also affect the algorithm itself (Bucher, 2017, pp. 41-42).

2.3.3. Algorithmic imaginary

The second line of inquiry focuses on how algorithms are perceived to work. In other words, it recalls how users believe the recommendation algorithms behind their platform of choice works and how its value systems either consciously or unconsciously affect them in their interactions with said platform (Bishop, 2018, p. 73). This is related to what Bucher termed 'algorithmic imaginary' (Bucher, 2017, p. 31). The algorithmic imaginary recalls the ways in which persons may imagine, perceive, and experience algorithms as well as what possibilities such imaginations can lead to (Bishop, 2018, p. 73; Bucher, 2017, p. 31). Such studies are interesting because they provide insights into how different perceptions about algorithms can influence how people use the systems that deploy them (Bucher, 2017, p. 32). These places and sceneries in which people interact with and endure algorithms shape how users think, speak, and feel about these systems (Bucher, 2017, p. 40).

Bucher (2017) looked into the situations that lead to awareness of and encounters with algorithms, specifically the Facebook algorithm (Bucher, 2017, p. 32). These experiences recall the 'moods, affects and sensations' algorithms can help generate (Bucher, 2017, p. 32). Platforms are socio-technical assemblages run by algorithms. In order to understand their social power, one needs to understand how users perceive algorithms, how that shapes their expectations, and how it can shape the algorithms themselves (Bucher, 2017, p. 33). And especially these expectations are a strong element. People have certain expectations about algorithms to act in a specific manner. And when they do not fulfill them and instead behave differently, the user often gets frustrated, surprised, or even loses faith in the system (Bucher, 2017, p. 35-36). Participants even said that how they perceived Facebook's algorithm made decisions and controlled what they would see or not see made them uncomfortable (Bucher, 2017, p. 39). Users are proven to be quite insightful when it comes to the popularity preference of the algorithms at work behind the scenes of the platforms, boosting response-provoking content over other, possibly more important content (Bucher, 2017, p. 36-37). Accordingly, users have found ways to work around the workings of algorithms, deploying strategies such as posting at a specific time, using a particular form of structuring posts, and not including certain keywords or hashtags (Bucher, 2017, p. 37).

2.3.4. Algorithmic imaginaries of TikTok

As they navigate platforms through interactions with content, users develop mental models and theoretical perceptions about the platform's algorithmic processes and its workings (Bucher, 2017, p. 40). This is also the case with TikTok and its users, as the studies by De Los Santos & Klug (2021), Kang & Lou (2022), and Siles et al. (2022) show, TikTok users, through their experiences with the platform shown to have learned quite a lot about how they work. In their reports and interviews, they show to have acquired insights into the

algorithmic processes of TikTok. Besides that, they also took up practices to go against the logics of its algorithm to attune its content recommendations more to their wishes. TikTok, like many algorithmically-driven platforms, is a black box, and so users had to make use of repeating attempts, observing signals and their own intuition to unravel the system's workings as well as ways to play into its preferences as to increase visibility (Abidin, 2020, p. 85). Such practices include trends through which users become part of and, as such, claim a specific site of TikTok as their community, engagement boasting campaigns, and interactive practices (Abidin, 2020, pp. 88-89).

2.4. Privacy

2.4.1. Privacy conceptualizations

While important, privacy is a complex, much-contested concept. Mulligan, Koopman & Doty (2016) even state that it is essentially contested. It has many sides and theorizations through which different concepts compete with and dispute each other both in theory and practice (p. 3). Truth be told, it is indeed not easy, if possible at all, to define privacy precisely because of its many facets and layers. Some scholars define privacy as having control over others' access to one's personal information (Altman, 1977, p. 66). Privacy is thus socially constructed and maintained and involves information and relationships with others. However, as Altman (1977) states, privacy must not be seen as an absolute right but as dynamic and complex, influenced by other factors such as social norms, culture, and technology (pp. 67-68).

Related to this is contextual integrity. Contextual integrity recalls that norms that rule information flows depend on the type of information it includes, the sender's social role, the topic, the receiver, and the way the information is transmitted (Nissenbaum, 2010, p. 127; Wu, Vitak, & Zimmer, 2020, p. 486). When information from one set of norms deployed in a specific situation gets transferred to another situation with very different norms is when people can perceive their privacy as being violated. While already a much-debated topic, social media have made privacy even more challenging to achieve but also to define.

However, as Marwick & boyd (2014, p. 1054) state, posting, and thus information sharing, depends on the social situation reading skills, and perception of the context of the sender, which is quite a difficult task in technology-mediated environments. Especially because in the social media landscape, to participate means to share. People post to a public or semi-public depending on their account settings and attitudes toward privacy, but in essence they all post to be seen (boyd, 2011). Because of this sharing nature of platforms, people who take part in sociality practices on those platforms are often presumed to disregard privacy (concerns). The platforms are, namely, widely accessible online

environments from which posted content can easily travel to other platforms and contexts. However, it is logical to want to share content while simultaneously wanting to achieve privacy in such networked publics (Marwick & boyd, 2014, p. 1054). And as such, at the same time, social media, and especially people's profiles, are sites of control in which the owner of the profile has, at least some extent of, power over who can view something and how they can do so (boyd, 2011, p. 43).

Furthermore, Marwick & boyd (2014, p. 1064) conceptualize networked privacy, stating that norms about information and their contexts are shifting all the time and co-constructed by all participants involved. This means that individual actors can interpret contexts differently, and these can destabilize and collapse, as well as be controlled by other agents and entities beyond their purview (Marwick & boyd, 2014, p. 1064; Wu, Vitak, & Zimmer, 2020, p. 487). Privacy is thus transformable through ever-changing technological and social conditions (Mulligen, Koopman & Doty, 2016). Consequently, privacy is no longer about individuals or groups but about networks that people share with each other. In the case of TikTok this is made clear through the platform's main focus on content rather than people. Yet the interactions with the video content, both through relatively passive actions such as likes and shares, and the more active counterparts such as posting or remixing existing TikTok videos, content-focused networks are formed and broadened.

Because privacy has become so complicated and interwoven with all kinds of agents and practices, Mulligan, Koopman & Doty (2016) suggested and developed an analytical tool to investigate how specific types of privacy are being violated and by whom as a means to separate its many threads and provide a way to clarify both privacy's value and function in a practical setting (p. 10). The tool maps privacy claims, critiques, and contests over 14 dimensions, ranging from object and justification to target, provider, and temporal scale, clustered around a set of meta-dimensions composed of theory, protection, harm, provision, and scope (Mulligan, Koopman & Doty, 2016, p. 10).

In general, social media challenge privacy, especially people's perceived control over it. While people deploy tools that radically alter their personal relationship with privacy by using social media, it does not mean they want to give up their privacy (boyd, 2011, p. 52). As Marwick & boyd (2014) show, social media users do care about their privacy and are, to some extent, knowledgeable about their online visibility. They can take control through all kinds of tactics, both explicit, such as changing privacy settings to exclude certain publics and people, or implicit, by hiding information or embedding symbolic and hidden layers of meaning in the content they post (Marwick & boyd, 2014, p. 1063).

2.4.2. Privacy paradox

Related to this is the privacy paradox, which is defined as a paradoxical practice through which people make claims that they are concerned about their privacy, yet effectively do little to protect it in practice. They seemingly share almost everything either through posting or by simply accepting the platform's terms of service without closely reading what they agree to and keeping the default privacy settings, leading to any person or other entity having access to their content and information (Gerber, Gerber & Volkamer, 2018, p. 227). Gerber, Gerber & Volkamer (2018) found eight theoretical explanations for the existence of the privacy paradox, assessing the privacy behavior of users, behavioral intention, privacy attitude, privacy concerns, and perceived privacy risk (p. 228). Their principal findings recall that there is strong evidence of the workings of the privacy calculus model, which consists of a careful calculation of whether the benefits live up to the costs, as well as social factor influence on privacy behaviors (Gerber, Gerber & Volkramer, 2018, p. 255). On the other hand, demographics seemed only weak predictors and gender only to some degree, as female users tend to disclose more than males.

As the calculus model states, we often see trade-offs between the benefits of using a social media platform and the counterpoints, such as the platform extensively collecting data about its users. Here privacy concerns are often balanced out against said pros, in which the latter are often deemed to weigh heavier than the former. Research done by De Los Santos & Klug (2022) shows this trade-off is also made by people who use TikTok (De Los Santos & Klug, 2022, p. 228). During their interviews with TikTok users, they discovered that what their respondents loved the most about the platform was the fact it found thrilling content for them without them having to put in any effort to find it themselves (p. 228). A number of interviewees reported to know that this is only possible because the algorithm behind TikTok discovers more information about its users every time they use the platform. Studies by Kang & Lou (2022) and Siles et al. (2022) report the same finding, namely that TikTok users are aware of the fact that TikTok's algorithm uses their user data to recommend content. However, most participants in these studies consider that a small price to pay for getting exciting content recommended to them. Others are more critical and state that they would like to know more about what exact information TikTok collects and for what purpose, and in general, preferred TikTok to be more transparent about these data collection practices (Kang & Lou, 2022; Siles et al., 2022). In any case, what is deemed private is context- and information dependent. It is important to underline that their participants sound incredibly apt in recognizing both the platform's potential and its dangers, even though they often prefer the former over the latter also in order of importance (Kang & Lou, 2022; Siles et al., 2022).

2.4.3. Privacy-preserving regulations

Privacy has become a central value and issue of our information age; through ever-growing advances in information and communication technologies (also referred to as ICTs) as well as their adoption, data collection and processing have expanded exponentially both by commercial and governmental (Wu, Vitak, & Zimmer, 2020, p. 485). Because of this, it is crucial that such processing and collection practices are adequately regulated. The right to privacy was conceptualized and announced at the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950 as the right to respect the live, including private and family lives, the property and the communication of any person (Wolford, 2020). From there on further, the European Union started to develop legislation to protect it. To keep up to date with technological developments following the steady multi-faceted implementation of the Internet, in 1995 the EU passed its European Data Protection Directive, which in 1996 took into effect. The Data Protection Directive was intended to provide basic privacy legislation for the EU member countries, as a means to underline privacy as a political imperative within human rights (Solove, 2016, p. 38; Wolford, 2020). It formed the basis for a comprehensive legislative fundament to protect the personal information of individuals from a range of entities, including companies outside the EU. While a good start, it proved insufficient as an all-overseeing privacy protection instrument and legislation. In the 2010s, Europe's data protection authority concluded after several data leaks and corporate scandals, that the 1995 directive urgently needed to be updated and that the EU was in need of a comprehensive approach to ensure privacy and data protection (Wolford, 2020).

In this vein work on the new privacy legislation began, through which the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was formulated and finalized in 2015 (Solove, 2016, p. 39). After several rounds of approvement and finalization changes, the GDPR officially took effect on March 25, 2018, to regulate data processing in the European Union. The General Data Protection Regulation consists of multiple sections and parts; in Article 4 it defines personal data as 'any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject') (Koch, 2020). It recalls thus any indication of a person '[..]who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of the natural person' [..] (Koch, 2020). Besides that, it also includes a section about pseudonymized data that states that this type of data falls within the parameters of the GDPR in case it is still relatively easy to identify a person from said data (Koch, 2020). Furthermore, in Article 6, the GDPR defines that processing of personal data is only legitimate and lawful if either (a) the data subject has consented to the processing, (b) said processing is done in accordance with a contract, (c) it recalls a legal obligation, (d) it is of vital interest, (e) it is in the public interest,

or (f) if it is driven by a legitimate interest (GDPR, n.d.). While the GDPR has created thorough laws and regulations that need to be followed and respected by organizations, both public and private, and whose noncompliance can lead to heavy fines, as ever, this law is not up to the task to fully be up to date to ever-growing technological improvement and development. As such, the EU is working on further regulations, including an AI act to also have algorithm-driven technologies and practices, including platforms such as TikTok, be impacted by and having to comply with international laws.

2.5. Previous research

As TikTok is one of the most popular and most used platforms in present day, it has also sparked an interest in the academic field. Anderson (2020), for example, expresses the need to look into the platform and its potential. This research comes particularly along the lines of ethnographic studies, user studies, and technical analyses.

2.5.1. Ethnographic studies

In this vein, Schellewald (2021) conducted an exploratory ethnographic study of TikTok and especially a variety of user practices that occur there (p. 1438). Conceptualizing TikTok as a communicative environment, Schellewald interprets the visual content users get fed in occurrence with their previous activities on TikTok as 'complex, cultural artifacts' rather than mere randomly presented short entertainment (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1439). In other words, by looking into the kinds of communication that occur on TikTok, it becomes possible to go beyond assumptions of the platform just being fun and entertaining and understand how communication takes place through the mediated influence of the applications' algorithmic For You Page (p. 1438). In total, he collected and investigated a total of 96 memes, trends, styles, and genres (p. 1443). These included silly fun, meme-ifications of moments of everyday life, communal communications, re-use/taking part in trends, starting new trends, life hacks (sharing specific knowledge and tips on particular topics and practices), and meta communications which critique and go against the platform's algorithmic workings. In his conclusion, Schellewald (2021) states that TikTok indeed upholds extensive, if not unprecedented, data collection practices which should be scrutinized (p. 1451). However, he stresses that it is crucial not to let such negative aspects overshadow the platform's (positive) potential. The plus sites of TikTok namely form shared cultural contexts and function as the backboard on which self-expression and sense-making of others can flourish (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1451). Some of these include mobilizing social action, spurring social change, and establishing (new) peer networks of learning and knowledge (Abidin, 2020, p. 85).

2.5.2. User studies

Another section of research endeavors focuses on user studies. In this line of inquiry, Bossen & Kotassz (2020) looked into the exact reasons and goals pre-adolescent and adolescent consumers in Denmark pursue when using TikTok. Through cluster sampling and survey research, they found that girls more heavily use TikTok than boys, with reasons ranging from passive consumption to participation to contribution. The most prevalent motives behind passive consumption proved to be entertainment and fun. Besides that, another important reason for using TikTok is to form new connections and build new networks (p. 473). Lastly, a search for praise and recognition formed a core reason for both pre-adolescent and adolescent users to produce content on TikTok. The study concluded that seemingly the older the user gets (within the pre-adolescent – adolescent age group), the less actively they post their own content (p. 472). Though not a topic they researched specifically, Bossen and Kotassz (2020) hypothesize with caution that this change in attitude towards posting could be caused by the influence of growing up and becoming more aware of privacy concerns (p. 472).

To extend the research on specific groups of users, De Leyn et al. (2022) investigated how tweens, youngsters in-between childhood and teenage life, together with their parents make sense of TikTok as a platform, discussing both its enriching possibilities and potential privacy issues. For the tweens, TikTok functioned as a new opportunity to create and perform identity, interact with friends, explore youth culture, and form a networked public (p. 1115). The performative nature of the platform made it the perfect place to show trampoline stunts, explore talents and take on other activities as a mean between content creation and disclosing practices and so become an appropriate environment in which mediated play can take place (p. 1116). Besides that, it also provided the tweens with new and necessary skills for interacting with digital environments and society. Furthermore, the study's findings show that while they enjoy doing challenges on TikTok, these tweens are already very much aware of the privacy risks the platform could pose. They, encouraged by their parents, post videos on TikTok either only for themselves to see, or for a close group of followers they personally accepted, made up of friends primarily (pp. 1119-1120).

Because of the collaborative nature of their content, in general, they often make videos together with friends. The tweens are very aware that not all content is appropriate to post and so they make careful considerations and take protective measures to make sure (others') boundaries are not crossed (p. 1120). As such, they make a distinction between public content and private content, of which the latter is only accessible by themselves. As De Los Santos & Klug (2021) discussed earlier, there exists a classic trade-off between getting interesting content and protecting one's personal privacy in the context of TikTok.

Their study's participants sound incredibly apt in recognizing both the platform's potential and its dangers, yet often prefer the former over the latter also in order of importance.

2.5.3. Technical analyses

Furthermore, as TikTok is the international version of ByteDance's Asian-focused application Douyin (Kaye et al., 2021; Lin, 2021), Kaye et al. (2021) researched the co-evolution of Douyin and TikTok by means of a concept called parallel platformization. This notion recalls how fundamentally both applications are more or less identical, only parting ways when it comes to local legislation-driven decisions about data collecting following international privacy laws (p. 248). Lin (2021) took a more technical approach and, as far as that is possible, technically analyzed both platforms and their algorithms by investigating their source codes to show privacy and security aspects of the applications as well as differences between the two platforms. Besides that study, Neyaz et al. (2020) also looked into the technical aspects of the TikTok application. Both investigations show that the TikTok application collects large amounts of data about its users through default settings and app permissions ranging from access to contact lists, to the internet and state of the network they are using, device IP addresses, and camera and messages' content (Lin, 2021, pp. 11-12, 34-35; Neyaz et al., 2020, p. 47). The app also registers activities such as the number of people followed, welcome screen changes, and what content has been liked and watched (Lin, 2021, p. 29; Neyaz et al., 2020, p. 48). Lin's (2021) findings, alongside Kaye et al.'s (2021), show that in many instances, TikTok is identical to Douyin, only parting ways in matters that have to do with international data regulations (Kaye et al., 2021, p. 248; Lin, 2021, p. 65).

Douyin, however, collects more data than TikTok, including location and device data, which is disabled in TikTok's software. Or, to be more precise, TikTok does collect and read some instances of said information but does not transfer it to their servers and does not collect MAC addresses or MCC and MNC (Lin, 2021, p. 22, 36; Neyaz et al., 2020, p. 54). In this sense, one could say that TikTok poses less of a threat. However, Lin's (2020) research shows that TikTok has the same source code, and as such, it could invoke said practices if it wishes to do so in the future (Lin, 2020, p. 65-66). Besides that, Neyaz et al.'s (2020) study reported that thumbnails from images and videos watched by users do not get encrypted, while videos posted by users do get encrypted when sent to the server; this means that information about watched content is vulnerable to illegal sniffing (Neyaz et al., 2020, p. 49). The same counts for thumbnails of images and videos that have been sent to other users in private conversations; they, too, do not get encrypted (p. 56). Neyaz et al. (2020) conclude that it is important that users keep an eye on changing terms of service as well as carefully

considering safeguards that can protect their identity, content, and privacy (p. 56). Neyaz et al. (2020) caution the reader that it is essential that users consider the motives of the applications that use and promote said technology.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the choice of the research instrument and the arguments as to why this specific methodology is deemed efficient and just for the study at hand. The steps through which the data for the research have been collected and how the data has been analyzed are also mentioned and explained here. Furthermore, the creation process of the interview guide and the recruitment process of the participants are provided in subsequent sections. Lastly, a section will be spent recalling the steps that have been taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the study and what they mean for the study's success in general.

3.1. Research Design

This thesis project can be interpreted as a qualitative study, as its goal was to probe the meaning-making practices of a specific population (Boeije, 2010, p. 58). This is the case because it investigated how users of TikTok in the Netherlands use and make sense of the platform, especially in combination with their potential ethical and privacy considerations regarding their use of the said platform. Because the goal was to gather in-depth and personal knowledge from the users, the method of choice was in-depth interviews. Interviews, especially in-depth interviews, allow the researcher to gather deep knowledge and information about people's personal experiences and their perceptions regarding specific issues (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, pp. 100-101). Because of this, interviews are very well suited to help answer 'what' and 'how' questions (p. 101), which are precisely the kind of research questions formulated for this research. In-depth interviews were a suitable method for my research focus because it allowed me to prompt respondents to provide elaborate and self-reflective answers about their use of TikTok and the challenges they experience.

To conduct the in-depth interviews, it was necessary first to do extensive research and read a lot of literature on the topic of study. The key concepts were defined and operationalized based on that literature, forming the research project's core. With these concepts clearly defined, it became possible to orchestrate an interview guide (available in Appendix C of this paper) with topics to discuss with the interviewees and the questions to probe their knowledge and perceptions. To successfully conduct interviews, the wording and meaning of the questions need to be clear and understandable to the participants, as well as provide the means to probe for deeper knowledge (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p. 101). To achieve this, rapport was built with the participants. By building rapport, the interviewee feels comfortable sharing personal information with you as an interviewer and, thus, as a researcher (pp. 104, 106). In this case, rapport was established by creating a safe space in which to talk, treating the interviewee with respect and interest, and starting up with

icebreaker questions. Once rapport was established, I moved on to more complex topics and discussed the core questions of the study. Giving the interviewees the space to talk gave them a sense of control as well as respect, and the comfort to open up to me as the researcher, which made it possible for them to tell me how they thought and felt about using TikTok and its workings in relation to privacy.

Interviews thus provide you with the means to design a structured interview plan with the topics you want to discuss with your participants. However, allowing the participants, from time to time, to talk about what they want to talk about regarding the topic, instead of fully and strictly following the script/interview guide, gave them agency and showed the participants that you are interested in their point of view. For these reasons, I conducted semi-structured interviews that followed the interview guide while also providing space to let participants talk about other things they found important. I concluded the interviews by reviewing the main points and allowing the participants to add anything else they wanted to discuss as a final question. The three main topics are: reasons to use TikTok, TikTok's workings and algorithmic imaginaries, and privacy concerns. Besides that, the interview started with an opening section, which consisted of background information about the interviewees and an icebreaker question, and it ended with a concluding question about possible other topics the participants wanted to discuss. For the complete interview guide, see Appendix C.

Furthermore, to analyze the interview data, I made use of thematic analysis. This choice of analyzing method allowed me to effectively categorize the data and to find, identify, and report themes within them, ranging from specific to more general concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis as a method and the specific process conducted for the study at hand will be elaborated upon more profoundly in a later section of this chapter.

3.2. Sampling

Conducting in-depth interviews is rather time-consuming as well as time-intensive. Because of this fact, my aim for this study was to have a relatively small sample size of 10-15 interviews. Accordingly, I gathered 12 participants, so the sample of this study is N = 12. Of the participants, 9 were females (N = 9), and 3 were males (N = 3). An overview table with demographic information about the participants can be found in Appendix A. Because not every TikTok user might be an equally valuable interviewee, I chose to use a nonprobability sample instead of a probability sample. A probability sample recalls that each member of the selected community has an equal chance to participate in the study. On the other hand, a nonprobability sample includes a selection of participants that is influenced by the researcher in one way or another. For this project, I used the nonprobability sampling techniques of

purposive sampling and snowball sampling. With purposive sampling, the researcher designs criteria that potential participants need to portray for them to be useful and valuable for the ongoing research project (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p. 105; Wolf et al., 2016). For participants to be eligible to be part of the research at hand, they had to meet the following three specific criteria; they had to be Dutch citizens, aged 21-30, and they needed to use TikTok frequently, preferably daily. The choice of young adult users in the Netherlands was made because young people make up the most significant part of the total community of TikTok users (Statista, 2023b), as well as because this group of users has not yet been studied in published research. Besides that, the choice for this particular set of users made reaching out to potential participants relatively easy as I am part of said age group myself. Snowball sampling, on the other hand, recalls sending out a form to people from the community under study to distribute further along their network in order to reach a larger set of people (Wolf et al., 2016).

As a consequence of these sampling choices, I am aware that this research's findings cannot be generalized to the whole target population as not every member has had an equal chance to be part of the study, as is the case with random sampling. While this means that the results will not be representative of the entire population, I believe it provided the most valuable participants for this research and, as an extension, the best possible sources to help answer the research questions. Besides this, as it is a qualitative study, it is also not possible to make causal inferences; however, it does give room for insights into users' experiences which in turn can prove to be relevant for society at large (Johnson & Rowland, 2012; Rose & Johnson, 2020). To ensure broadness of scope and some amount of randomization, I followed Wolf et al.'s (2016) recommendations to make use of multiple channels for the recruitment process and to create several posts announcing the study and its recruitment on numerous social media platforms tailored to the users and thus viewers that are specific to said platforms. As recalled before, the recruitment first started in my existing network of contacts, yet through snowballing extended it to a broader network beyond my own.

To save time and costs, I posted a recruitment application on several social media accounts, including Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, to recruit participants. The text I developed for these recruitment posts is available in Appendix B. In the text of these information and recruitment posts, I briefly but clearly explained the reason for the small research as well as the mentioned criteria people had to meet in order to be eligible to take part. For further information about the study, people could reach out to me via a private message on either platform, through which I happily answered any questions they had. Lastly, in the post, I asked people to share it with others in their networks who might be interested in participating. After this first step in the recruitment stage was concluded, short

conversations were conducted in which the research questions and goals of the study were explained to interested persons. Besides that, I also assured the participants that their information would be treated just and confidential, that their answers would solely be used for this research project, and that the data would be pseudonymized in order to prevent them from being identified by their answers. Lastly, the participant's rights were clarified, including the right to withdraw their participation at any time and for any reason, and they were asked for their consent. After these informant sessions were concluded, the interviews were planned.

The interviews that were conducted ranged between 40 and 60 minutes, in which we went in-depth into the participants' perceptions of TikTok and privacy. While face-to-face interviews were preferred, it was more convenient to hold the interviews online via Zoom as it made it easier and less time-consuming for all parties. Besides that, this way, the interviewees could stay comfortable within their own homes or other places of their preference and feel at ease to discuss the matters at hand. Before each interview, I briefly went over the characteristics of the study once more. I assured the participants that they could decide not to continue at any point, after which the recorded data would be deleted. Consent for recording was asked, and the interviews were recorded on Zoom with separate files for video and audio, and transcribed using Grain. After each interview, I listened to the audio recording and read the transcript to make sure there were no mistakes, and I added the notes I wrote down during the interviews. Here I also made sure personal details that could potentially be an identifying characteristic, such as names and city names, were deleted from the transcripts. Afterward, I read the documents once more and wrote down my first findings and impressions.

3.3. Data analysis

After the interviews were conducted, the analysis process started. To analyze the data, I used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is one of the most used methodologies in qualitative analysis (Terry et al., 2017, p. 17). There exist different conceptualizations of thematic analysis. In this vein experiential orientation looks into what research participants think, do, and feel, while critical orientation investigates recurrent and dominant patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Terry et al. 2017, p. 19). Because of these characteristics, thematic analysis was the right instrument for this research's purpose as this type of analysis is used to identify, analyze and report patterns in data, namely in the interview transcripts of the perceptions and opinions of TikTok users in the Netherlands (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79; Terry et al., 2017, p. 19). As such, it is used to find 'patterns of meaning' that are repeated across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). Thematic analysis segments and

reassembles data to transform it into valuable results (Boeije, 2010, p. 94). Through coding, thematic analysis helps you to make sense of the dataset efficiently and orderly (Boeije, 2010, p. 94). By immersing yourself in the data, in repeated rounds of reading, writing down things that stand out to you, and combining them with the notes you made during the interviews to document your first thoughts and impressions, you get to know the data really well on a deep level through familiarization (Terry et al., 2017, p. 20). After that, you start inductively generating codes in such a way that you create meaningful labels for specific sections of your data, which are relevant and valuable for your research questions (p. 26). As such the coding helps you to identify the most valuable data within each data section, and then to name them with a characterizing label.

Thematic analysis consists of three rounds of coding: open, axial, and selective coding. This process follows open coding, through which you break up the data in parts, to axial coding, where these parts are then connected to each other to form related themes, and finally to selective coding which connects these themes to one or more central categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, by deploying the mentioned three rounds of coding, you go from narrow and specific to general and broad themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It follows an iterative process in which you work from early codes and first ideas to clearly defined and demarcated themes that consist of data sections that have a clear and significant connection to it (Terry et al., 2017, pp. 28-29). By going back and forth and reviewing the themes and making sure the data is segmented properly and assigned to the right theme, you make sure that the coding has been done accurately.

This method was suitable for this type of research as its purpose was to infer about the perceptions of a specific population about a specific issue, namely users of TikTok in the Netherlands and their perceptions of using said platform, with the concerns of privacy and ethics that come with that. By iteratively coding the interview data with themes, it became possible to not only to answer my research questions, but also to write up conceptualizations of the interviewees' ways of formulating their answers as well as how they make sense of TikTok and privacy which are a rich insight to society at large. Furthermore, this analysis process and the development of themes provided a means to link the results to theoretical concepts, enrich these concepts, and evaluate if they matched or disputed findings from earlier studies in the same field. The coding scheme is available in Appendix D.

3.4. Reliability and Validity

As the study is a qualitative one, the ways to make sure the research is significant and academically just differ from their quantitative counterpart. Nevertheless, any research project is weighed on its levels of validity and reliability. Reliability can be met by the

consistency of the research and the manner in which its findings can be interpreted as not accidental (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 436; Silverman, 2011, p. 360). To achieve reliability, I made sure the essential parts were taken care of, which consisted of creating and using an interview guide, the appliance of transparency about the research process, and evaluating the role of the researcher (Silverman, 2011, p. 360). With the interview guide as a tool, it was possible to ask all the participants similar questions to guarantee methodology consistency and ensure that the interviewees could share their perceptions and ideas in a consistent manner. Building on that, by thoroughly describing the data collection and data analysis processes in the methodology section, full transparency about the research process was provided and reached (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 440; Silverman, 2011, pp. 364-365). Furthermore, the transcripts of the interviews were checked for correctness to correct any mistakes made in the transcription to ensure the data showed no errors before being analyzed (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 440). Lastly, the role of the researcher was evaluated as just and helpful in creating a safe space in which the interviewees could share their beliefs. As such, a respectful and intimate bond was established between the interviewer and participants (Silverman, 2011, p. 367).

To achieve validity, on the other hand, concepts were operationalized and acknowledged during the conduction of the interviews as a means to help answer the study's research questions and so safeguard the accuracy of the findings and the study as a whole (Rose & Johnson, 2020, pp. 436-437); Silverman, 2011, p. 369). Furthermore, other measures of validity, including establishing interviewer responsiveness and validation through methodological consistency, upholding theoretical sampling and adequacy of the sample, actively deploying an analytic perspective, and reaching saturation, were met (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 436; Silverman, 2011, p. 374). When the mentioned steps have successfully and effectively been taken, the researcher can strengthen the development of the research project and the analysis' direction in such a way that both reliability and validity are achieved. In conclusion, when investing a proper amount of time and energy in making sure validity and reliability are assured in your qualitative research project, the better the research can help to make a positive change in the world (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 436).

4. Results and Discussion

In this chapter the most significant results are presented and discussed. The chapter starts with a short overview of the analysis process after which the findings are presented. Potential corroborations and deviations from previous research are taking into account as well.

4.1. Coding process

As referred to in the previous chapter, I used qualitative thematic analysis as the method for analyzing the interview transcripts. The analysis started with a first round of coding by going through the data and writing down new themes as they presented themselves. This phase of open codes was very inductively, as each time a new code showed up, I went back to the earlier sections of the transcripts I had been working through to see if this theme was actually already present in previous parts. I repeated this same procedure for every code until no more new codes came up. Then I went over the codes to see whether or not some code names needed to be changed or if two or more could actually fit the same code and thus could be combined. This way I identified ninety-nine open codes in total.

After this first phase concluded, I started the axial coding phase. In this stage of coding, I reviewed the open codes I found before and clustered them into multiple dimensions of broader themes. I repeated this step until all the open codes were divided under the axial codes. Here I came to a total of fourteen axial codes.

Lastly, I started the third coding phase and clustered the axial codes together into three general selective codes. The coding process took ten days in total. During this coding process, I went from narrower and specific codes to broad and overlaying themes. While some of the themes are a direct answer to the questions I asked the participants, most codes are based on specific terms they used in their statements about their use of the platform.

To be able to provide the richest findings, the following three main sections have been set up to cover the three general themes, namely (1) ways of usage, (2) TikTok insights, and (3) paradoxes. Here attention will be given to the most important codes that make up these selective themes.

4.2. Ways of Usage

The first selective theme I detected in the data is "Ways of Usage". This is a very broad theme, especially because there are various possibilities and reasons to use TikTok.

However, it is an important theme as it recalls the different driving forces that stir young adult TikTok users, such as the ones in this study, to interact with such a platform.

4.2.1. Categories and Usage Reasons

The first axial code within the scope of Ways of Usage is 'Categories and Usage Reasons'. By far the most significant reason the participants of this study recalled as their main urge to use TikTok is for 'fun and entertainment'. In fact, all twelve participants stated that they used the platform to have a laugh, to be entertained. For instance, participant 5 commented, "I also watch TikToks if I want to have a good laugh at silly pranks. They have a lot of those on TikTok. I watch those when I want to be cheered up" (P5). A few even went as far as to say 'fun' and even more 'being entertained' are part of TikTok's core existence, and especially the numerous challenges. In this vein, participant 9 stated, "What is life without fun, TikTok is entertainment, it is just the right amount of time, it is pure laughter. Especially lipsync videos and challenges, which are literally made for laughs" (P9).

These statements about TikTok being 'fun' and being used for entertainment are in line with Bossen & Kotassz's (2022) and Schellewald's (2021) findings that entertainment and 'silly fun' are core usages of TikTok. Related to this is a strong sense of using the platform to keep up with 'celebrity drama' and 'artists/fandom'. Examples here are participant 1's finding regarding the vetting of a piece of drama, "those semi influencers who completely vet some huge pop culture drama inside out" (P1), and participant 8 who stated that in celebrity drama situations like that, all kinds of things are over-analyzed, "Usually it's drama, you know, celebrity drama, people pulling all sorts of far-reaching stories, things that have been said, videos and stuff, and over analyzing that all" (P8). Furthermore this theme ranges from wanting to be in the know of what these stars are doing, to 'juicy' gossip, such as is the case for participant 9 who uses, "TikTok to stay up to date, also on the biggest misses, and juicy celebrity gossip" (P9). Such fandom and gossip usage practices recall the notion of 'social surveillance of celebrities' as found and defined by Bossen & Kotassz (2022).

Besides fun there are also more serious thoughts to use this specific video platform. A close second category namely refers to 'obtaining knowledge'. The young adults in this study seem to be keen to not only find joy, but also to learn something in the process. Many a participant in fact said they wanted to learn new things by using TikTok, that the platform is actually full of helpful tips on a broad range of topics. For example, participant 6 talked about a handy trick to protect strawberries which he discovered through TikTok, "I saw a TikTok video about growing strawberries, and the guy used sheep wool to acclimatize the plants against the cold at night and to retain water in the soil. That type of wool also protects it

against snails, which is really a huge problem. And it really works perfectly. I am so grateful for that, for that tip, for that specific TikTok" (P6).

Furthermore, two other interviewees even recalled that the social medium in its own right formed a learning experience for them, that TikTok's characteristics provided them with new means of marketing content online. Participant 3 said that he wanted to "immerse myself in it, so that I can use it for work" (P3), while participant 9 "instantly saw and understood that TikTok offered a lot of new opportunities to build an audience and also for brands to promote content" (P9).

As such these TikTok users thus use the platform for their own benefit, for their personal growth and development. This finding corroborates Bossen & Kotassz definition of using social media for 'information seeking (2022), and Schellewald's 'life hacks' that recall tips and knowledge about specific topics and practices (2021).

And last but not least 'documenting experiences'. In this documentation practice there is both attention for 'watching people do their thing' and capturing happenings themselves. These documentations are tri-folded: concert footage, travelling, and good times with friends. For concert footage, participant 4 recalls what they usually do for such a video, with the example of a Lady Gaga concert, "when I'm somewhere, I always make a few quick videos, just a few seconds, to record all the impressions. And then I put that all together. Then you have a video of the Chromatica Ball, for example, all the people I saw there, a lot of pictures and shots of my girlfriend Gaga of course, a lot of screaming, a lot of tears" (P4). They continued by calling it a "pretty snapshot of all those emotions" (P4). And while participant 10 talked about concerts in the same vein, they said that they viewed a meeting of friends just as precious, "a very nice evening with friends" P10). While various, these categories and reasons form a rich set of TikTok usage practices.

4.2.2. Emotions and experiences

Besides categories and reasons, many statements provided by the interviewees about their TikTok use tapped onto experiences and included emotions or adjectives to describe their experience of and with TikTok. First, an important finding is that at least half of the participants was rather positive and even amazed at how good TikTok seemed to be at finding content for them that they actually liked. This is present in a statement from participant 1, "Not a day goes by that I think to myself gee today the content is a lot less good, I'm always very satisfied" (P1). Two other participants even made their case that they have never experienced any bad recommendations from the platform, such as participant 6, "I have to say that has never occurred to me yet, any bad recommendations. I do hope I am not evoking karma now though" (P6). The same participant went on to say that they can

"blindly trust in TikTok that when I open the app, I will see videos that I like" (P6). And thus contentment is an important emotion expressed here. Such sentiments are in line with Kang & Lou's (2022) and Siles et al.'s (2022) descriptions of users recalling the platform to be nothing short of 'incredible' and very accurate.

Another participant stated they were very pleased with the short nature of TikTok content. While for others this might have been a little getting used to, as will be tapped upon in a later section, for interviewee 10 this was favorably, especially because of their low attention span, "The length of the videos is also great, I can never concentrate on anything for very long, so TikTok's short videos are actually quite perfect for me" (P10).

From the data it becomes clear that especially curiosity, boredom, and distraction are the main experienced emotions that led the participants to start using TikTok. Many of them state that especially they felt this way during the Corona pandemic in 2020, with its many restrictions and lockdowns. Three participants, state that the new video platform provided them with 'something fun' to distract them from these hard times. Participant 4 mentioned that, "it provided a great distraction. And it still does, by the way" (P4). Furthermore, participant 10 said that TikTok helped to "get through that tough time, that way there was at least something fun" (P10).

Besides that, and closely related to that, some interviewees declare that TikTok and its content are also an excellent tool to help them to relax. This can be when they simply have a few minutes to spare, such as participant 8 "If I don't have anything to do for a few minutes, I quickly grab TikTok to watch some videos and just relax" (P8), or to clear their head after working hours, as participant 10 phrased it, "it's also great to relax after work and laugh at some TikToks" P10). These experiences corroborate with the statement from Bossen & Kotassz (2022) that relaxation is an important factor for young people to use social platforms, TikTok is thus no exception.

Other experiences recalled the repetition-ness and template-like nature of certain types of posts on TikTok. A handful of participants declare that they actively look up more of the same content, mainly specific challenges, in case they experience them as rather enjoyable, as participant 11 states, "if I see one I like, I will look up more, I think that has something meditative about it, that repetition" (P11).

In doing so they made use of TikTok's rotating disc button, to access an entire catalogue of the challenge, hashtag, or topic from which they wished to see more content. For example, participant 2 memorized that "with a challenge there is often this icon at the bottom, a rotating disc, which takes you to a kind of database of only that challenge, that way

I often watch the first few videos" (P2). While participant 10 called that specific button very useful as, "it sends you to an overview of all videos of that challenge, of that tag" (P10).

Besides that, others talked about how there are specific ways of posting certain content, ways that are adopted quite broadly, if not en masse. Here participant 2 recalled about combining pictures with clips, "doesn't everyone make videos that way [..]?" (P2). While participant 4 mentioned the overflowing of lipsync videos on TikTok, including their own, in which "everyone does the same" (P4). This same-ness was also touched upon by participant 8 regarding their outfit-showing TikToks, "there is not very much possibility there, so yes indeed I do follow a kind of template" (P8).

Such experiences and perceptions recall meme-ification practices as defined by Schellewald (2021) and Abidin (2020), and Zulli and Zulli's (2020) conceptualization of imitation publics. By following certain templates and accessing databases of specific content, these TikTok users both extent and take part in content-centered networks of users on TikTok that are built around imitation (Abidin, 2020; Schellewald, 2021, Zulli & Zulli, 2020). These actions follow a logic of mimesis and form a platform structure of internet memes (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

4.2.3. Watching and posting

The essence of TikTok ultimately is watching and posting content. However, there are multiple possibilities to do exactly that. All twelve participants use TikTok to watch and thus consume content. Some, four to be precise, are self-declared 'just watchers', and do not post themselves. As Bossen & Kotassz (2020) also found, these young individuals mainly use TikTok for consuming, especially through scrolling. Such manners of content consumption are rather passive.

Some state that in their consumption of content, they are sometimes influenced by friends to watch specific videos, either passively by seeing their shares, such as participant 1, "sometimes I see on Instagram or something, on the stories, that friends of mine have reposted, shared a video, if it appeals to me then I open that link on TikTok" (P1). Another possibility is that they get sent links from friends, as participant 2 does of, "a video they think I really need to see" (P2).

Posting is also essential. Eight participants actively post on TikTok, though some more than others. One of them, participant 6, does so when they are proud of an achievement, "if I'm really proud of a very big fish I caught, or if a pumpkin looks really nice, then I can't resist posting about it, then I think to myself, you really did that, well done dude, just look at that!" (P6). Another, participant 4, mostly for the theatrical sides to TikTok,

"Occasionally I do duets, or rather my favorite songs of that moment and then I lip-sync to them very dramatically," (P4).

4.2.4. Options to improve the content

While as stated above, most interviewees are rather positive about the quality of TikTok's presented recommendations, some have a more mixed experience with said suggestions. Two participants even specifically said that the quality of these recommendations is quite fluctuating. In line with earlier findings, one practice some participants made use of in such a situation is to continue going through their feed but to simply speed up the pace, to scroll faster to the next video. Here participant 3 stated, "then I go to the next one very very quickly" (P3), participant 9 acted by "going to the next video after just a few seconds" (P9), and participant 12 scrolled further by means of swiping, "I swipe down, so I get another video" (P12).

Others close TikTok altogether or instead go to other apps in case the content is not of their taste. Lastly, though not that many stated to actively take action, a slight number of users said that they look for content themselves in case they find TikTok's recommendations to be lacking. Here participant 3 recalled it to be up to themselves, "if my For You page is nothing good, then I simply have to do it myself" (P3). The same counted for participant 5 who then would use hashtags, "If there really is nothing at all, I will look for other content myself, via hashtags. For example, I'll type in "hashtag taylor swift" or something like that" (P5)

All in all the study supports an argument that TikTok users in the Netherlands, or at least those of them who took part in this study, have a range of tactics at their disposal to improve the content that TikTok shows them, and they make use of them, though some more actively than others. Either way, this taps on findings by Kang & Lou (2022) and Siles et al. (2022) that recalled that many a TikTok user, by interacting with the platform, can improve these content suggestions and thus have an influence on its workings.

4.3. TikTok Insights

The second selective code retrieved from the interview data is TikTok Insights. This theme recalls the various perceptions the young adult TikTok users of this study have developed regarding the workings of TikTok, especially through their experience with the platform. In general, it came to my attention that, though to varying degrees, the participants are rather well informed about the processes that work behind TikTok's content showing practices.

4.3.1. Assumptions about how TikTok works

Through interacting with TikTok, the participants have come to assumptions about the platform's workings. The first thing that stood out quite significantly is that all twelve users stated that TikTok keeps a close eye on what they and other users do action-wise on the platform and app. To what extent this goes varies, the core centers mainly around liking and reaction actions, of both specific videos and topics, and following activities. But others also included assumptions that TikTok watched their using habits such as what period of day they were usually on the app, and for which duration of time. Participant 5 recalled in other words that the social media really watched every thing they do, "all your activities on TikTok, your likes, your shares, your comments, who you follow, also when you usually use TikTok, and for how long, things like that. They keep track of all of that" (P5).

Another topic these users are very vocal about is their experienced assumption that TikTok collects and uses all kinds of information about its users. The platform gathers this information through what users themselves expose about themselves on the app, but also on other platforms they assume the video-social medium has connections with.

Building on said information collection the participants experienced that they are compared to other users by TikTok and so pushed in categories for the app to filter out content, while linking users together and showing them the same content, including videos the other has liked. In line with this participant 3 recalled that, "part of that information is therefore also collected and compared with others. If you have enough similarities with, say, user K, then there is a good chance that you like the same videos as K. And then they will show you the videos that K has liked" (P3). Building on this participant 12 talked about content based on user categories, "if you have enough links with other users, they'll show you the content they like, because you're in the same category as them" (P12).

While the above assumptions already paint quite an insightful picture, a small number of participants used the term 'algorithms' in their narration of TikTok's processes, where the other participants just used terms such as 'processes' or 'TikTok does X, Y, and Z', and as such remained a bit vague. Participants 3 and 9 perceived that TikTok makes use of algorithms, and that these learn, predict, and recommend content based on the TikTok user data it trains on. Participant 3 recalled that, "the content you see is decided upon by algorithms. Those algorithms work on data, on user data" (P3). They went on to say that, "TikTok collects a lot of user data. And they get that from everywhere, from other media and platforms, from your profile, from your behavior, from your followers, everything. They then put all that information into that algorithm and based on that data it chooses which videos to show you" (P3). And participant 9 said similar things, "TikTok runs on algorithms, that is artificial intelligence, which run on machine learning. They learn from the data that is handed

to them. In this case data about you, the user. The algorithms behind TikTok then use that to show you the kind of content that they have learned that you have interacted with in the past, [that you have] liked" (P9).

Besides data collection and usage, another aspect of the users' perceptions about TikTok's processes is that popularity plays an important role. Popularity and thus reach of specific accounts push their content up, as well as a strong volume of likes and other interactions with the content, as participant 7 defined, "what's hot and trending will definitely be shown faster than [..] a video that only has a few likes" (P7). As such, some feel, popularity is preferred over quality, such as participant 10 who stated, "they also keep an eye on which videos are popular, they also show them faster and more often, regardless of who you are and what you like, popularity scores" (P10).

All in all, this set of assumptions make up what Bucher (2017) has conceptualized as algorithmic imaginaries. These twelve TikTok users have developed the above-recalled mental models, and specific imaginaries about TikTok's workings through their use of and experience with the platform as a medium.

4.3.2. TikTok is a Process

All the participants recalled interacting and using TikTok has been some kind of process for them. For some this process has been short because they experienced TikTok as being quite like other social media they were already familiar with. As such participant 9 and participant 10 experienced TikTok as rather easy and instinctive. "well, in essence, TikTok of course works quite like other social media that I use .. that did help with the [..] understanding of the app" (P9). "I was pleased to notice that the first time I went on TikTok, that it was not completely different and that I [did not] had to make an effort to understand how it worked. It works very intuitively" (P10).

Yet others declared to have had a bit more trouble with acclimating to this new social media environment due to TikTok being different. They experienced that they had to get used to some of its characteristics such as the speed of the content, as recalled by participant 1, "I just had to get used to the fact that when you have watched a video, another one starts immediately' (P1). Besides that, participant 11 mentioned to have had get accustomed to TikTok's specific ways of posting, "I also had to get used to how you post on TikTok, yes, that is quite different from Insta" (P11).

In some occasions it went a little deeper, as two to three participants discussed to have had quite a hard time getting TikTok to recommend them content they actually enjoyed and liked. Participant 5 had to put in actual time and effort to turn this around for the better,

"I've had to put in a lot of effort to break TikTok's popularity focus to see different content, to see things I actually like" (P5). Others, like participant 9 recalled that the recommendations were simply not good, "when I just started on TikTok, the proposals were simply not good. The content I was shown was completely different from what I like" (P9). As such, for these users TikTok has been an actual process.

4.3.3. Points of critique

While many a participant of this study seemed to praise TikTok's entertainment potentials and to a lesser extent the accuracy rate of its recommendations, there are also some points of critique present in their statements. First of all, they perceived TikTok to have quite a complete and total control over the content, with all the consequences that lead from that. Recalling this issue, participant 10 stated to have issues with, "TikTok having so much control over everything. They determine what you see, and even though the content is nice, those videos are nice, it bothers me a bit that they control that completely" (P10). As an example, participant 10 named to have experienced that TikTok regards friend content as less important as a trending challenge, "I almost never see videos my friends have posted, even though that's exactly what I actually want to see" (P10). The participants expressed their frustration about this quite vividly.

Building on said severe content control, the interviewees were also rather concerned about the velocity of data that TikTok collects and stores. Even more so about TikTok's practices of sniffing things out, quite personal things to be exact, as stated by participant 12, "They, TikTok, can find out very personal things about you through your use of the app. Personal things that are none of their business, like people's sexual orientation, or political affiliation, those are really things that are private, but they can figure that out somehow anyway" (P12).

Lack of transparency about the platform's precise doings and reasons was of lesser concern, though one interviewee expressed his wish for more clarity, "I think TikTok should be more transparent about the type of information they collect, and why they do it" (P10).

Lastly some users were critical about certain types of information TikTok collects about its users which they viewed as rather unnecessary and redundant. Participant 4 was especially surprised about the collection of telephone settings and internet information, "doesn't TikTok also collect all sorts of data about your browsing history and even your phone's settings? I really don't see what's the point in that" (P4). Participant 5 recalled the same sentiment and said "they shouldn't collect such data about your WiFi and your phone at all. What good can come from that?" (P5). This study thus argues that, at least some, TikTok users regard internet connections, phone details, and storage as unnecessary data

for TikTok to collect and use. These critical notions show not only experienced frustrations with TikTok, but more importantly quite a deep comprehension of the various things TikTok does and controls.

4.3.4. Media attention

Some interviewees discussed how media and media exposure have informed their perceptions of TikTok as well. The media, news media, can have quite a persuasive impact, this is also the case with reportings of TikTok's growing popularity, which led many a participant to want to try out the platform, as tapped upon by participant 9, "I always keep up with the latest trends, also in terms of apps and such, so when TikTok started to become booming I immediately signed up" (P9).

However, not all publicity is positive, especially when it comes to TikTok. One participant seemed to almost want to go to war to make visible the opposite, the strength and positive impact of the medium. Participant 7 felt quite frustrated with the negative publicity surrounding TikTok, "I think it's too much about that. When TikTok is in the news, it's only about that, about data usage lawsuits. About politicians' concerns about what TikTok can do to society. In a bad sense" (P7). They went on to call attention to the exact opposite, "you never hear stories that revolve around the exact opposite, the thousand and one ways in which TikTok has and can have a positive influence" (P7).

Lastly, it has not remained unnoticed that various lawsuits have been declared against TikTok and its home company ByteDance. Their data collection practices have stirred up some thinking, within political circles as well as under users. Some expressed to be worried, such as participant 12 who stated that "it could be very dangerous if TikTok shares user data with the Chinese government. I personally find that very worrisome" (P12). Others preferred to look at the potential positive fruits of investigation, in this vein participant 3 rationalized the usefulness of enquiries into social platforms, "I think it's only right that there are questions. It is a fact that TikTok stores and uses a huge amount of information. It must be ensured that TikTok adheres to the rules" (P3).

In summary, in their self-declared stances about TikTok the participants shared assumptions, critiques and media influences that make up their imaginaries of the short-video platform.

4.4. Paradoxes

The third and final selective code that has been developed from the interview transcripts is the existence and emergence of certain paradoxes, especially in relation to privacy. These paradoxes presented themselves as a difference between how the TikTok users in this study defined privacy and discussed possibilities to protect their privacy, and how they, or at least a significant number of them, seemingly did not make use of these insights and tactics in practice.

4.4.1. Privacy definitions

There are various ways to define privacy, as the word has endless facets and parts to it. No matter which definition they stood by, all twelve participants, without exception, declared to find privacy important, even worth protecting. The strongest felt sentiment and thus most significant definition proposed is that privacy recalls deciding for yourself. To have privacy means that you yourself have a say about what happens. Therefore participant 1 defined privacy as "that every person can decide for themselves what they do and don't do, without too much interference from others, both individuals and organizations" (P1). And participant 11 believed that privacy concretely comes down to having control over your life and over what you do without "being hindered or prevented from doing something on the basis of some characteristic" (P11).

A second proposition declared privacy as data control. To have privacy means to have direct control over your information, over what is available, and to whom. Here participant 3 stated the interrelatedness between data and life, "privacy is having control over your data, over your life, and how one can affect the other" (P3). Others focused on the essence to not be retained, not be "held back by anything that people or authorities, may or can know about you" (P11).

Another saw privacy as interconnected with freedom, participant 4 viewed privacy as, "having the freedom to do what you want. Without anyone else being able to influence or abuse it" (P4). Furthermore participant 7 recalled that privacy is interwoven with freedom and that "that is now more important than ever" (P7). With this statement the participant meant the aftermath of the Corona crises, which is also presented in the last strongly-felt expression that privacy is to be left alone. Following the mentioned pandemic, they described privacy as not being watched all the time for a possibility to be a danger, "privacy is that you are not constantly monitored, constantly calculated whether what you do and who you are, might be seen as wrong in some way, labeled as some kind of danger" (P7).

Though these are rather different definitions of privacy, they do have links to each other and thus cover common ground. All these statements and all definitions recall a sense of having control, and thus follow early privacy conceptualizations as made by Altman (1977). However, there is also a sense of Nissenbaum's (2010) contextual integrity, as it recalls situations and boundaries, as well as impact.

4.4.2. Privacy on social media

When talking about privacy on social media in general, but also in relation to TikTok, it became clear that this group of users found that, through the essence of what social media is, it is not that straightforward that there is room for privacy. Furthermore its characteristics make privacy a lot more complicated, difficult or even impossible. One interviewee declared that privacy does not work on social media, due to not only to its open nature and environment, but also because misinterpretation is rather easy and can happen quickly, without there being options to remedy or counteract this. "You can never have total control on social media. Nobody can protect themselves from things that are on there, that one video in question, for example, from living a life of its own, from being collected and used" (P6). They continued that, "it is very easy to interpret things differently than they are meant to be. Interpretation is subjective. Distorting things is very easy on social media" (P6).

Others remain positive and think privacy is possible, is always possible in fact, even on social media such as TikTok. Participant 8 stated to believe that if you want to, it is possible, "If you want to, you can protect your privacy, including on social media, including on TikTok" (P8). In other words, privacy is up to the user, and thus, as participant 9 declared, a matter of putting in effort, "that doesn't mean it's impossible to have privacy. You just have to do it right" (P9).

And lastly, various possibilities to make privacy possible, protect it and improve it were presented. Most of these centered around opting for specific account settings, or changing them. For example, participant 7 mentioned managing their audience by opting for a private account, "making your account private, that way you keep control over who can see you, who can see your posts' (P7). Other options were more content-based, as participant 5 recalled a tactic to focus and disclose only certain things about yourself and your life, and not others, "you can also choose to only share specific things, post about specific things, and shield yourself for the rest of your life" (P5). As such, the participants recall Marwick & boyd's (2014) recollections of networked privacy, where on social media contexts and audiences are evidently to collapse, but where possibilities exist to navigate them.

4.4.3. Privacy tactics

Furthermore, the participants discussed various areas that you can explore in order to increase and protect your personal privacy on TikTok. In total they presented a set of twelve such courses of action. Among these twelve tactics, the most invoked one was selective posting. By only posting about certain topics and not others, these young adult TikTok users, shielded off other topics and information about themselves. Closely related to this another practice, namely making a distinction between general and personal information. Participant 2, namely, experienced the need for a thick line between generally accessible details such as nationality, and highly private ones, "I think there is a difference. Extremely personal information, such as gender identity, and sexuality, things you don't want to publicize, say, if they find out and judge you on that, and use that, then that's not good" (P2). As such participant called for carefully safe-guarding such a border.

Others called for slightly more activist practices, such as confusing, habit-breaking, and taking back control over the content, as means to fight back against some of TikTok's workings they experience as repressive or at least manipulating. By actively taking such actions the participants both protect their privacy as oppose TikTok's monopoly on content control. Participant 11 mentioned another benefit to this tactic, namely getting other kinds of content, "taking tactical action you know[..]. Going against habits so they get confused. That way you can also make TikTok show you other videos" (P11).

Some also considered taking stock of potential consequences as a measure to actively think and action privacy and to deprive TikTok of access to where the users are located, what's on their phones or in the cloud, or only allowing access to service options such as their cameras and microphones when they are recording a video on TikTok. Participant 5 defined and explained it as, "not giving such permissions, or limiting them to when you actually use something like that, only accessing your microphone when you're recording a TikTok video for example..." (P5). Yet other possibilities are slightly more passive, including using nicknames and statements recalling that if you care that much about privacy, you should not use social media, such as TikTok, at all.

These lines of action and tactics specific to TikTok built on the tactics found and discussed by Marwick & boyd's (2014), and as such show once more that social media users are often quite literate not only about how these platforms work, but also how they can protect themselves when they interact with and on said platforms.

4.4.4. Protection vs. no protection

Besides discussing such tactics, the participants can be divided into two camps, on the one hand those that take no account protection, and those that do take active account protection. Those that did not protect their accounts are either non-posters, and found it be unnecessary to for example set their account to the private option, such as participant 1, "I didn't do that to be honest, but I'm not too worried about what others and TikTok can see about me, and I also don't post anything so yes. Then that is not necessary" (P1).

Other users did not opt for a private account because it would be counterproductive to their goals of using TikTok in the first place, namely to reach a broad amount of people. Participant 4 wanted to get into contact with new people and believed that, "If I would only admit people I know, and my profile would no longer be generally accessible, it would be much harder for me to do that" (P4). Others, such as participant 9, worked to build a large following, "I want to reach as many people as possible with my posts, I want to create interactions with my followers" (P9). Besides not actively choosing for a private account on TikTok, these users often have entertained and keep on using the platform's default settings. Some even without much thought to them.

On the other hand when users actively protected their privacy on TikTok, it centered around denying the platform access to specific information such as the user's location, or WiFi details. For participant 2 location is off limits, "my location is private, I don't give TikTok access to that" (P2). The same sentiment can be found in participant 6's statement, though they went a bit further, "what they absolutely don't need to know is my location, if I want to share where I am in my video, I'll add it myself. TikTok doesn't need to know where I am at all times. That's none of her business. That's none of anyone's business really" (P6).

Furthermore, some participants set their account to private mode because they felt like their posts and content are something private, something that they want to protect from unknown people, as was the case for participant 10, "what I post is private, only myself and my close friends may see it, others have nothing to do with it" (P10).

While there are thus two sides to account privacy, how and why they choose one over the other does vary. It slightly suggests that their stance has to do with how the users individually think about privacy in general, and thus recalls Gerber, Gerber & Volkamer's (2018) finding that (personal) privacy attitudes play an important role on this issue. It also recalls the infamous privacy paradox because those who do not actively protect their TikTok accounts do in fact portray having knowledge about ways to increase their privacy, but seemingly and actively choose not to make use of them.

4.4.5. Opinions on TikTok's data collection and usage

When recalling their thoughts about TikTok collecting and using user data in their service and in the background of the app's workings, the participants recalled various opinions on these matters. For one there is a significant amount of scaling the pros and the cons, where the former seems to outperform the latter. For participant 1 the most important thing was not experiencing any disadvantages, "as long as I don't notice anything else, except that I get tailor-made and selected recommendations for me, I won't lose any sleep over it" (P1). Furthermore, participant 6 recalled the added value of TikTok using their data, "as far as I'm concerned, it's worth it that they have information about you and use it to show content that you like, it saves so much time that you don't have to actively search yourself, I think that really adds value. They can have my data for that" (P6). Such scaling practices recall the so-called calculus model, through which social media users weigh the advantages and disadvantages of using a specific platform, as presented by Gerber, Gerber & Volkamer (2018).

While some view TikTok's data collection and usage 'a tricky thing', most of the users in this study present to be not that concerned, recalling portions of level-headedness, nonchalance, or made use of the generalization that 'basically all social media do that'.

However, this type of social media circular reasoning portrays a social influence that using and collecting data is nothing new, that it is normal, that it is justifiable and even that it is wanted. This is in line with Gerber, Gerber & Volkamer (2018) result that social influence is one of the most significant reasons for such a paradox between thought and action regarding privacy preserving tactics.

4.4.6. Terms of Service perceptions

A last topic that was discussed in the interviews was TikTok's terms of service. Here the response ranged from statements that they simply did not read it, that clearly no one reads that, that it is unnecessary, that it is "too" difficult, or that it is a waste of time. On the other hand, a handful of participants did read it, found it to be useful, or recalled legitimacy of the terms of service and the reasons TikTok claim that their services are law abiding and legitimate. Such varying opinions are, again, corroborating Gerber, Gerber & Volkamer's (2018) finding that (personal) privacy attitudes have significant part in people's perceptions regarding privacy, including reading or not reading platform's Terms of Service and other policy documents.

5. Conclusion

In this final chapter, the key findings will be discussed. Besides that, implications for society at large and the academic world are taken into account, followed by shortcomings and ethical considerations of this study. Lastly, some future paths of inquiry will be proposed.

5.1. Key findings

At the beginning of this research project, I posed four research questions. These were:

RQ1: How do young adult users in the Netherlands use TikTok in their day-to-day lives?

RQ2: How do young adult users in the Netherlands perceive and interpret TikTok's platform workings?

RQ3: How do young adult users in the Netherlands perceive privacy issues surrounding TikTok?

RQ4: Do young adult users in the Netherlands use specific practices to manage their privacy on TikTok, and if so, how do they do that precisely?

To answer RQ1, from the results, it has become clear that most young adult TikTok users in the Netherlands use the application for fun and entertainment, to gain knowledge, to incorporate social surveillance of celebrities and artists, to document important memories, and to be inspired. Furthermore, most find it a very positive experience that helps them overcome boredom, distract themselves, and find relaxation. All the participants use TikTok for consumption, either through scrolling their feed or, to a lesser extent, by actively looking for content themselves.

To answer RQ2, the participants show relatively high levels of insight into TikTok's workings. These range from recalling registration of activity, and usage of user information, to slightly more technical knowledge about TikTok having algorithms at work behind the scenes and how said algorithms actively control content choices. Besides that, the participants all perceived TikTok as a process, some short and easy, others slightly more complicated, with having had to put in effort and a sense of getting used to it. Besides that, some also critiqued some of TikTok's practices, such as that the platform 'has total control over the content' and lacks transparency. Finally, media coverage, particularly the various lawsuits orchestrated against TikTok and its Chinese company behind it, has influenced their perceptions to a lower extent.

To answer RQ3, most of the TikTok users in this study did not heavily experience privacy issues in their usage of the platform. They did not find it that worrisome that TikTok collects, uses, and passes on all kinds of information about them. Their sentiments regarding this topic gather around level-headedness, nonchalance, and a slight sense of circulation reasoning and social influence that all social media platforms collect large amounts of data about their users and that there is no fuss about that. Besides that, they are convinced that TikTok is not doing anything unusual and especially not anything unlawful and that legislation and institutions such as privacy guards and watchdogs are keeping a close eye on that.

Those who looked at such practices more critically are mainly concerned about the extent of this data collection and potential consequences. Here the emphasis is primarily placed on non-service data such as locations, internet details, technical information about phones and other devices, and the registration of files in the cloud and on mobile phones. These types of information are categories the interviewees do not feel comfortable with if TikTok accesses these; some go even further and claim that the short-video platform has no business nosing in data like that.

Besides that, some are concerned about TikTok's potential and talent for deducting highly personal details, such as users' (hidden) sexuality or political stance, and how such private revelations can be used in potentially harmful manners. The many pending lawsuits against TikTok and its Chinese mother firm ByteDance by extension, fuel such already existing concerns, with a small number of users saying that even the slightest speculated possibility that China's government could, in theory, ask for access to the company's user data makes them feel uneasy.

To answer RQ4, there are some discrepancies, which I have termed paradoxes, between most participants clearly stating to find privacy 'very important' and portraying knowledge about possible existing tactics to protect privacy, yet in practice, not seeming to use these insights and instead 'not protecting their account' at all, or only to some extent. On the other hand, some participants do protect their accounts and information. They do so by keeping a close eye on who their followers are, rejecting anyone they do not know, and actively denying TikTok access to matters like their location, internet details, and telephone characteristics and files. Others act slightly more activistic and, in their goals to protect their privacy, try to confuse the platform's information processing and responding practices by undoing their general habits and searching for random content to change TikTok's assembled image of them and so protect and cloak 'who they really' are with a veil of smoke.

5.2. Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of this research study are multi-folded. Firstly, this study has presented a new focus for social media user research, specifically TikTok use. Where former studies about TikTok looked into teenagers and adolescents, this research project investigated the next segment of users, the young adults, from yet-to-be researched culture: the Netherlands. As such, these findings have broadened insights about TikTok usage as previously only countries such as the United States, Sweden, and Belgian were investigated.

Secondly, the ways these particular users interact with the video-content medium recall practices and platform structures centered around mimesis and the building and growing of networks of imitation content, just like Zulli & Zulli (2020) and Abidin (2020) have formulated earlier.

Furthermore, the findings build upon theoretical conceptualizations regarding user practices and perceptions of platforms. Where Bucher (2017) spoke of algorithmic imaginaries regarding users' mental models of Facebook, this study presents a set of TikTok insights that the participants of this study have built around the workings of TikTok.

Moreover, the specific tactics of preserving privacy on TikTok, which are either known or actively deployed by its users, extend the influential work of Marwick & boyd (2014) around practices taken up by specific groups of social media users to protect their privacy and guard their social image online.

And finally, the infamous privacy paradox between what one claims to think about privacy and what one actually does about it is also present in these young adult TikTok users to at least some extent. While all seem quite e-literate regarding privacy on the platform and tools they can use to safeguard their privacy, only a shorthand of them actually take action to protect it. Reasons for this vary from privacy attitudes to calculating the benefits and disadvantages to mainstream social influences.

5.3. Societal implications

The findings also provide societal implications. First, the study presents a set of useful tactics for any TikTok user who wishes to protect their privacy on the platform actively. While some may be more practical or significant than others, the mentioned tools are a good start and can provide safeguarding from people and platforms.

Secondly, while all respondents find privacy important, less than half do something to protect it. A possibility to decrease such lack of action might be to more actively spread information campaigns regarding the importance of privacy on social media so that more users are aware of its risks and the tools to take action. A start could be to provide attention

to the significance of reading platforms' terms of service because, as the results show, only four out of twelve users in this study have even taken as much as a look at said document. Even more so, as Neyaz et al. (2020) stated, it is vital to read these policies once and frequently re-read them as these documents are prone to undergo changes. It is important to be up to date about the developments and changes in practices of social media, such as TikTok, to remain armed and able to protect one's privacy and rights.

5.4. Limitations and ethical considerations

Some limitations and ethical considerations need to be discussed. First, to save time and make it relatively easy and convenient to gather participants, I used the non-probability sampling methods purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Because of these choices, the results are not generalizable to the population of young adult TikTok users in the Netherlands. As such, the findings do not fully represent this community's stance on TikTok use concerning privacy matters and perceptions of platform workings. However, putting in place criteria participants had to meet to be a part of the study helped gather participants with the experience and opinions needed to answer the posed research questions.

Besides this, by making use of my network of contacts on various kinds of social media, it could be that the findings are slightly biased. Nonetheless, to make potential biases as small as possible, I implemented snowball sampling so the people in my network could reach out to people from their network and enlarge the scope, thus making the reach to recruit people for the study wider.

Lastly, because the interviews were conducted online through Zoom, the researcher and interviewees were not together in the same room during the interviews. This meant that it was impossible to take stock of the total visual presence of the interviewees. Thus, possible non-spoken cues outside the parameter of Zoom's camera scope have been missed.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study are still important and fruitful because the setup of this study made it possible for the participants to feel highly comfortable talking to the researcher about their perceptions regarding TikTok and privacy. Probing for answers beyond the surface level and peaking inside their minds was ensured this way. It has provided many rich insights into how these users between 21-30 use TikTok, their imaginaries about TikTok, and their privacy-preserving tactics. As such, these findings expand existing research regarding the social media use of specific groups.

5.6 Suggestions for future research

While this study has made an important step in continuing and extending user research on TikTok, there are various fruitful lines of inquiry to build on it and its findings. A few of these options will be discussed now.

Firstly, as the current study had a small sample of only twelve participants, it seems reasonable to extend this to a larger sample in the near future. Besides that, as this study used a form of non-probability sampling, it could be a justified step to take on a probability sample to study how a representative selection of young people in the Netherlands use TikTok and how they think about privacy.

Another possible line of inquiry could be to extend the scope by looking into populations from other countries within the same age range and thus run a comparative study or multiple studies. Through such a research setup, it becomes possible to investigate if there are potentially significant differences between these various cultures and citizens.

Furthermore, the research instrument of the current study was interviews, and thus explicitly focused on in-depth interviews with individual users. While proven a useful method, it could be interesting to see if there would be differences in discussions between groups of users and thus develop a focus group study.

Besides that, it could also be worthwhile to develop a mixed method approach through which both user's personal perceptions and perspectives on TikTok and privacy are collected and to enrich those statements with some kind of follow-up in which the user's actual behavior and interaction with TikTok can be watched and interpreted. This could be done, for example, by asking participants to keep a journal and write down what they do or to sit in on a TikTok usage session.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A: Participant information

Table 1. Demographic information about the research participants

ID	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Profession	Hobbies/interests
Participant 1	26	Female	Belgian	Intermediate vocational education	Secretary	Queer culture, series, music, sports, travelling
Participant 2	24	Female	Dutch	Intermediate vocational education	Photographer	Concerts, music, reading, poetry, photography, nature
Participant 3	26	Male	Dutch	Academic education	Social media expert/ Student	Gaming, comics, series, music, playing guitar
Participant 4	24	Female	Dutch	Intermediate vocational education	Nurse/ waitress	Concerts, veganism, food, animals, travelling, pop culture,
Participant 5	25	Female	Dutch	Highschool	Shop keeper	Music, gigs, cats, vinyl, art
Participant 6	27	Male	Dutch	Academic education	Hospitality	Soccer, gardening, playing drums,
Participant 7	30	Female	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Life coach	Health, mental health, personal growth, music
Participant 8	22	Female	Dutch	Intermediate vocational education	Nurse/ Student/	Concerts, travelling, food, art
Participant 9	23	Female	Italian	Academic education	Social media consultant/ Student	Fashion, trends, influencers, health, food
Participant 10	27	Male	German	Highschool	Distribution center employee	Anime, gaming, dancing, music, pop culture, nature
Participant 11	28	Female	Dutch	Highschool	Shop keeper	Music, gigs, dolls, fashion, art
Participant 12	25	Female	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Elementary school teacher/child care worker	Concerts, food, Harry Styles, reading

Appendix B: Recruitment message

Hoi allemaal,

Ik ben momenteel bezig met het schijven van mijn scriptie voor mijn master studie aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. Daarvoor doe ik onderzoek naar hoe jongeren in Nederland TikTok gebruiken en hoe zij denken over privacy. Daarvoor zoek ik mensen die tussen de 21 en 30 jaar zijn en actief TikTok gebruiken om deel te nemen aan een paar korte interviews.

Spreekt dit je aan of ken je iemand die hier misschien aan mee zou willen doen? Stuur mij dan een privé bericht zodat ik meer info kan delen en eventuele vragen die je misschien hebt te kunnen beantwoorden.

Delen wordt op prijs gesteld! :)

Groeten,
Simone Sprangers

/ English:

Hi everyone,

I am currently writing my thesis for my master's studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am researching how young people in the Netherlands use TikTok and how they think about privacy. I am looking for people between 21 and 30 of age who actively use TikTok to take part in a few short interviews.

Are you interested or know someone who might like to take part in this study? Send me a direct message so I can provide more information and answer possible questions you might have.

Sharing would be much appreciated! :)

Regards,
Simone Sprangers

#tiktok #tiktoknederland #research #privacy #socialmedia #socialmediause #users

#student #masterstudent #master #mediastudies #erasmusuniversity #studentresearch #netherlands

Appendix C: Interview Guide TikTok users

<u>Opening</u>
Welcome and thank participant.
Present research purpose and goals.
Present interviewee with their rights.
Ask for consent to record the interview.

Start recording

<u>Icebreakers</u>
Greet and thank the interviewee for participating (For the recording)
1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, education, work, hobby's, interests)
Follow up question(s) about work/hobby's to show you are interested in what they can tell you.
If possible, make link to TikTok.

<u>General TikTok use</u>
2. Why did you start using TikTok? (Friends? Influencers? Social media?)
3. What is the most important reason you use TikTok?
Follow up: Besides X, are there other reasons you use TikTok?
4. How does a typical TikTok session look like? (Can you describe to me what you do, which steps you take?)
5. Do you mostly just watch videos or do you also create content?
Follow up:
If the interviewee (only) consumes content: What kind of content do you watch?
If the interviewee (also) creates content: How do you make a video? Do you have an idea and work it out or is it more like you see something, maybe a trend, and you decide to take part/react to it?
6. Do you ever watch TikTok challenges?
Follow up: Can you name your current favorite TikTok challenge, can you tell me more about that?
7. Do you ever follow a particular TikTok challenge, do you watch multiple videos?
Follow up:
If interviewee is a poster: Do you ever take part in TikTok challenges?

TikTok's workings and algorithmic imaginaries

8. Would you say TikTok always shows you interesting content?

Follow up:

If yes: In your opinion, is TikTok adequately capable of choosing content you like? Explain.

If no: What do you do? Do you take some kind of action yourself?

9. Has TikTok ever surprised you content-wise?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about that? Can you give an example?

10. How do you think TikTok decides what content to show you?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about that, how does it work, anything else you want to add?

Repeat answers back to the interviewee to see if you understood what s/he means properly

11. Do you think it is a good thing that TikTok collects data about its users, or are you slightly uncomfortable with that?

Follow up:

If rather positive: Can you think of possible negative sides to TikTok's data collecting practices?

If rather negative: Can you provide more context about the negative sides, the possible consequences?

12. In general, would you say using TikTok is a positive experience?

13. Would you say interacting with TikTok as a platform has been a learning experience?

Follow up:

If yes: Did it take long before you understood how TikTok works?

If no: Why not?

Privacy

14. Would you say privacy is important?

15. Can you describe what privacy is to you, in your own words?

Follow up, make link to the next question

16. In your opinion, is it possible to have privacy on social media?

Follow up: Ask about specific ways/tactics to do so, and how that works.

Follow up: How would you call said tactic to ensure privacy?

17. In your opinion, can you protect your privacy on TikTok, is it possible to do that?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about how that works?

18. Do you use said tactics yourself to protect or increase your privacy on TikTok? *Follow up*: Ask interviewee to provide reasons.

19. Can you think of other measures you can take to protect privacy on TikTok?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about that?

20. Can you think of measures to protect your privacy against TikTok?

Follow up: Can you explain that a little further?

21. Does it worry you that TikTok collects so much information about you and other users? Why, or why not?

22. Would you say giving up (part of) your privacy is just a small price to pay for the exciting content TikTok has to offer?

Follow up: Can you provide reasons?

23. Have you read TikTok's terms of service, their official policies?

Follow up:

If yes: What is the most important thing you learned/remember?

If no: Can you provide arguments as to why not?

24. Would you say it is important to know exactly what TikTok does and for what reasons?

Conclusion

Summarize what the interviewee has said

25. So if we would summarize this, [..], is that correct?

26. Is there anything else you would like to add or would like to discuss?

Conclude and thank interviewee for their time and participation.

Stop recording

The End

Appendix D: Coding scheme

Table 2. The coding scheme of the thematic analysis of the collected data

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective codes
1. Parodies 'I sometimes watch TikTok workouts yes, but not serious ones' (P1) 'Parodies so to speak, that make fun of the whole gym madness' (P1) 'influencers who super exaggeratedly lift the smallest dumbbell with seemingly the greatest effort, while wearing such ridiculous bright sport clothing' (P1) 'standing there looking like it is the hardest thing they have ever done in their entire life' (P1)	**Categories & Usage Reasons**: • Parodies • Celebrity drama • Artists & Fandom • Memes • Fun and entertainment • Obtaining knowledge • Experiences • Inspiration • Creations • Trends • Helping out	*Ways of usage* Categories and usage reasons, experiences, watching and posting, options to improve content
2. Celebrity drama 'those semi influencers who completely vet some huge pop culture drama inside out' (P1) 'Last year when that whole drama occurred around FLETCHER and her song 'Becky Is So Hot' you know, a lot of thought that was really not okay, FLETCHER name-calling her ex's new girlfriend and her name like that. Literally all of TikTok was falling over it, with TikTok reactions everywhere. It was actual gold' (P1) 'Usually it's drama, you know, celebrity drama, haters pulling all sorts of far-reaching stories, things that have been said, videos and stuff, and over analyze all that shit.' (P8) 'Using TikTok to stay up to date, also on the biggest misses, and juicy celebrity gossip' (P9)	**Emotions & Experiences**: • Relativize • Surprise • Contentment • Curiosity • Boredom • Distraction • Community • Easiness • Discontent with other apps • Relaxation • Attractiveness • Endless • Shortness • Repetition • Template	*TikTok Insights* Assumptions about how TikTok works, process, critiques, media attention

3. Artists & Fandom 'I also look at what my faves post on TikTok, such as FLETCHER, Upsahl, Halsey, artists like that' (P1) 'I want to know what they are doing' (P1) 'whether any surprises might be coming up, like, new music, tour dates, merch drops, things like that' (P1) 'Gosh, I actually mainly started using TikTok because FLETCHER kept posting TikToks on her Insta, on her stories, she does that a lot. I didn't want to miss out on anything so then I subscribed to TikTok too' (P1) 'fan cams are great. TikTok is full of those' (P2) 'I also follow some of my favorite artists.' (P8) 'they post content to give some insights and a look into their lives, [..] drop news.. make fun content for their followers, that sort of thing' (P8) 'I want to [..] you know [..] know what she's up to' (P8) 'Videos about Harry Styles, fan duets, challenges that use his music.' (P12) 'Everything with and about Harry I simply must and want to see' (P12)	**TikTok is a process**: • The same • Different • Getting used to • Process • Ease • Instinctive	*Paradoxes* Privacy definitions, privacy on social media, tactics, protection vs. no protection, opinions on data collection and usage, Terms of Service perceptions
4. Memes 'pop culture memes' (P1) 'especially astrology memes' (P1) 'I also like it when things be taken with a grain of salt' (P4) '[things] getting blown up in memes, I enjoy that so much, so much, it's relatable but also deliciously over the top.' (P4) 'the best memes ever'(P5)	**Watching & Posting**: • Consuming • Scrolling • Social influence • Supporting • Searching for content • Posting • Heavy usage • Average usage	
5. Fun and entertainment 'I mainly use TikTok to laugh, yes' (P1) 'hilarious' (P1)	**Options to improve the content**: • Closing app • Switching to other apps • Reporting • Scrolling faster	

'a good dose of humour' (P2) *Challenges* 'I can laugh about them so much, most of them are so incredibly funny' (P2) 'TikTok works extremely well on my laughing muscles, especially short clips of iconic sketches, monty python, tommy cooper, I love those, parodies of them as well, I can be literally on the floor about those' (P3) 'I also watch TikToks if I want to have a good laugh at silly pranks. They have a lot of those on TikTok. I watch those when I want to be cheered up.' (P5) '[..] mainly for entertainment I think. If I don't have anything to do for a few minutes, I quickly grab TikTok to watch some videos and just relax and laugh.' (P8) 'What is life without fun, TikTok is entertainment, it is just the right amount of time, it is pure laughter. Especially lipsync videos and challenges, which are literally made for laughs' (P9) 'I always open TikTok when I want to have a big laugh. And that happens very very often.'(P12)	• Searching content yourself	
6. Obtaining knowledge 'riffs for the guitar, there are some cool accounts recreating and teaching the most iconic guitar riffs and solos ever produced, with tips and stuff.' (P3) 'I watch TikToks to get better, to learn new things, to gain knowledge.' (P3) 'I wanted that [flamingo wallpaper] for my door, so I started looking around and then I found the perfect how-to TikTok about how to smoothly cover your door with wallpaper. And guess what? It worked perfectly! I am so so happy with it.' (P5) 'sometimes there are also good tips on it, of those handy tricks that	**Assumptions about how TikTok works**: • User activity registration • Collecting and using user information • Comparing users • Algorithms • Popularity • Platform logics	

you would never have thought of yourself.' (P6) 'Recently I saw a TikTok video about growing strawberries, and the guy used sheep wool to acclimatize the plants against the cold at night and to retain water in the soil. That type of wool also protects it against snails, which is really a huge problem. And it really works perfectly. I am so grateful for that, for that tip, for that specific TikTok' (P6) 'I instantly saw and understood that TikTok offered a lot of new opportunities to build an audience and also for brands to promote content' (P9) 'if they are fun dances. I like to watch those too. And you know, if I really really like them then I save them to try them out and do them with the children at the daycare' (P12)		
7. Experiences 'TikTok is an excellent place for concert experiences, you can capture the essence of such a gig very nicely and visualize it in such a short video' (P2) 'Take a peek into the lives of others who experience the coolest things.' (P2) 'a kind of short overview of a concert.' (P2) 'I post other stuff too though. Road trips and stuff, videos of concerts I've been to, you know, as a reminder of all those fun things and times.' (P4) 'documenting the good times.' (P4) 'When I'm doing something, like, when I'm somewhere, I always make a few quick videos, just a few seconds, to record all the impressions. And then I put that all together. Then you have a video of the Chromatica Ball, for example, all the people I saw there, a lot of pictures and shots of my girlfriend Gaga of course, a lot of screaming, a lot of tears' (P4)	**Points of critique**: • Total content control • Extremely much data • Figuring out • Lack of transparency • Redundant information	

'a pretty snapshot of all those emotions.' (P4) 'to see and hear the stories and experiences of others' (P7) 'If I experience something very special, it could be something that touches me personally, something that helps me grow, or overcoming something, then I want to pay attention to it in that way.' (P10) 'It could be [..] a very nice evening with friends or something, or a concert that I enjoy so much that I completely lose myself in it and forget everything for a while and just enjoy every single second.' (P10) 'It's definitely capturing important moments, documenting moments that are dear to my heart. Holding on to those moments' (P10)		
8. Inspiration 'TikTok is full of recipes and travel trips, I can pick a lot from that.' (P4) 'I follow a few artists on TikTok that I think are really cool, they make really beautiful things. That is also inspiring for me, so that's a win win' (P5) 'I am currently completely redecorating my bedroom, literally everything is being thrown out[..]. So yes I am all ears and eyes when it comes to possibilities' (P5) 'I also watch lifestyle videos, especially girls who give their house a complete makeover.' (P5) 'Watching other people do their thing, you know. TikTok is full of videos in which people show what they are good at, also to inspire others, I like watching that' (P6) 'It makes me so happy to see TikToks of people making something of their lives, and wanting to be an inspiration to others' (P7)	**Privacy definitions**: • Importance • Deciding for yourself • Having control over data • Protection • Taking into account others' wishes • Freedom • To be left alone	

'There is just so much, so much inspiration. So many one-liners you can use' (P9) 'I really like those dance TikToks, you can literally see the fun splashing off, that is really contagious. Then I simply want to dance as well.' (P10)		
9. posting creations 'for example, that Taylor Swift painting I told you about, I posted a making-of video of it on TikTok" (P5) 'Also because it is slightly different from what I usually do, with the rhinestones and such.' (P5) 'I do post looks, but that's just because I like that, to keep track of what I'm buying, how I can combine clothes, what the perfect party outfit is at that moment.' (P9) 'just to post cool looks' (P11) 'I post about my dolls too. I set up a separate account for that. Then I post when I got a new doll from somewhere, or if when I've given some of them a makeover.' (P11)	**Privacy on social media**: • Difficult • Impossible • Possible • Essence of social media • Possibilities/account settings	
10. Trends 'I go to Discover for the latest trends and stuff' (P8) 'I always keep up with the latest trends, also in terms of apps and such, so when TikTok started to become booming I immediately signed up.' (P9) 'Using TikTok [..] to stay up to date with the latest trends, the biggest misses, and the juiciest celebrity gossip. That kind of thing.' (P9) 'I really like visual platforms, TikTok was simply the latest one on that list, that just appealed to me, so I set up an account' (P11) 'go to the Discover page for the latest news, the newest hottest items, and then see what's so great about them [..] why they ended up in that list.' (P11) 'to stay up to date with the latest trends, to be able to talk about	**Privacy tactics**: • Selective posting • Random content • Denying access • Taking consequences into account • Creating confusion • Breaking habits • Tacking back control over content • Nicknames • Simply not using social media • Making distinctions • Actively deciding what can be knowable	

them and discuss them with others' (P11) 'If I want to see content, I open TikTok and click 'Discover'… And then I watch the funniest trending videos.' (P12) 'then I type 'Harry Styles' or 'hashtag harry styles' [..] And then I watch every new video I haven't seen yet. That way I can't miss a thing.' (P12)		
11. Helping out 'I mainly use TikTok to make people think, think about simple things, simple little things that can, in fact, say so much.' (P7) 'Like canceling an appointment at the very last minute, for example. Why do you do that? Is it really not convenient for you, or is there something else going on, is there something behind it? Anxiety, being afraid of judgement, being afraid of doing something wrong. That's nothing to be ashamed about, but it can have such a big impact on your life, such a negative impact. It keeps you from doing fun things.' (P7) 'They are short videos that start with one sentence, followed by the thoughts that led to that sentence, the consequences of that sentence. Then there are tips on what you can do about it, how you can improve your situation. And finally an invitation to talk about it further, if people want to. With soothing music behind the shots, and pastel shades.' (P7)	**Protection vs. no protection**: • No account protection • Active account protection	
12. Relativizing 'i find that to be very relativizing' (P1) 'Relativizing all of life' (P4)	**Opinions TikTok's data collection**: • Scaling • Tricky • No opinion • Level-headedness • Nonchalance • Generalization	
13. Surprise 'When I go on TikTok, I just open the app and let myself be surprised' (P1) 'When I use TikTok I just open the app and then I'm flooded with videos' (P2)	**Terms of Service perceptions**: • Did not read it • No one reads that • Pointless • Difficult • Waste of time • Did read it	

'showing me things that make me think wow' (P12) 'I think it's magical how they do that, I'm always so curious about the next video' (P12)	• Useful • Legitimate	
14. Contentment 'Not a day goes by that I think to myself gee today the content is a lot less good, I'm always very satisfied.' (P1) 'I can only be very positive about it' (P1) 'there are always fun new videos on it' (P5) 'I have to say that has never occurred to me yet, any bad recommendations. I do hope I am not evoking karma now though haha' (P6) 'I can blindly trust in TikTok that when I open the app, I will see videos that I like' (P6) 'I am very excited about it, I don't really have anything to complain about regarding TikTok, nothing to criticize really' (P6) 'Absolutely, it really feels like a nice hot bath, that may be a little cliché but [..]it really is a nice environment to talk about things.' (P7) 'for me it is a very positive experience' (P8) 'I'm having a really good time on TikTok so yes, I think it's a positive experience" (P12)	**Media attention**: • Media influence • Negative publicity • No eye for positive sides • Lawsuits	
15. Curiosity 'TikTok was "the new big thing", the new hot social media platform, I wanted to see for myself what all the fuss was about' (P3) 'also to be able to immerse myself in it, so that I can use it for work, for marketing and such.' (P3)		
16. Boredom 'actually purely out of boredom during the whole corona situation. I was stuck at home with nothing to do, nowhere to go, so I created a TikTok account' (P4)		

17. Distraction 'it provided a great distraction. And it still does, by the way.' (P4) 'I love to watch [them] and simply lose track of time.' (P9) 'it is a nice escape' (P9) 'TikTok helped to get through that tough time, that way there was at least something fun.' (P10) 'TikTok slaps you in the face with challenges[..], but it is a more than welcome distraction if I'm honest.' (P11) 'To shut myself off from those thoughts in my head, to escape in the content, in the challenges, in the videos of others who dare to be 100% themselves, without any shame.' (P11)		
18. Community 'To feel connected to others who share the same passions as I do.' (P4) 'See other people who enjoy life, enjoy food, enjoy the world' (P4) 'When I feel completely annoyed and want to lash out, I also turn to TikTok to feel supported, to know that I am not alone. You know, mansplaining, oversexualizing the female body, all the little things about men that can really annoy you as a woman' (P5) 'TikTok is flooded with short videos that make me think, yes, my god yes, that's exactly what I think and experience too' (P5)		
19. Easiness 'you can carelessly see fun content without having to look for it yourself. You don't have to do anything at all, TikTok does all the work for you. That saves a lot of time.' (P8)		
20. Discontent with other apps 'It's kind of the new Tumblr, what Tumblr used to be, you know, promoting music and artists. Combined with the best memes ever. That is the essence of what Tumblr was, but that is gone now, and I truly miss it so much.' (P5)		

'As TikTok became more and more popular, and more and more artists started making TikToks, I thought maybe… just maybe TikTok could be the answer. Could fill that void, you know. And so I took a look and I immediately fell in love, TikTok really is the video version of Tumblr.' (P5) 'dissatisfaction with other apps actually, I wanted more video content and, in my opinion, Instagram and stuff was deteriorating further and further.' (P6)		
<u>21. Relaxation</u> 'If I don't have anything to do for a few minutes, I quickly grab TikTok to watch some videos and just relax.' (P8) 'It works very well for me to watch TikToks and simply relax after a long day' (P8) 'it's also great to relax after work and laugh at some TikToks.' P10)		
<u>22. Attractiveness</u> 'TikTok has an attractive interface with buttons and options.' (P9)		
<u>23. Endlessness</u> 'Yes, the For You page will keep you occupied for a while. It just goes on and on' (P10)		
<u>24. Shortness</u> 'the length of the videos is also great, I can never concentrate on anything for very long, so TikTok's short videos are actually quite perfect for me.' (P10)		
<u>25. Repetition</u> *Watches multiple videos from the same challenge:* 'if I like a certain challenge' (P2) 'Each video is slightly different, if only because the person is different. You can give it your own interpretation. Those differences are really nice and fun.' (P2) 'with a challenge there is often this icon at the bottom, a rotating disc, which takes you to a kind of database of only that challenge, that way I often watch the first few videos.' (P2)		

'Yes, that goes without saying, a challenge quickly becomes a trend, and then you see that challenge every day in new videos on your feed' (P3) 'Seeing it once is enough for me, then I already know the ins and outs so to say' (P7) 'sometimes yes, if I really like the challenge then I watch a few of them.' (P8) 'Yes, that happens instantly, if something is hot then it will stay that way for a while, and then more and more people will join in. But I like that. That way you really see something emerging, a hype building up.' (P9) *Circle button*: 'that button is very useful for that, it sends you to an overview of all videos of that challenge, of that tag' (P10) *Challenges*: 'Yes, if I see one I like, I will look up more, I think that has something meditative to it, that repetition.' (P11) 'You can see all the videos that have ever been posted about it via that dial' (P11) 'I like to see how everyone puts their own spin on it, I mean, the basis is the same, but there are still so many possibilities to do it a little differently, to make it your own, so to speak, that's really nice' (P12)		
26. Template 'i always do that' (P2) 'but doesn't everybody do that?' (P2) 'Doesn't everyone make videos that way, with both pictures and clips?' (P2) 'Such a lipsync video, of course, a little bit yes, I mean, everyone does the same, TikTok is full of those' (P4)		

'the TikTok sauce, short, funny, flashy, and a bit dramatic' (P5) 'I always follow those steps, my videos always build up the same way, you could call that a template indeed' (P7) 'of course there is not very much possibility there, but yes indeed I do follow a kind of template' (P9) 'show the full bag. Briefly show the treasure one by one. Then quickly disappear, put on the outfit, pop out and show off the look like a star on stage, complete with kisses and posing gestures' (P9)		
27. The same 'essentially, TikTok is similar to others, to previous social media' (P1) 'an experience of recognition' (P1) 'TikTok is very similar to Instagram, for example' (P2) 'might be different for the average user, more of the same so to speak' (P3) 'TikTok [..] is more like a familiar environment in a slightly different jacket, with slightly different accents' (P4) 'TikTok is actually not that different from Instagram or Facebook. You can post and watch content on all of them.' (P6) 'well, in essence, TikTok of course works quite like other social media that I use .. that did help with the understanding of the app' (P8) 'TikTok is very similar to Instagram, which I experienced and actually liked when I went on TikTok first time, that it was not completely different' (P10)		
28. Different 'it works slightly differently, the buttons are slightly different, the different pages and options are slightly different, in short, the platform logic is slightly different.' (P3)		

'The fact that TikTok has a different focus works just like Instagram, for example.' (P5) 'Just what I said before, they are better at it than the others, which is why TikTok is so popular.' (P6) 'Not really in terms of the platform, but it has given me new opportunities to reach and help people' (P7) 'I also had to get used to how you post on TikTok, yes, that is quite different from Insta.' (P11) 'And that you can add sound effects and stuff.' (P11)		
29. Getting used to 'I just had to get used to the fact that when you have watched a video, another one starts immediately' (P1) 'and that the videos are really really short' (P1) 'there were some new things for me that I had to learn, that I had to get used to.' (P2) 'the videos are truly very short' (P2) 'and it goes straight to the next one or it starts again, I had to adjust to that speed' (P2) 'it took some getting used to in the beginning, but that didn't take long.' (P2) 'other than that, you just learn a lot by using the app' (P8) 'The first time I used TikTok I found it very overwhelming, it was so much, too much even.' (P11) 'I also had to get used to how you post on TikTok, yes, that is quite different from Insta.' (P11) 'yes originally it was of course a new platform, that took some getting used to.' (P12) 'did it took me a long time to understand TikTok, well, a bit of what I just said, some things were		

new to me, others not, so that's not too bad.' (P12)		
30. Process 'The first few times I got a lot of pushed videos, like, the same ones as on discover. That's not very personal or anything, but as I used it more, and liked more, it got better and better.' (P4) 'I've had to put in a lot of effort to break TikTok's popularity focus to see different content, to see things I actually like' (P5) 'Not at the beginning, of course, then TikTok doesn't know anything yet, so they can't give you content that you really like.' (P6) 'It gradually got better the longer I used the app.' (P6) 'when I just started on TikTok, the proposals were simply not good. The content I was shown was completely different from what I like.' (P9) 'In those early days I had to do the work for them, it really felt like that. I almost wanted to quit.' (P9) 'Eventually yes. Now it's perfect. TikTok knows exactly what I like' (P9) 'TikTok is a learning experience, [..]to a certain extent. As I said before, it took me some time to make TikTok work the way I want it to, that was a process, a kind of learning process' (P9) 'I think it took a week or so before I actually got suggested videos that I thought oh that's really nice' (P10) 'That process, like I just said, took a few days, a week or so' (P11) 'Whether TikTok quickly understood me, in terms of interests, in terms of personal recommendations... well, I'm not really an average person, it took a while before TikTok completely figured me out' (P11)		
31.Ease		

'it actually went very quickly and easily' (P1) 'By actively interacting with the platform, I quickly understood how it all works' (P3) 'It actually pretty much showed itself, how TikTok works' (P10) 'after the second time it was already on autopilot' (P10)		
32. Instinctive 'I immediately understood how it all worked, what the buttons were for, things like that, it was just instinct and experience with other platforms' (P5) 'I was pleased to notice that the first time I went on TikTok, that it was not completely different and that I [did not] had to make an effort to understand how it worked. It works very intuitively.'(P10)		
33. Consuming 'I don't post myself' (P1) 'I simply watch and react' (P1) 'I wouldn't be able do that at all, it's such a hassle, so much work.' (P1) 'I am not an active TikTokking person, or at least not one who posts' (P3) 'Not even guitar tricks and chords either. That's not for me. I like working on those, but that's just for me, I don't really feel the need to share that with the internet.' (P3) 'that's not for me, I'm not like hey look at me, I'm not a show off .. I leave that to others [..] there are enough of those already.' (P8) 'I am not a content creator [..], just a consumer' (P8) 'I am a watcher, not a doer.' (P12) 'I would never present myself like that. Props to you if you can and want to do that, but that's not for me. I will keep that for the private sphere.' (P12)		

'I don't do posting, I'm just a viewer' (P12)		
34. Scrolling 'I don't search for special keywords or hashtags or anything' (P1) 'the content I like will find its way to me anyway' (P1) 'I go to TikTok, open my feed and then watch and scroll, just from top to bottom.' (P2) 'I simply scroll down my feed. I just look at what's out there.' (P3) 'I just watch it when it happens to pass by.' (P3) 'I actually always mainly stay on the For You page, there are the videos that I like, which are based on what I have liked, on who I follow.' (P5) 'If I want to see videos I open the starting page, the For You page, and then I just scroll down for a bit' (P7) 'I open TikTok on my phone.. and then I just start watching.. usually it starts with videos of people I follow [..] and then I just [..] keep watching until I have to go do something' (P8) 'When I use TikTok, I mainly look at what is on my For You page, I go through all the videos on the page, on the feed' (P10) 'I also use For You a lot, on which I pass the content of my favorite accounts, the things I love, the things that make me happy.' (P11)		
35. Friends/Social influence 'sometimes I see on Instagram or something, on the stories, that friends of mine have reposted, shared a video, if it appeals to me then I open that link on TikTok.' (P1) 'It happens quite often that I get a link from friends of a video they think I really need to see.' (P2) 'Everyone of my friends is on TikTok, so it quickly happens that		

someone has seen something and then texts the rest, like, have you seen this, and then it rolls like this, then everyone watches it and we talk about it in the app group.' (P2) 'A friend of mine showed me the app, showed me what you can do with it, and then I went on it too, then I also created TikTok [account].' (P2) 'The whole corona situation really, I saw more and more TikToks on Instagram, you know, young people trying to cope with the lockdowns and everything, then I also went on it.' (P7) 'To be honest, it was mostly because of my friends. They were all already on it, so yeah, I couldn't stay behind then' (P8) 'somewhere in 2020, during the lockdown, TikTok was growing enormously at the time, you saw TikToks everywhere on social media, about corona but also dances and other funny things.' (P10) 'I saw more and more TikToks on Instagram, on the stories, and then I thought well I'm going to go see for myself what it is with that TikTok[..] And I never left' (P12)		
36. Supporting 'Then I check if my friends have posted anything.' (P4) *Friends posting challenges*: 'Some of my friends do [post challenges], so then I promote them, also on other social media, sharing, and stuff.' (P10)		
37. Searching for content 'with a challenge there is often this icon at the bottom, a spinning disc, that takes you to a kind of database of just that challenge, that way I then watch the first few videos on that page.' (P2) 'then I close For You, and then I'll look if there are any special trending topics in the field of mental health.' (P7)		

'I started actively following influencers and liking videos with specific hashtags, until I saw that same content on my page.' (P9) 'If I like the challenge, yes. I've watched dozens of videos of them. Then I click on the circling icon and then I tap on the ones that immediately speak to me' (P10) 'I don't necessarily start with the first, well yes the first I usually do watch, but otherwise which ones appeal to me, I don't know, it could be the expression on someone's face, the outfit, something like a huge doll in the background, could be anything, but if it catches my eye like that, I will open that one' (P10) *Challenges:* 'Yes, if I see one I like, I will look for more of it' (P11) 'I also type Harry Styles in [..]. And then I watch every new video I haven't seen yet.' (P12)		
<u>38. Posting</u> 'sometimes yes, but not actively, there is often a big time gap between me posting stuff.' (P2) 'I watch a lot more than that I post. I'm not that active in terms of posting. I'm too lazy for that.' (P4) 'Occasionally I do duets, or rather my favorite songs of that moment and then I lip-sync to them very dramatically' (P4) 'Sometimes yes, but I post more on other social media, especially Instagram.' (P5) 'I'm not much of a poster if I'm honest' (P6) 'if I'm really proud of a very big fish I caught, or if a pumpkin looks really nice, then I can't resist posting about it, then I think to myself, you really did that, well done dude, just look at that!' (P6) 'Sometimes it's just so sick, then I get such an urge that I simply have to share it, you know.' (P6)		

'Very occasionally I do post' (P10) 'It's hard for me to get started, to actually do it, but once I've posted or started recording, it kind of pushes the bad thoughts away. Then I can enjoy it.' (P11) 'If I have overcome myself like this, I am just so proud of myself. That does give me such a positive boast.' (P11)		
39. Heavy usage '[it is] one of the many apps I use every day where I simply scroll through content' (P1) 'when I open the app, before I know it, a whole hour has passed, sometimes even more' (P1) 'you just can't get enough of it' (P1) 'I spend a lot of time on TikTok, every day at least a few hours.' (P3) 'I'm on TikTok every day, it's my favorite app.' (P5) *If content is good*: 'Then I can go on like this for a few hours.' (P8)		
40. Average usage 'I don't spend that much time a day on it. Occasionally a few minutes in between things' (P4)		
41. Closing the app 'If I see too many things I don't like, I just close the app.' (P4) 'if it's really really bad, and if it's video after video after video then I just close the whole app.' (P8) 'those types who think they're absolutely the greatest.. I really can't stand that.. at such a moment I think ok 'bye then.'(P8) 'When I really think about leaving because of something I have seen on TikTok .. then it's often one of those conspiracy videos or something, I really don't want that.' (P12) 'I so don't understand how it ended up on my feed to be honest.' (P12)		

42. Switching to another app 'then I lose interest and go to another app, Instagram for example.' (P4)		
43. Reporting 'If it's really bad, I'll even report the video' (P3) 'If the recommendations they give me are bad, I'll let them know, that is supposed to be their cutting edge, their selling point, if that's not working right, then they should do something about it.' (P3) 'Do I give TikTok feedback... yes sometimes I do, if I see something that I think does not belong there, then I will report it' (P9)		
44. Scrolling faster *If videos are bad*: 'Then I will go to the next very very quickly' (P3) 'What do I do at such a moment? [..] scroll faster? Go to the next video after just a few seconds?' (P9) 'Then I quickly scroll further' (P12) 'then I swipe down, so I get another video' (P12)		
45. Searching content yourself 'if my For You page is nothing good, then I simply have to do it myself' (P3) 'No, looking for content myself I am too lazy for that. They should do that for me. That is the whole essence of that app.' (P4) 'If there really is nothing at all, I will look for other content myself, via hashtags. For example, I'll type in "hashtag taylor swift" or something like that.' (P5)		
46. User activity registration 'they record what you do on TikTok? What you watch, what you react to, who you follow, that kind of thing' (P1) 'They look at what you like. Which subjects and topics. Which accounts' (P2) 'all your activities on TikTok, your likes, your shares, your comments,		

who you follow, also when you usually use TikTok, and for how long, things like that. They keep track of all of that' (P5) 'They keep an eye on what videos you watch and like' (P7) 'TikTok learns from your behavior, from your likes' (P9) 'They watch what you like on TikTok, what you respond to, when you are most active, etc' (P10)		
<u>47. Collecting and using user information</u> 'that information together forms a "good" picture of who you are. That image, they can then use it to offer videos, it tells them what kind of things you like, so they then can look for videos that fit with that' (P1) 'TikTok has these kind of profiles, and they put all users in them, that way they can get the right content to the right profile and therefore to the right users." (P1) 'They use that information to make targeted recommendations' (P1) 'they also have all kinds of data about you, generally what you have shared, entered, your name, your age, your nationality, etc.' (P2) 'With all the information they have, they can estimate whether you might like a video or not.' (P2) 'Based on those things, they may or may not show that video.' (P2) 'I assume they use the information they have on you. Age, interests, routines. That kind of info tells them what kind of person you are. If they know what kind of person a user is, they can show them videos that are in line with that' (P4) 'they use the data they got on you' (P4) 'In addition, they also collect information about who you are, what you do, where you live, your age, your behavior online,		

everything that can be found about you through their own system and that of other platforms and companies they are affiliated with.' (P5) 'All that information is put together and TikTok then uses it as a kind of system to check which videos match that. And they then show those to you on your feed.' (P5) 'They have a treasure of information about you, who you are, what you like, what you don't like, and they watch what you do on TikTok. They summarize that and that way they make up a picture of you, they can then attach videos that you should like, based on those data points.' (P6) 'I suppose they'll know all sorts of things about you. You fill in a lot when you set up your account, names, locations, age, and so on. They will also use all that information to show you the right videos.' (P7) 'they have my details. My personal details, you know, the things you enter into your account, your age, your gender, your nationality' (P8) 'probably also data from other social media… they are all intertwined.' (P8) 'they keep track of all that data, and then based on that data and those comparisons, TikTok chooses what content goes on your page.' (P8) 'their database consists of much more than just your likes and your views, so to speak.' (P9) 'Anything you've ever done online, on other platforms TikTok has partnerships with, they can access that as well. Plus the information you have provided them yourself, the information you put on your account about yourself.' (P9) 'then they link that [user activity] to information you entered, information they have about you.		

By putting that together, they can show you content that matches that, that fits with that' (P10) 'user information helps TikTok to select the right videos for you' (P10) 'They simply know all there is to know about you. Every thing you do online, in the app, tells them a little bit more about who you are, and they collect that in a huge database.' (P11) 'That data is you, that is the digital version of you. And with that digital version they know exactly what you like. And they use that to serve you videos.' (P11) 'They decide what you see based on the image they have of you, which are all small facts about you that have been lumped together into a profile' (P11) 'They study user information. You know, the basics. Who you are, where you live, what you like. Things like that.' (P12)		
48. Comparing users 'Part of that information is therefore also collected and compared with others. If you have enough similarities with, say, user K, then there is a good chance that you like the same videos as K. And then they will show you the videos that K has liked.' (P3) *TikTok watches..* : '[..]what your friends like? What other users like me like?' (P8) 'All that information together creates a digital profile. They can then compare this with profiles of other users. Where there are similarities, if you like the same things, they recommend the same kind of videos.' (P9) *TikTok looks at your information*: 'They then put it next to the information of other users for comparison. This is how they find things you have in common with others, and based on those commonalities they show you		

certain videos and not others.' (P12)		84
'a similarity between people shows a kind of connection, a preference, and they can use that preference to promote videos, estimating whether people will like a particular video.' (P12)		
'If you have enough links with other users, they'll show you the content they like, because you're in the same category as them.' (P12)		
49. Algorithms 'everything you see on TikTok is coordinated by algorithms' (P3) 'The content you see is decided upon by algorithms. Those algorithms work on data, on user data.' (P3) 'TikTok collects a lot of user data. And they get that from everywhere, from other media and platforms, from your profile, from your behavior, from your followers, everything. They then put all that information into that algorithm and based on that data it chooses which videos to show you.' (P3) 'These data show patterns, and those patterns connect users to content, and to each other.' (P3) 'TikTok learns from your behavior, from your likes, that way they gain insight into what interests you, what you think is great, what you don't. Then they filter out the videos that match [that].' (P9) 'TikTok runs on algorithms, that is artificial intelligence, which run on machine-learning. They learn from the data that is handed to them.' (P9) 'In this case data about you, the user. The algorithms behind TikTok then use that to show you the kind of content that they have learned that you have interacted with in the past, [that you have] liked.' (P9) 'the more TikTok knows about you, the more personalized the videos		

you see, which TikTok shows you on your feed, will become' (P9)		
50. Popularity 'the popularity of the creator will surely also play a role, the more followers [he/she has] the faster his/her content will be praised by TikTok.' (P2) 'That's always how it goes with popular content. You don't have to do anything for that. They are just pushed by all those likes and views' (P4) 'I believe [it is like] what I said before, if a video does well, gets a lot of likes, etc., is viewed a lot, then it will also rank high in TikTok's list of recommendations" (P4) 'it's all about clicks and stuff' (P4) 'I understand that it is a commercial platform, that views are important' (P5) 'if it is a popular challenge you cannot avoid seeing it numerous times in different videos, they will pick it up if a video or topic is doing well, they will immediately use it to promote. Then you will see those more often.' (P6) 'sometimes you can really see that influence is exerted, you know.. from companies and stuff.. influencers, who promote things' (P8) 'I guess what's hot and trending will definitely be shown faster than [..] a video that only has a few likes' (P7) 'Popularity and likes can push videos to the top of every page. Then you simply must see it' (P7) 'they take into account what's trending, what's popular.' (P7) 'of course they also keep an eye on which videos are popular, they also show them faster and more often, regardless of who you are and what you like, popularity scores.' (P10)		

'Popularity is the rule I guess.' (P10) 'The hotter a video, the more traffic it generates, the higher on your page that video will be' (P11)		
51. Platform logics 'TikTok is a commercial company, it is a platform for video content.' (P3) 'Their business model is to give the best recommendations as possible, collect as much data as possible, and make money from all that. That's just the way it is.' (P3) 'Obviously, like I said, a lot of it is also influenced by trends, by views, if you only got to see videos that are popular, then they wouldn't hold your attention, then it would be too obvious that they are a company that wants to make money, then they're negating their sales pitch that they're the best place for your content.' (P7) 'TikTok is essentially finding videos that users like as accurately as possible. To make that work, to make that mission a success, they need information about their users' (P7) 'Yes [..]the whole deal with TikTok revolves around recommendations, to show the right content for each user, which goes hand in hand with collecting information.' (P8) 'They just need your data to make it work, to choose videos that you're likely going to like.' (P9) 'And that's what TikTok is, the online video platform that always has content for you, content you love.' (P9) 'Nothing is ever free, if the service is free, they still make money off you through your data.' (P9) 'For good recommendations, TikTok must of course know something about you. If they didn't, it would be bad for business, because displaying content is		

exactly their commodity. It would be harmful if their recommendations were wrong' (P12)		
52. Total content control 'TikTok controls what you can and cannot see' (P5) 'they decide what is important enough to end up on your feed. You as a user can have a completely different opinion about that, but you can't put that much pressure on it.' (P5) 'You can have some influence by liking content, but in the end it is TikTok that holds sway over the content that you see.' (P5) 'Unless you completely ignore For You and stuff and always look for content yourself, but that takes so much more time, that's just not efficiently possible.' (P5) 'By collecting and analyzing information, TikTok determines what you see.' (P9) 'they control the flow of content for all its users. [make it] As personalized as possible' (P9) 'I do have a bit of a problem with TikTok having so much control over everything. They determine what you see, and even though the content is nice, those videos are nice, it bothers me a bit that they control that completely.' (P10) 'For example, I almost never see videos my friends have posted, even though that's exactly what I actually want to see.' (P10) 'Popularity is the rule I guess. I get that, I get it, but I'm not fully and completely happy with that.' (P10) 'They control what you see based on the image they have of you' (P11) 'TikTok has complete control over what you see on the platform. They influence the content on your page, they prefer certain content over		

other content, so you don't get to see that other content.' (P12) 'While, actually, you might like other content just as much, or even more' (P12)		
53. Collecting extremely much data 'TikTok certainly collects a lot of data. They track more than any other app or platform.' (P3) 'Yes, TikTok collects more data than any other social media. Also information about your mobile, for example. I find that quite bizarre.' (P5) 'TikTok does collect a lot, yes. Whether it's too much…I don't know' (P7) 'TikTok definitely collects a lot of information.' (P9) '[if it's] Too much, I don't think so, if so they would have been called out on that a long time ago. Regulations see to that. And certainly organizations such as the privacy watchdog do too.' (P9)		
54. Figuring out 'A friend of mine struggled a lot with his coming out, he had only told me, no one else yet. But TikTok somehow knew, it showed him such content that triggered him a lot, that really upset him. That TikTok can figure out something so personal, something so hidden.' (P2) 'They, TikTok, can find out very personal things about you through your use of the app. Personal things that are none of their business, like people's sexual orientation, or political affiliation, those are really things that are private, but they can figure that out somehow anyway.' (P12) '[such] info can be used in ways that can work against you' (P12)		
55. Lack of transparency 'in any case, I think TikTok should be more transparent about the types of information they collect, and why they do it.' (P10)		

'Really good arguments, not that "to improve the service" nonsense, that it is "simply necessary for the service", anyone can say that, that's plain bull****' (P10)		
56. Collecting redundant information 'TikTok, collects certain information about you that makes no sense. Doesn't TikTok also collect all sorts of data about your browsing history and even your phone's settings? I really don't see what's the point in that' (P4) 'Now that I think about it, there are definitely negative sides. I think they shouldn't collect such data about your WiFi and your phone at all. What good can come from that?' (P5)		
57. Privacy is important 'privacy is important to me' (P1) 'Privacy is one of the most important rights we have.' (P2) 'Privacy is certainly important. That is why there are also laws and regulations that must ensure that privacy is not violated.' (P3) 'I think privacy is important' (P4) 'Privacy in itself is important yes, but I don't think that everything has to make way or that it clashes with it' (P5) 'Yes, yes, I find privacy important, yes.' (P6) 'I absolutely think that privacy is important.' (P7) 'Yes absolutely. Privacy is very important' (P8) 'Privacy is certainly important to me. Everyone thinks so. But I don't think everything should depend on it.' (P9) 'I think privacy is really important.' (P10) 'Yes, enormously, privacy is really something very important, you have to do everything you can to keep it, in my opinion' (P11)		

'I think privacy is very important.' (P12)		
58. Privacy is deciding for yourself 'Privacy is that every person can decide for themselves what they do and don't do, without too much interference from others, both individuals and organizations.' (P1) 'Privacy is the right to determine who knows what about you, who is allowed to know, how they can know, and what is off limits to know.' (P3) 'Privacy is that you don't have to reveal everything. That there are things that you think someone else has nothing to do with. Things you want to keep to yourself.' (P6) 'privacy is a right. A right not to have to disclose everything just like that, not to have to share everything about yourself and others with anyone.' (P8) 'Privacy is the right that not everyone can know and use everything about you all the time. You must have control over this and be able to make choices about it, without them being made for you by default' (P10) 'Concretely, it is having control over your life. Having control over what you do and not being hindered or prevented from doing something on the basis of some characteristic.' (P11) 'Everyone has the right to decide what he/she/them considers private, which should not be made public.' (P11) 'That applies both to others but also to institutions, including work or government' (P11)		
59. Privacy is having control over data 'privacy is having control over your data, over your life, and how one can affect the other.' (P3) 'Privacy is not unwanted interference, which means that you or your data cannot be used		

without you wanting to, without your consent.' (P9) 'Privacy is the right to decide for yourself about your information.' (P10) 'Privacy is living your life the way you want, without interference, without being held back by anything that people or authorities, 'may' or can know about you' (P11) '[having] privacy is about shielding yourself, protecting information about yourself from others who might misuse that information' (P12)		
60. Privacy is protection 'Privacy is a right that protects you and lets you have a private sphere.' (P5) 'Privacy as a private sphere means that there is a place where you are left alone, which is not accessible to others, where you can do what you want, without anyone being able to access or influence it.' (P5) 'Privacy is the boundary between what you do and do not show, what you do or do not share. That's what it comes down to. Privacy is and remains the boundary between public and private' (P6)		
61. Privacy is taking into account others' wishes 'Privacy is accepting another person's boundaries and wishes. If you have not given someone else permission, they should not do or use anything you say or do.' (P2) 'It's the same with photos and copyright, you can't just share them and use them for yourself, and certainly not without the permission of the maker. That should be the case with everything.' (P2) 'There must be a kind of passive control. In the background. Like norms and values. Rules we are all aware of and abide by.' (P7)		

'Privacy is that no unwanted interference takes place in your life.' (P9) 'Privacy is not unwanted interference, which means that you or your data cannot be used without you wanting to, without your consent.' (P9)		
62. Privacy is freedom 'Privacy is having the freedom to do what you want. Without anyone else being able to influence or abuse it' (P4) 'Privacy goes hand in hand with freedom. That is now more important than ever.' (P7) 'Fortunately, the corona is now over, but during the pandemic that was a big problem. Everything was tied down. Everything had to be regulated. The Hague determined everything, it felt like a prison. I had a really hard time with that. People should always be allowed to make their own choices. Back then that was made impossible.' (P7)		
63. Privacy is being left alone 'Privacy is being left alone, respecting your values.' (P7) 'Privacy is that you are not constantly monitored, constantly calculated whether what you do and who you are, might be seen as wrong in some way, labeled as some kind of danger.' (P7)		
64. Privacy on social media is difficult 'Privacy on social media... well it's certainly not easy, I wouldn't say that' (P5) 'Social media and privacy? That is very difficult.' (P6) 'Privacy is difficult on social media' (P9) 'privacy on social media, that is complicated' (P11)		
65. Privacy on social media is impossible 'Privacy on social media.. you would almost tend to think that one cancels the other, or at least counteracts the other.' (P3)		

'In my opinion, privacy on social media doesn't work. If I'm being honest' (P6) 'You can never have total control on social media. Nobody can protect themselves from things that are on there, that one video in question, for example, from living a life of its own, from being collected and used.' (P6) 'It is very easy to interpret things differently than they are meant to be. Interpretation is subjective. Distorting things is very easy on social media.' (P6)		
<u>66. Privacy on social media is possible</u> 'Yes of course' (P1) 'Absolutely' (P2) 'it is possible yes.' (P5) 'Of course it is possible to have privacy on social media.' (P7) 'I think privacy is always possible. If you want to, you can protect your privacy, including on social media, including on TikTok' (P8) 'That doesn't mean it's impossible to have privacy. You just have to do it right.' (P9)		
<u>67. Essence of social media</u> 'Social media don't like privacy. The default of social media is that everything can be seen and known.' (P3) 'For them it is valuable if they can know as much as possible about you, collect as much information about you as possible. That generates income for them.' (P3) 'Of course, social media is an excellent place for sharing. That's what it's all about.' (P4) 'Social media can of course be an open book where you can tell and show everything. And everyone can see that.' (P6) 'Social media is open and accessible to everyone. Everyone can see what you do on social		

media. Everyone can record that, everyone can interpret it.' (P6) 'the essence of social media is to share' (P9) 'it is clear that social media makes certain choices for you, such as what you [can] see' (P10) 'Social media themselves want as little privacy as possible, they want to know as much as possible about you in order to earn from you.' (P11) 'Social media can of course be an open book where you can tell and show everything. And everyone can see that.' (P12)		
<u>68. Privacy possibilities on social media/Account settings</u> 'It is up to the user how he/she uses the platform, whether they only read and retweet, or whether they also tweet themselves, and about what. That is all up to the user himself.' (P1) 'The same goes for whether they set their account to private or not.' (P1) 'Actively making choices in the field of privacy' (P1) 'You can create a private account, then people who have nothing to do with it can't see your profile and posts.' (P5) 'You can also choose to only share specific things, post about specific things, and shield off the rest of your life.' (P5) 'Protecting your privacy by taking control of who is part of your audience.' (P7) 'Making your account private, that way you keep control over who can see you, who can see your posts.' (P7) 'Set restrictions so that others cannot comment on your content, to prevent other interpretations from being possible.' (P7)		

'setting options, setting limits, in order to keep out, defend your privacy, your content' (P7) 'You can achieve privacy on social media by actively determining who can see you, who can see your posts, who can comment, who can message you. This way you can shield yourself from specific people if you want to.' (P9) 'Protecting privacy on social media by drawing limits on who has access to your social media, your (inter)action on social media' (P9) 'As a user, you must also have some control yourself.' (P10) 'Who can see and reach you, that is a choice that should be yours. By actively making a choice there, you have influence over your own privacy online.' (P10) 'Social media wants to know as much about you as possible: So it's up to the user to do something about it. To deprive them of that right, or at least to hinder it.' (P11) 'Navigating your visibility on social media, using your views on privacy' (P12)		
69. Selective posting 'Only share those things on TikTok that you feel comfortable with' (P2) 'That is again personal of course, but yes indeed. It's totally okay if people don't want to reveal everything about their lives or who they are. That way you can protect what you don't want to make public.' (P2) 'Not sharing everything, not pouring everything online." (P3) 'improving your privacy on TikTok by being selective about what you post, what you don't talk about' (P6) 'Being pragmatic about what you do and don't share on TikTok.' (P6)		

'Yes, be pragmatic. That way you just don't allow things you don't want to share, things you want to keep to yourself. That way you keep private what you want to keep private' (P6) 'I really only post about my hobbies, about when something really cool happens like winning a cup or catching a huge fish.' (P6) 'Don't share everything on autopilot because everyone else does that too.' (P12) 'Check carefully with yourself what you do and do not want to share with others and in that way protect the parts of yourself, of who you are, that you want to keep to yourself' (P12) 'Keeping your boundaries in check' (P12)		
70. Random content 'I type in random things until I see content that appeals to me.' (P3) 'If my feed isn't nice, it means TikTok shows too much of the same stuff, too much filtering, [it is] too stuck in the same segment. To get out of that, to get different content, I look up other hashtags, I look for other topics. To break the bubble, you know? To broaden the scope. That way I make sure TikTok will show me other things.' (P3) 'it also changes the way the platforms sees me, then they have a different picture of me, so who I really am, is clouded by this new image.' (P3) 'Recently I did a kind of experiment, I wanted to see how fast TikTok would show me conspiracy videos if I liked one every so often, and what do you think? Within a day my entire feed was filled with the most bizarre hoaxes and conspiracies. I was really in shock to be honest, so quickly it had taken over my entire feed. It was interesting though, to break completely out of my own comfortable bubble and encounter		

different opinions and different ways of thinking.' (P3)		
71. Denying access 'Yes, for example, I find my location to be private, I don't give TikTok access to that' (P2) 'I don't think TikTok needs to know where I am, not even a broad estimate.' (P2) 'Denying TikTok access to your phone. [Access] to data from your phone, such as location, but also type, device number, WiFi network, and the files on your phone and cloud' (P3) 'Protecting my privacy against TikTok? From their data collection? Ehm yes limiting the data they can collect I suppose, not allowing them to see where you are.' (P4) 'TikTok asks permission for a lot of things, access to your camera, your microphone, your files, your location, even your internet connection.' (P5) 'Not giving such permissions, or limiting them to when you actually use something like that, only accessing your microphone when you're recording a TikTok video for example... that can protect your privacy, that can protect you from TikTok's excessive data-gathering practices.' (P5) 'I understand that they need access to your microphone, which is necessary if you want to post TikToks..' (P6) 'What they absolutely don't need to know is my location, if I want to share where I am in my video, I'll add it myself. TikTok doesn't need to know where I am at all times. That's none of her business. That's none of anyone's business, really' (P6) 'service only, otherwise it is none of their business, simply. And so I also refuse such options.' (P6)		

'I don't say yes to everything in any case, I don't say yes to all TikTok's requests for access.' (P7) 'Turning off your location? Not giving TikTok access to where you are.' (P8) 'Restricting TikTok's access to certain data' (P8) 'Denying access' (P8) 'You can protect your privacy against TikTok by not giving TikTok permission for everything. The less you allow, the less they can know about you, the greater your privacy.' (P9) 'Protecting my privacy against TikTok? Not allowing the app to access files and other information on my phone' (P10) 'Denying TikTok access to options I don't agree with' (P10) 'Protecting against TikTok itself.. yes, actually. By not simply saying yes to everything TikTok asks for.' (P12)		
72. Taking consequences into account 'Thinking carefully about who can read it, who can see it, who can comment on it, when you post something. In other words, who can see everything, and by that I don't just mean people.. also the algorithms, the platforms, the companies.' (P3) 'See for yourself what it can do to you if you allow that stranger to see your content, what the effect might be if your aunt can see everything you post.' (P3) 'Checking in advance what it means to use TikTok' (P4) 'you have to be aware that such things happen, can happen.' (P6) 'looking with critical eyes at what that actually means, what TikTok actually does, what you are agreeing to.' (P11)		
73. Causing confusion		

'then I confuse the algorithm.' (P3) 'Taking tactical action you know[..]. Going against habits so they get confused. That way you can also make TikTok show you other videos.' (P11)		
<ins>74. Breaking habits</ins> 'Yes, then I break the routine' (P3) 'then I break with just watching content and take matters into my own hands to find fun content' (P5) 'Going against habits '(P11)		
<ins>75. Taking back control over content</ins> 'That way I also take back some control, then I am no longer the passive consumer, but a user interacting with the platform.' (P3) 'That way I influenced TikTok, so to speak, so that they step up their game, and show me better videos.' (P5) 'You can have some influence by liking content' (P5) 'you completely ignore For You and stuff and always look for content yourself' (P5) 'Tactical action [..]. Going against habits so they get confused. That way you can also make TikTok show you other videos." (P11)		
<ins>76. Nicknames</ins> 'using a pseudonym' (P2)		
<ins>77. Not using social media</ins> 'You know in advance if you are going to use social media that they will use your data, if you have something against that, you should not use it.' (P4) 'If you don't want that to happen, just don't use it. It's just that simple but hard truth.' (P6) 'just don't go on TikTok? No okay that's too easy and too bland.' (P6)		
<ins>78. Making distinctions</ins> 'I do find there to be a distinction between very personal things and more standard data such as age or nationality, I do not find the latter a problem, but the others…' (P2)		

'I think there is a difference. Extremely personal information, such as gender identity, and sexuality, things you don't want to publicize, say, if they find out and judge you on that, and use that, then that's not good. I don't think they should do that' (P2)		
79. Actively deciding what may be knowable 'Critically considering what you want, what TikTok may know about you. And based on that, not fill in certain data and therefore not make it public.' (P2) 'if you don't want them to know things about you at all, then you don't fill in anything, you don't give them access to anything.' (P2) 'ensuring you limit your content and access to that content' (P5) 'Restrict TikTok's access to certain data' (P8) 'You can achieve privacy on social media by actively determining who can see you, who can see your posts, who can comment, who can message you. This way you can shield yourself from specific people if you want to.' (P9)		
80. No account protection 'No, I didn't do that to be honest, but I'm not too worried about what others and TikTok can see about me, and I also don't post anything. Then that is not necessary.' (P1) 'To be honest, my account is just plain public.' (P4) 'mostly to reach a larger group of people, to make new contacts' (P4 'If I would only admit people I know, and my profile would no longer be generally accessible, it would be much harder for me to do that' (P4) 'I don't.' (P7) *Account information*: 'I filled in everything there' (P7) 'My account is not private. But I don't post content myself, so I'm		

not sure if that would be useful, so to speak' (P8)		
'To be honest, no, I wouldn't know exactly what I did and didn't give permission to... I think pretty much everything, in a hurry' (P8)		
'No, I don't protect it' (P9)		
'I want to reach as many people as possible with my posts, I want to create interactions with my followers. My account is generally accesible' (P9)		
'Honestly no. I just have the default settings and I've had those since I created TikTok.' (P9)		
TikTok has: 'access to my microphone and location' (P9)		
'I've never been bothered by it.' (P9)		
'It feels a bit embarrassing now to have to say this but no, I didn't, I just clicked 'accept'..' (P12)		
'I just wanted to open that app, I wasn't busy thinking about such things at all' (P12)		
81. Active account protection 'my location is private, I don't give TikTok access to that' (P2) 'I don't think TikTok needs to know where I am, not even a broad estimate.' (P2) 'I have a private account. I choose very critically who can or cannot find me and who can follow me. Only people I really know, people I have a connection with, I allow them, not others.' (P3) 'What they absolutely don't need to know is my location, if I want to share where I am in my video, I'll add it myself. TikTok doesn't need to know where I am at all times. That's none of their business. That's none of anyone's business really' (P6)		

'service only, otherwise it is none of their business, simply. And so I also refuse such options.' (P6) 'what I post is private, only myself and my close friends may see it, others have nothing to do with it.' (P10) 'Not allowing the app to access files and other information on my phone' (P10) 'limiting what they know about you [..] they can't use against you or exploit what they don't know' (P11) 'Me personally, all my social media profiles are private, including TikTok.' (P12)		
82. Scaling 'As long as I don't notice anything else, except that I get tailor-made and selected recommendations for me, I won't lose any sleep over it' (P1) 'It takes no effort at all, you don't have to do anything, it happens all by itself, you don't notice it, and the effect is great content. I think it's more than worth it.' (P1) 'As long as I get content I like, I'm fine with it' (P4) 'As far as I'm concerned, it's worth it that they have information about you and use it to show content that you like, it saves so much time that you don't have to actively search yourself, I think that really adds value. They can have my data for that' (P6) 'Thanks to the fact that they have my data, I don't have to do anything myself to get exciting content from TikTok.' (P6) 'It's like I said, it's literally what TikTok does. If you want good content, you have to do something for it in return.' (P7) 'In the end, everyone wants to be entertained and surprised by TikTok, so we say yes, yes TikTok, use my data. That's why we use		

TikTok, for fun, for entertainment' (P7) 'Of course you shouldn't close your eyes to the fact that that happens, that they collect data about you. That would be naive. Of course they do that. Obviously that's their business model. But I don't think that should overshadow the good stuff. TikTok is a great platform to get together. To talk about things that matter. To help others. I think the focus should be on that.' (P7) 'TikTok is so nice because you can see fun content without having to look for it yourself. You don't have to do anything at all, TikTok does all the work for you. That saves a lot of time.' (P8) 'TikTok is entertainment after all. You are looking for entertainment so you use TikTok, you watch their videos. I don't like the fact that the app keeps track of all your data at the same time, but am I really that worried about it... [no] not really' (P8) 'that's what TikTok is, the online video platform that always has content for you, content that you like. As long as they do that right, I don't mind my data being used.' (P9) 'Nothing is ever really free, if the service is free, they still monetize you through your data. But since you don't have to do anything yourself, and you simply get entertainment thrown in your face, I'm fine with it, I think it's a good deal.' (P9) 'yes yes. You get such an amount of entertainment in return… I am willing to give my data for that, yes' (P12)		
83. Tricky 'I find that difficult to be honest.' (P8) 'TikTok is entertainment after all. You are looking for entertainment so you use TikTok, you watch their videos. I don't like the fact that the app keeps track of all your data at		

the same time, but am I really that worried about it... [no] not really' (P8) 'I'm a bit dubious about that. On the one hand, I understand that they need information to be able to make choices about who gets to see which videos. But on the other hand, that means they know a lot about you.' (P10) 'All in all, that is a lot of information. Worried is a big word, but I don't feel completely comfortable with it either' (P10) *Pros vs. cons*: 'The question is [of] which one there are more and whether one outweighs the other. Personally, I don't feel like I know enough about it to take a good stance on it' (P10) 'That's tricky' (P12)		
84. No opinion *Collecting/using data*: 'I don't really have a strong opinion about that' (P4)		
85. Level-headedness 'I don't care much about TikTok collecting information about me, I'm pretty level-headed about that' (P1) 'I'm very level-headed about that, I don't care if they have information about me. They have information about you everywhere' (P6)		
86. Nonchalance 'It may be a bit naive of me, but I can't be bothered about that' (P1) 'In itself, I don't have much trouble with the fact that they collect and use data for their services' (P2) 'Let me put it this way, I don't lose any sleep over TikTok knowing where I was when I checked a few videos just before this conversation' (P4) 'There are much more important things to worry about. The climate, for example.' (P4) 'Why should I care about that data. I'm on TikTok for entertainment and other fun stuff.' (P4)		

'it is part of the service. I have nothing to hide' (P5) 'that's what TikTok is, the online video platform that always has content for you, content you love. As long as they do that right, I don't mind my data being used.' (P9) 'I don't find it to be a problem' (P9)		
87. Generalization 'Yes, they collect information about you. But isn't that the case everywhere?' (P1) 'it's just part of an app like TikTok' (P1) 'All social media do that, twitter, instagram, spotify, you name it, that's how they all work. TikTok too' (P2) 'TikTok is no exception, all social media and online platforms do. It's just part of what it is' (P4) 'all social media works like that, [and] we have slowly accepted that.' (P6) 'Just like most social platforms. Popularity and tailored content are the strength' (P7) 'all social media do that' (P9)		
88. Did not read the Terms of Service 'No I haven't read it' (P1) 'No, not really.' (P4) 'No, there is no starting point' (P6) 'The terms of service? No, I did not' (P7) 'Honestly, no' (P8) 'I always quickly click "accept".' (P8) 'I just said everything was alright, I just agreed [to it]' (P8) 'The terms of service? No, I haven't read that' (P9)		

'I can be very brief about that: no. I haven't read it' (P10)		
89. No one reads the Terms of Service 'Let's be honest, who reads stuff like that? Literally no one I know has ever read a single part of app policies.' (P8)		
90. Terms of Service is too difficult 'Those scriptures are written way too difficultly' P1) 'Totally incomprehensible.' (P1) 'The terms of service are very long. And it takes a long time to get to the privacy section, that's just a small part. It is written in awfully long, technical sentences.' (P4) 'That is a very long-winded piece.' (P7) 'All [written in] difficult terms too. I can't make sense of that if I'd tried to read it.' (P7) 'full of difficult sentences, technical words' (P8) 'I think those documents would only confuse me and freak me out' (P8) 'The language is too complicated. It was written that way on purpose. TikTok knows that no one is going to read it, so they don't put in any effort to make it readable.' (P10) 'It's solid stuff. Lots of parts. Difficult language too.' (P12) 'It's not very attractive to read [it] all the way through.' (P12) 'They wrote that text because they have to, such terms of service, but they didn't do it or present it in a way that users think "gosh I'm really going to read that now". Users are not [being] motivated to actually read it.' (P12)		
91. Reading the Terms of Service is a waste of time 'You're wasting your time trying to read it.' (P1)		

'Even if you read it all the way through, I don't think you'd learn much from it.' (P4) 'That is a very long document' (P8) 'I know it's not that good, but I just don't have the time to go through all those policies' (P8) 'I simply don't have time for that. It consists of hundreds of pages(!)' (P9)		
92. Reading the Terms of Service is pointless 'You know the drill anyways: they show you content, make it possible to post content, and during the whole process they store your data and use it for their service.' (P1) 'For users, to interact with the platform, to create and watch content, I don't think that it's really necessary [to read]' (P2) 'it's a social media app. It is meant for entertainment. It must be all "good", otherwise the app would not be allowed' (P4) 'Not for me personally, it is not necessary for daily consuming behavior' (P5) 'Because it has nothing to add. I already know what they do. I don't have to read two hundred pages to know that. They collect and use my data. That's what it comes down to.' (P6) 'Yes, actually yes, of course. But I think that I already have a good idea of what TikTok does.' (P7) 'If I'm honest, what worth would it bring [me] if I did? I assume they have valid reasons for it all, otherwise TikTok would not be allowed here.' (P8) 'There are certainly important things in it, but if you think about it, you can think of [most of] it yourself: we collect data about you and we do that because it is necessary for the service.' (P10)		

'I already know that, I don't have to read those hundred pages for that.' (P10) 'I have to admit that I just haven't thought of it that way, if I'm being honest, maybe not that smart but I just simply wanted to be on TikTok' (P12)		
93. Did read the Terms of Service 'yes well, globally' (P2) 'I "read' it",' (P2) 'oh I definitely read it' (P3) '[I did] very quickly, but only when I used TikTok for the first time' (P5) 'Yes I have, broadly speaking.' (P11) 'Yes, but very fleetingly. Not in detail.' (P12) 'I skimmed through it quickly the first time and then clicked "accept".' (P12)		
94. Reading the Terms of Service is useful 'It's good to be informed about what TikTok is doing I suppose' (P2) 'I think you should take a good look at that, with every service you use, you should look at it in writing, in black and white, and see what you are agreeing to' (P3) 'Yes, I think so, I find it very useful, [and] necessary as well.' (P11) 'you should know the facts of the app you are using.' (P11)		
95. Terms of Service includes legitimacy 'TikTok says they have a legitimate reason and legitimate grounds to collect and use all that information about its users. Namely that it is in the interest of the service they provide. That it, in the end, is all in the interest of the user.' (P3) 'TikTok says it is necessary for the service, to [be able to] provide you with the best, customized service possible, "it's in the public interest" they say' (P5)		

'In any case, TikTok says that everything they do is necessary, that it is legit, that it is in the interest of improving their service, [in the interest] of the experience.' (P7) 'That you agree to it that they collect data about you if you click "okay" or "I accept". And that it is necessary to make the service work, and to improve it, to keep it up to date, you know it.' (P9) 'they cover themselves with all sorts of nonsense reasons why it is significantly desirable that they know so much about their users. And all the possibilities and cases in which they share your data [with others].' (P11)		
96. Media influence 'I always keep up with the latest trends, also in terms of apps and such, so when TikTok started to become booming I immediately signed up.' (P9)		
97. Negative publicity 'I don't think it's not a problem. It's good to think about it that TikTok does that, that TikTok keeps track of information about its users.' (P7) 'It is only a healthy way of living to take a critical look at it.' (P7) 'But I think it's too much about that. When TikTok is in the news, it's only about that, about data usage lawsuits. About politicians' concerns about what TikTok can do to society. In a bad sense.' (P7)		
98. No attention for the positive 'Meanwhile there is never any attention for the positive side, you never hear stories that revolve around the exact opposite, the thousand and one ways in which TikTok has and can have a positive influence.' (P7)		
99. Lawsuits 'It's no wonder that they [TikTok] are often in the news for that reason, including lawsuits and parliamentary questions.' (P3) 'I think it's only right that there are questions. It is a fact that TikTok stores and uses a huge amount of		

information. It must be ensured that TikTok adheres to the rules.' (P3) 'I understand those concerns too. TikTok is a company of ByteDance, a Chinese company thus. Xi Jinping and the Communist Party have legislated that Chinese companies must declare their business records if Beijing requests it. The same goes for ByteDance. However, TikTok is not based in China. Therefore, I think, TikTok shouldn't be obligated to do that' (P3) 'it is good that citizens are being protected' (P8) 'It could be very dangerous if TikTok shares user data with the Chinese government. I personally find that very worrisome.' (P12) 'that it is carefully checked whether everything they do is within international legislations and rules' (P12) 'If not, they should be called upon that. Then action must be taken and it must be ensured that they follow the law from then on. The interests of the users must be defended and given priority' (P12)		