



## OPEN ACCESS

## EDITED BY

Oliver Fernando Hidalgo,  
University of Passau, Germany

## REVIEWED BY

Eva-Maria Euchner,  
Fliedner Fachhochschule  
Düsseldorf, Germany  
Laura Cervi,  
Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain  
Yohanes Krismantyo Susanta,  
Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Toraja, Indonesia

## \*CORRESPONDENCE

Katharina Limacher  
✉ [katharina.limacher@univie.ac.at](mailto:katharina.limacher@univie.ac.at)

RECEIVED 24 September 2024

ACCEPTED 11 February 2025

PUBLISHED 26 February 2025

## CITATION

Hunklinger M and Limacher K (2025) “Your identity is, what God puts into you”—Christian online activism on gender and sexuality politics on TikTok. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 7:1501105. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2025.1501105

## COPYRIGHT

© 2025 Hunklinger and Limacher. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

# “Your identity is, what God puts into you”—Christian online activism on gender and sexuality politics on TikTok

Michael Hunklinger<sup>1</sup> and Katharina Limacher<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Political Science Department, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands, <sup>2</sup>Research Centre “Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society”, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Christian and right-wing actors have been able to push their agenda, which includes the idea of Christian supremacy and fundamentalist views on sexual orientation, gender relations, reproductive rights and family concepts, toward the political center in recent years. In this context, the new Christian Right metapolitics is moving beyond mere debates and ideological discussions to become a way of life. At the same time, we observe an increasing number of progressive Christian actors online, who address gender and sexuality issues from a perspective in line with their (progressive) religious convictions. This is where our paper sets out and explores how Christian activists in the German speaking part of Europe engage in debates on gender and sexuality issues online. Numerous current examples show that the social media platform TikTok is a place of digital activism that is increasingly gaining influence in different social spheres, shaping young people’s political attitudes and political participation. Through a multimodal analysis of videos of self-described Christian activists from different denominations in the German speaking part of Europe, we aim to identify the different characteristics that address gender and sexuality issues. We find that both, conservative and progressive Christian TikTokers use similar strategies and techniques and address gender and sexuality issues in three dimension: Gender identity, gender relations and sexual orientation. Our interdisciplinary paper contributes to the growing field of research on religious digital activism by combining insights from political science and religious studies as well as queer studies.

## KEYWORDS

TikTok, Christian, activism, citizenship, gender, sexuality

## 1 Introduction

As the LGBTQ+ movement has grown in popularity, so has opposition to it. It comes primarily from right-wing, conservative religious activists and groups that see gender equality or freedom of sexual expression as a violation of the “natural order” and “traditional values.” This anti-genderist agenda targets both, the LGBTQ+ movement itself as well as at the ideologically neutral, secular, and liberal democratic state. Religious and morally conservative groups are increasingly networking transnationally. They organize themselves across cultural, national, and religious borders with the aim of influencing international organizations as well as national parliaments, governments, and other institutions in their favor (Ayoub and Stoeckl, 2024). The basis of these (right-wing/religious) transnational networks is a shared canon of values centered around conservative family values, rejection of homosexuality as well as the restriction of women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive rights.

In this context, religion plays a central role in the definition of “traditional values” because moral conservatives everywhere feel that their freedom of religion is threatened by liberal and democratic values that drive the recognition of equal rights for LGBTQ+ people. Conservative Evangelical, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox Jewish groups and organizations play a central role in these networks as they underpin a pro-family rhetoric with religious concepts. A particularity of the Christian context is its strong institutional presence on a global scale, mainly represented by the American Christian Right, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church (Lo Mascolo and Stoeckl, 2023). Those main institutional drivers are important for the facilitation and manifestation of the opposition to progressive gender and sexuality norms and values (McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023).

Religious individuals and groups have long been using social media as a tool for activism (Cervi and Divon, 2023) and digital activism has been defined as digital technologies used to expedite change in the political and social realms (Joyce, 2010, p. 36). Influenced by the widespread adoption of the internet, digital activism gives new inputs for social movements, empowering individuals to share their narratives and amplify their impact (Chen et al., 2021). Thus, the affordances of social media is and has been an essential driver of social change (Khondker, 2011). Focusing on the video-sharing platform TikTok, which has taken a “serious turn” in recent years, this article examines how Christian activists frame gender and sexuality issues. We aim to understand how Christian discourse agents communicate their positions on gender and sexuality diversity in the public sphere.

To do so, this article first provides some contextual information about recent developments in European Christianity, digital activism in general as well as conceptual approaches to activism, citizenship and the public sphere. We then will present the data and methods as well as the results of our explorative study. In the discussion we argue, that both conservative and progressive Christian activists use similar techniques and argumentative strategies which add to the already existing literature on online activism.

## 2 Theory

To the German speaking part of Europe, we see a development of an increasingly inter-denominational Christian Right, that is limited to a conservative political spectrum within the Christian denominations involved (Limacher et al., 2023). Although transnational in orientation, local religious and political actors play a prominent role in furthering anti-genderist agendas. As Mayer and Goetz (2023) show, these Christian groups pursue a “twin-track strategy,” seeking to gain influence both through petitions or citizens’ initiatives and by influencing legislation at the national or supranational level. A prominent example of this strategy is the transnational foundation CitizenGO. Set up in 2013 in Spain to launch online petitions around the world, CitizenGo has a clear political line: it has repeatedly attracted national and international attention with petitions and ultra-conservative positions in the area of anti-genderism, such as the rejection of same-sex marriage or the

fight against abortion autonomy. The foundation describes itself as a civil society organization or an association of civil society actors. However, WikiLeaks (2021) documents from 2021 reveal a network of relationships with right-wing populist parties in Europe, as well as partial funding from Russian oligarchs. This “weaponising” of active citizens (Datta, 2021, p. 46f) is being reinforced in and through social media as it is an essential means to connect people and initiatives.

However, simply talking about the instrumentalisation or “hijacking of religion” (Marzouki et al., 2016) and religious actors by international networks, such as CitizenGO, may not be sufficient to elucidate the complex context in which we need to understand current religious (online) activism. While some conservative Christians form strategic alliances with internationally illiberal politicians, others are not. And while (Christian) religion continues to serve as an important marker of identity and a tool for voter mobilization of far-right parties against gender equality and freedom of sexual expression or immigration from Muslim-majority countries, we observe that conservative Christians themselves, despite an ongoing decline in church membership across Europe, are becoming increasingly vocal along and across denominational lines.

The same can be said of Christians in general. Catholic and Protestant churches as well as religious NGOs in Germany and Austria have been very vocal on human rights issues in recent years. While they have not been equally vocal about LGBTQ+ rights, they have not shied away from openly criticizing the governing parties on various issues, such as asylum policies in the wake of the 2015 migration movements (Fülling, 2019). In a similar vein, the 2024 European elections prompted both Catholic bishops and the Protestant church in Germany to publicly speak out against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 2024; Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, 2024). These very selective examples give us an idea of the complex playing field of religion and politics in German-speaking Europe: between national and international interests, individual and institutional positions, and (ultra-)conservative and progressive positions, we see a variety of strategies and alliances competing for interpretative sovereignty.

As Ekman et al. (2016, p. 1) put it, the “way in which citizens get involved in politics, as voters, activists or protesters, remains one of the most studied phenomena in social sciences.” Current research on civic engagement increasingly focuses on the analysis of digital communications and the role of social media in organizing, coordinating and converting protests. The information agenda in the digital space determines the level of public tension and creates conditions for the mobilization or demobilization of protest activity (Oskooii et al., 2019). New media such as social platforms have led to a variety of avenues for collective action (Lievrouw, 2012) and social media is increasing the involvement of users in political issues and have become a platform for informing and mobilizing various disunited groups, while they are of the greatest importance for mobilizing and moderating the activity of members of the organization (Peter and Muth, 2023).

Although they lack the centralized organization of traditional activism, networked social movements can challenge the dominant gatekeeping of traditional media (Bennett, 2003) and are changing social discourse on an unprecedented level (Garrett, 2006). Activists

are forced to accept the rules of use imposed by private platforms, which define how activism circulates online (Cervi and Divon, 2023, p. 02) and digital activism is not only subjected to human agency, being defined and developed within private platforms that can “affect the development and success of social movements” (Cammaerts, 2012, p. 119). Much current scholarship on social media and politics treats “social media” as if it were a unitary phenomenon when, in fact, differences between social media platforms crucially shape both the practices of their users and the resulting political dynamics (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023, p. 02). In the past years, TikTok has expanded the character of political engagement online (Zeng and Abidin, 2021). TikTok is a vibrant space for activism and political engagement because it enables users to share their views in ways that are appealing to them, that help them connect to peers, and that are embedded in their interests and their cultural lives. Even so it is vastly growing, TikTok, is an under-researched but increasingly significant platform for political expression (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023, p. 02).

Central to social media in general and TikTok in particular is that “the platform facilitates replication and ‘spreadability’ through the design elements, where each created video has the potential to trigger the creation of another” (Abbas et al., 2022, p. 290). The digital development has transformed activism and the way people engage in public debates since the internet has no geographic boundaries (Mutsvauro, 2016). Social movements may often advocate for specific beliefs that mirror global politics, such as anti-vaccine movements, the distribution of misinformation and far-right movements (Lee and Abidin, 2023, pp. 02). Each platform provides unique socio-technological affordances that shape users’ communicative practices as networked publics. TikTok, one of the fastest growing entertainment platforms, is also a burgeoning space for hosting political expressions and movements. TikTok videos are a testament to the power of memes and memetic text in digital culture, easily generated intertextual entities whose vast circulation in mediascapes encourages users to collectively participate in shaping the dynamics of public and political discourse (Zulli and Zulli, 2022).

Mobilization and connection on TikTok, as well as on other social networking sites, work through expressions of affect, understood as something that is both individual and social, an “entity that cannot be neatly separated from thought or connectivity or other individuals and collectivities” (Abdel-Fadil, 2019, p. 16). People perform their religious and gender identity on social media sites and thus connect or separate themselves from others, using very diverse aesthetic techniques. Their affective engagement with content is facilitated and amplified through the structure of platforms (Sampson et al., 2018). In the case of TikTok, one central structural element seems to be its algorithmic ability to not only propose content based on users’ interactions, but it’s ability to amplify their ideas by categorizing them and adjusting content recommendations adding to polarization, or worse, radicalization (Shin and Jitkajornwanich, 2024). This does not mean, that affective engagement on social media is only to be understood in terms of negative engagement. Rather it points to the idea that engagement encompasses a diversity of emotions. Thus, TikTok is an important part of what Papacharissi calls affective publics (Papacharissi, 2014). She defines affective publics as “networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions

of affect” (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 125). A pluralisation of media formats, including the establishment of ever new social networks, is central to the concept of affective publics. It leads to shifts in the structures of public articulation and enables other, new forms of participation (Boyd, 2010). The affective publics frame allows considering forms of engagement that exist outside a more structured sphere of public articulation and are exceedingly fluid and unstable in character and characterized by the particularities of platforms, such as “publics constituted via hashtags” on X formerly Twitter (Lünenborg, 2020, p. 33), or in the case of Tiktok, publics constituted through imitation and replication (Zulli and Zulli, 2022). We can therefore speak of new ways of organizing both publics and social movements under the conditions of digital media (Mühlhoff et al., 2019, p. 8).

While the discussion of a public sphere and the role of religion in it has a long tradition both in sociology and political theory (Casanova, 1994; Habermas, 1995) the turn to affectivity and emotion is more recent (Clough, 2007). Ural et al. (2024, p. 336) point to an important link between emotion, religion and the public sphere: the connection of their trajectories in secularization theories. In their view, early theories of secularization all relied heavily on a dichotomous understanding of the process of modernization. This meant, that “[i]f religion was closely tied to emotions, and secularization entailed the waning of religion, emotions fell out of the picture.” Feminist, gender and postcolonial studies have denounced the exclusion of different groups of actors from the Habermasian ideal type of a public sphere (Benhabib, 1992; Fraser, 1990) that follows from this lack of attention for emotions. Thus, they focused on social formations that center on emotion and conflict rather than on consensual deliberation (Mouffe, 2002). Consequently, the separation between a public, rational, de-emotionalised, space and a private or semi-private space of emotions and affects became increasingly questioned. From this point of view, affects, feelings and emotions should be understood “as part of the social and political” (Bargetz and Sauer, 2015, p. 95), because publics only manifest (and disappear again) based on affective articulations.

Against this background, we understand citizenship to encompass not only various forms of formal and informal socio-cultural engagements by individuals and groups within their society, but also to include forms of political and civic engagement. As such, active citizenship is being treated in this article as an all-encompassing concept embracing formal and non-formal, political, cultural, inter-personal and caring activities. Active citizenship is itself partly constitutive of a larger sense of community because it assumes an obligation to “serve the public good” (Schubert, 2009, p. 38). Against this backdrop we understand social media influencers that publicly talk about gender and sexuality issues as civically engaged activists, according to the typology of Ekman and Amna (2012, p. 292). Besides the understanding of active citizenship, we follow Ayata (2023, p. 52) in focusing on the affective dimension of citizenship, that allows us to grasp both, the importance of people’s feelings toward others and “and how feelings of comfort, unease, anger, empathy, (mis)trust, (dis)respect, love, and hate toward an imagined ‘us’ and ‘others’ are regulated and reproduced in official policies, discourses, and practices.” Especially in the negotiations of gender identity and sexual diversity, we see that affects and emotions have historically played a central role

and still do today (Berlant, 1997). Thus, citizenship policies, such as for example rights to marriage, have a longstanding history of endorsing particular feelings as legitimate while others are discredited. Religious activism on TikTok inscribes itself in the logic of affective citizenship, as religions evoke intense feelings of attachment to one set of morals and one worldview and—equally important—its distinction from others (Abdel-Fadil, 2019).

Digital religion and its intersection with politics has gained a lot of scholarly attention in recent years, with scholars focusing on various social media platforms and different religions (Campbell and Evolvi, 2020; Evolvi, 2022; Bramlett and Burge, 2021; Tsuria, 2020 to name but a few). In terms of digital religion and digital activism, there has been a surge of research that considers social media as significant tool to find spaces of expression and connection around gender and sexual identities and combat gendered as well as religious stereotypes. Hirji (2021), for example, shows how Muslim women activists use social media, especially Twitter, to engage in various forms of resistance and to amplify their voices. However, she does not fail to point out the ambivalence of digital spaces as the “promised land” of free and equal public discourse on the one hand, and the persistence of harassment and oppression, especially of minorities, on the other. Mahmudova and Evolvi (2021) and Islam (2019) both show, how Muslim women use social media platforms to perform and create aspects of their self-image online, thus taking control of their representation. Peterson (2022) presents a comparable argument regarding the digital activism of Muslim and Christian feminists. She demonstrates that the characteristics of social media enable young religious people to engage in activism that reimagines religion from outside traditional religious institutions. While a considerable amount of research has been conducted on Muslim women and their activism for progressive gender politics within and outside of religious contexts, there appears to be a paucity of research that addresses the perspectives of both progressive and conservative religious activists on gender and sexual identity politics. By looking at self-identified Christian TikTokers, that position themselves as conservative or progressive in regard to gender and sexuality issues, By looking at conservative as well as progressive Christian TikTokers, our study aims to address this gap by also examining a social media platform that has only recently begun to attract the attention of researchers.

Since its global introduction in 2017, TikTok has emerged as one of the most impactful video-sharing platforms worldwide, achieving a milestone of one billion unique users by 2021 (Silberling, 2021). The growth of TikTok can be attributed to the pandemic, when people spent a lot of time at home and learnt to produce TikToks (Einstein, 2024, p. 141). Content creation on TikTok covers a wide range of thematic categories, such as beauty, fitness or animals, but also politics has an important presence. Recent studies (Hautea et al., 2021; Vijay and Gekker, 2021) have shown how TikTok has become a crucial (online) space for activism, amid controversy over its handling of users' sensitive information and a general lack of transparency about how its algorithms work.

### 3 Data and method

Following Abbas et al. (2022) we build our analysis corpus, by adopting a purposeful sampling technique in order to deliberately

look for information-rich cases that capture analytically important variations in the target phenomenon. Videos were selected using a purposive, non-random sampling method, which allowed the researchers to select videos that fit a specific set of criteria for the purpose of the study (Wimmer and Joseph, 2011), combining religious content with topics of gender and sexuality.

The basis for our case selection consists of publicly available videos of German speaking self-declared Christian TikTokers that are vocal about gender and sexuality issues.<sup>1</sup> We chose German speaking TikTokers that state in their videos that they are Christians, including different denominations like catholic, protestant or evangelical. Following Sapag et al. (2023), we identified the accounts by using a quantitative search that searched systematically through keywords (used as hashtags) in German and English, such as *Christ, Gender/-Ideologie, Orden, LGBT/Q, schwul, christiantok, christlichesTikTok, christianrap, Familie, Lesbisch, Sünde, Jesus, Liebe, Ehe, Sexualität, Homosexualität*. In the first qualitative screening round, videos were checked to ensure that they addressed a link between religious content and gender and sexuality issues. In the second qualitative screening round, videos were divided into two thematic groups: progressive and conservative positions on gender and sexuality issues. We chose videos in which the identified TikTokers addressed gender and sexuality issues and framed their position either as progressive or as conservative. We excluded videos where the TikTokers made no clear connection between gender and sexuality issues and Christianity. This zooming-in analysis is by no means exhaustive but should be seen as another initial foray into a broader understanding of religious politics on TikTok (Bandy and Diakopoulos, 2020; Bösch, 2023).

The current research is based on a content analysis of the 20 TikTok videos, 10 corresponding to progressive positions, 10 to conservative positions. The videos were selected on the basis of all the videos available on the channel of a particular TikToker to make sure that each selected video was in line with the general content creation of the channel. We choose videos that specifically addressed issues concerning gender and sexuality (e.g., gender identity, same-sex marriage or relationships between man and women) from a Christian perspective. In terms of visibility, the channels had an average of 5,000 to 15,000 followers with one channel being bigger with an approximate of 640,000 followers. Our data were retrieved from the standard search portal on TikTok from February to April 2024. All 20 videos were transcribed and then coded, with the unit of analysis being a single TikTok video.<sup>2</sup>

Applying multimodal content analysis (Serafini and Reid, 2023), we focused on layers of spoken and written language as well as visual elements and sound of the videos to create cohesive references between text, image and sound. Taking a multimodal approach is particularly important to understand online environments' meaning making (Jewitt, 2014), because on

1 We confirm that we have read and understood TikTok's terms and conditions prior to data collection and have adhered to them throughout data collection and analysis.

2 To ensure the best possible protection of individuals' identities, we use codes derived from our pseudonymisation scheme in this article. All used quotes were translated and altered from the original German video transcript. They are not searchable by standard search engines.



social media, and especially on TikTok, users combine different modes of communication (video, audio, text, etc.) into one, creating an integrated, multimodal environment (Cervi and Tejedor, 2023, p. 131).

## 4 Findings—same, same but different?

Our findings show that even though the content of the actors analyzed varies, the strategies and media techniques they use to share the content does not. In this section, we first give a short overview of those strategies and media techniques before analyzing the content of the videos in respect to our research question on the framing of gender and sexuality issues. Finally, we link those findings to our theoretical frame, focusing on the role of affect and its.

It is important to note that our sample consists of actors from different denominations and that they have chosen various ways of communicating their denominational affiliation. While some make their affiliation to a denomination or even a specific (offline) community clear, others explicitly or implicitly avoid denominational affiliation, with some not belonging to any denomination at all, pointing to the blurring of intra-religious boundaries observed in research on religion on Instagram (Novak et al., 2022, p. 9). Although we focused on German-speaking self-identified Christian activists, they often included English captions in their videos or added English hashtags to their video descriptions. Both aspects—not disclosing a denominational affiliation and using English captions or hashtags—could be seen as strategies to reach a broader audience.

### 4.1 Key strategies and media techniques

For our sample we chose actors that were clear in their self-positioning as either conservative or progressive Christians. Analyzing the videos, we found different argumentative strategies that were used by both groups: explanation, appeal and attack. One key strategy is to (try to) explain questions or issues surrounding gender and sexuality. The argumentation often relies on pseudoscientific explanations and religious justifications, such as the belief that God knows precisely what and why he created gender and gender identity. This form of claimed expertise in religious matters is frequently supported by reasoning, which draws on biblical references or the bible as a whole, often cited arbitrarily, with little attention to historical contextualization. “There are many people today who sell the church or the faith Christianity in order to generate more reach, which means that more people come to church, because if you were to be honest and say that homosexuality is a sin according to Christianity, many would probably be put off and not come to Christianity. But the Bible says it clearly” (CC4m<sup>3</sup>). These and similar explanations are typically accompanied by an explicitly stated claim to truth, which establishes a hierarchy of worldviews. Additionally, criticism

is directed toward both progressive and conservative Christians, their interpretations of Christianity, and the prevailing zeitgeist. Within this strategy, we found several ways of engaging with and performing religious expertise. By including religious symbols in their videos, such as a cross, or wearing the clothing of religious experts, such as a collar shirt or talar, they support their claim to be religious experts.

As a second key strategy, the activist appeal to the viewers in different ways and call them to action, the argument being that rather than being blindly influenced by current trends in politics and society, common sense should serve as a guiding principle. This calls for an appeal to personal responsibility and self-information. Viewers are encouraged to engage critically and proactively with information in order to make well-informed decisions regarding their religious beliefs and consequently their attitudes toward social issues. In this context, instances of preaching and praying aimed at persuading others of a particular opinion or ideology are being applied. Furthermore, we observed advertising and sales strategies (of actual goods, such as clothing or jewelry, or the channel itself), are part of the arguments visible in the videos. For example, one progressive Christian TikToker frequently states: “If you want to learn more, follow me!” (PC4f) at the end of her videos, while a conservative Christian promotes her book about Jesus and Gender (CC2f).

A final key strategy—attack—was identified in our analysis. In the confrontation with opposing positions, the concept of “othering” is frequently employed, whereby the opposing side is portrayed as alien or different, i.e., by referencing that *these* people still need compassion: “Of course we should still respond to these people in love [sic]. Nobody is saying e\*(...) that we should do anything to these people or meet these people with hatred. Jesus preaches to us that we should also treat these people with love” (CC4m). The opposing stance is further undermined through delegitimization, as its validity or relevance are called into question. In some cases, this may involve threats, such as a video that depicts a male TikToker in a black hoodie holding up a cross with the caption reading “Don’t you dare changing our true faith!” (CC4m). Moreover, humor and ridicule are also used, with the opposing view being depicted as absurd in order to render it laughable. Several videos of one progressive TikToker build on the concept of humor and ridicule, such as a comical reckoning with conservative positions that opens with the phrase: “Fasten your seatbelts, it’s going to be embarrassing again” (PC1m).

The activists analyzed in this paper used a variety of media techniques that are common on TikTok (Zulli and Zulli, 2022) including collages, comedy, interviews, loops, selfies, stitches and visual reinforcements. All of those were used by both, conservative and progressive activists. In some videos on- and offline perspectives were integrated, by e.g., filming street preaching activities or filming interviews with people on the streets. Many of the activists used sounds or clips that were trending to reinforce their message. This demonstrates the importance of the technological and cultural affordances that the platform itself provides. Thus, as other research has found, TikTok and other social media platforms and the way they operate are an important part of shaping religious activism online.

<sup>3</sup> Quotes were translated from German to English by the authors. Codes refer to the pseudonymized Christian activists in our sample.

## 4.2 Issues

In our analysis three major topics emerged that relate to gender and sexuality issues: (a) gender identity(ies), (b) gender relation(s) and (c) sexual orientation. It is evident, that these themes overlap and intersect so that certain themes appear in all three topics.

### a) Gender identity

In the videos analyzed, both conservative and progressive views on gender identity were present and articulated in very different ways, ranging from acceptance and anti-discrimination to pity and condemnation. The progressive actors argue for the importance of recognizing and embracing individual differences, challenging the exclusion that marginalized groups—such as trans and queer communities often face: *“If you are listening to me here today and the area of gender and LGBTQ is a personal issue for you, I would like to ask you for forgiveness where Christians have fought against you, excluded you, condemned you and where they have painted you a picture that God hates you”* (PC3m). For those who identify outside the traditional binary of gender and sexuality, identity is not only a matter of biology, but also of personal experience, emotion, and individuality. This is linked to a universal acceptance and love from God: *“God loves everyone and He loves you too. You are unconditionally accepted”* (PC3m).

From a more conservative religious perspective, questions of identity are often tied to beliefs about Jesus and God’s plan for humanity. For them, aligning one’s life with God’s natural order is crucial, and anything that contradicts that order, such as queerness or trans identities, can be seen as a misunderstanding or misconception of one’s true self. Consequently, conservative Christian activists often refer to an unquestionable binary nature of gender: *“God created us humans as man and woman for a reason”* (CC3m). The identity of Jesus is sometimes held up as a model of perfect humanity, and some see deviations from traditional gender roles as departures from this ideal.

As people navigate these complex issues, many also consider the broader religious context. For some, debates about gender identity and sexuality are signs of the end times, and they see societal shifts as a reflection of moral decay: *“We can see from this that the end times are approaching and that the devil is no longer hiding as much as he used to”* (CC1f). Others see it as a time of growth, when Jesus’ teachings on love and compassion call us to embrace and celebrate all people, regardless of how they define their gender or sexuality: *“As Christians, we ultimately believe that God has created and called us all individually. This individuality does not stop at our gender identity”* (PC4f).

In the videos we analyzed, compassion is a recurring theme in how Christian TikTokers talk about gender identity and gender relations. In a conservative frame, compassion focuses on the individual who is “struggling” with either their ascribed gender identity or heteronormative gender relations. Often they argue for “saving the sinner” while continuing to condemn the act of non-conformity.

In contrast, the progressive frame of compassion highlights exclusion and discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender relations as grounds for empathy, and seeks to embrace the inclusivity and dignity of all people, regardless of how they identify or structure their relationships.

### b) Gender relations

In discussions of gender relationships and identity, conservative as well as progressive Christian activists address the concept of binary—the division of humanity into two distinct categories of male and female. While conservatives argue This is often based on traditional views of faith and biology.

Based on gender relations, it becomes clear in the analysis that both conservative and progressive Christian activists refer to a certain “naturalness” of gender relations. While the conservative camp unsurprisingly argues with a God-given binary order and the resulting heterosexual gender relationships as the only option, progressive Christian activists also refer to a “naturalness of diversity” and the various forms of relationships that can be derived from this. Many conservative perspectives argue that gender roles derive directly from physical differences and link them to a natural, divinely ordained gender order that intentionally created by God. In this framework, the relationship between a man and a woman (marriage) represents the only acceptable form of relationship that serves as the foundation of family and society: *“When we look at the bible we see that marriage and relationships are only supposed to take place as a relationship between a man and a woman”* (CC3m). Dealing with marriage and relationships also includes the question of subjugation and hierarchization between men and women, as addressed by a female conservative Christian activist as follows: *“I submit to my husband, this does not mean that he oppresses me, but it means that I have the awareness that he is the head of the family and is responsible before God for our future family”* (CC1f).

However, as society evolves, the gendering of roles and expectations has come under scrutiny. Progressive views often emphasize that naturalness is not about adhering to rigid gender binaries, but about recognizing the diversity of human experience and identity: *“Jesus says that love is the fulfillment of the law and how we implement this correctly changes over the centuries”* (PC4f).

### c) Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is often framed in terms of a dichotomy of good and evil, which places it in a stark moral debate about right and wrong. These debates often extend beyond individual actions to the broader cosmic struggle between good and evil, sometimes couched in the language of spiritual warfare and doomsday narratives, with Satan or the devil symbolizing the forces of temptation and sin: *“And that’s exactly what the devil wants, to tell you lies, that you’re queer, that you’re not enough the way you are. That comes from the devil and it’s not something that will bring you happiness and peace because you’ve now found yourself, but it’s an identity crisis. It is something that only Jesus can solve. Only Jesus can give you true identity, true peace”* (CC1f).

At its core, however, much of the discourse is shaped by differing beliefs about human nature, the role of tradition, and the path to a more moral and just society. Thus, progressive Christian activists emphasize that love in its many forms should be celebrated, not condemned. For them, sexual orientation is part of one’s innate identity, not an expression of evil or sin, but rather of one’s individuality and capacity to love, as expressed in the short and recurring statement *“Love is not a sin”* (i.e. PC4f).

When it comes to issues of sexuality, opinions are often deeply divided. The famous “hate the sin and love the sinner” frame is very prominent in the argumentation of the conservative

actors analyzed, as is visible in the caption of one video about homosexuality stating “*We should still love the people who indulge in this sin, but not the sin they indulge in*” (CC4m).

Interestingly, a vast majority of the videos address (foremost male) homosexuality while other sexual orientations are not mentioned. Homosexuality—whether viewed as an act, a relationship, or an identity—is discussed in different ways. While the sexual act itself as well as same-sex relationships are clearly labeled as sinful, the take on homosexual identity is a bit more blurry. This mirrors a long-held understanding and significant part of for example Catholic teachings, that condemn homosexual acts as immoral while at same time calling for gay men and lesbian women to be treated with respect (Moser, 2019, p. 136f). Thus, for some conservative Christian activists, homosexual identity may be tolerable in certain contexts if gay men or lesbian women do not act on it. For others, it is always a sin that can be prayed away, and it is the responsibility of the individual to change to heterosexual behavior. Thus, one TikTok posts videos, where she prays for people at a pride parade (CC2f).

We observed that especially on homosexual relations, both types of activists point to biblical references. Especially, the prominent quotes from Genesis or Leviticus but also others, are referred to time and again as the following example illustrates: “*When I saw the video, I thought of the following Bible passage: Matthew chapter 7, verse 15: “Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” What he says in the video about homosexuality is not true. In the book of Leviticus, chapter 18 verse 22, we see a refutation of his points and arguments and also in the book of Leviticus chapter 20 verse 13 and in the book of Romans chapter 1 verse 27*” (CC4m).

For many conservative groups, homosexuality is closely linked to the protection of children. They may see certain progressive views on sexuality, such as the normalization of homosexuality, as a threat to child protection. They contrast this with their strong stance against clearly immoral acts, such as pedophilia, which they equate with homosexuality.

### 4.3 The role of affect

Based on our understanding of affect that does not reduce it to the characteristic of a subject, but rather understands affect as an aspect anchored in sociality and relationality, we see that affect influences both the discourses we investigated as well as the phenomenon of the public sphere in which these discourses take place. Looking at the specifics of TikTok, in particular its multimodality, we can uncover different “affective undercurrents” (Schankweiler and Wüschner, 2019, p. 112). Analyzing the detailed descriptions of the videos in our sample, we find hints of the affective dynamics between the video and the viewer. An example of one of our video descriptions reads as follows:

*Two alternating images in a slideshow, accompanied by an Arabic rap track sung by a male voice: The first shows a person wearing a white alb (undergarment of priests/deacons) and a rainbow-colored stole. The person is standing in front of a church entrance, the steps are also dressed in rainbow colors, a banner*

*above the entrance shows the Pride flag on which is written “Rainbow Christians together”. The person is holding a poster that reads “It is Ash Wednesday. XXX (illegible) to go! Remember You are Stardust!” The second picture shows a photo of Person in a black tracksuit. He is holding a brass-colored cross in one hand and holding up his other hand with a raised index finger. The caption above the picture reads: “Don’t you dare changing our true faith! [Emoji of a Russian cross]”.*

Schankweiler and Wüschner note that images move both users who interact with images as well as other images. The affective dynamics that facilitate or constitute these relationships can be analyzed by focusing on certain aspects that act as affective intensifiers within the context of the image or video, such as movement or motion. In our example, the affective dynamics arise from the slideshow technique and its contrasting effect between two seemingly very different scenarios, one of which is bright and colorful (and perhaps open to ridicule), while the other, with the person in a black tracksuit holding a cross, appears menacing (emphasized by the gloomy continuous track in the background). Affective dynamics are of course not only generated by a basic tone perceived as threatening, but are also present in videos that reproduce successful dance memes, for example, or use humor. Again, movement, music and language come together to create the relationship between the video and the viewer.

For the Christian activists in our sample, both progressive and conservative, the affective dynamic appears to be particularly relevant in eliminating ambiguity and underlining a quest for and claim to ultimate clarity on issues of gender and sexuality, aspects that are indeed characteristic of fundamentalist religion. This could be seen as evidence of the continuous success of the main institutional (religious) discourse agents in social media that oppose progressive gender and sexuality norms and values in a similar often fundamentalist manner, even though the activists in our sample do not link themselves to these or any other religious institutions.

## 5 Discussion

This paper adds to the literature on social media, religion and activism by looking at Christian activists on TikTok. As we were able to show, Christian activism on gender and sexuality issues is an internally diverse phenomenon. It can be placed at the intersection of the numerous religious contents on Tiktok—from paganism to witchtok, from modest fashion to Muslim bodybuilding—and decidedly activist contributions, such as on LGBTQ+ rights, on inclusion of people with disabilities, on environmental protection or the circulating updates on various international crises.

On the one hand, Christian activism on Tiktok is strongly shaped by the technological and affective affordances as well as the memetic culture of the platform. This is evidenced by the fact that all the videos we analyzed rely on a combination of different strategies and media techniques. This results in a double ambivalence: on the one hand, the videos are very similar in form—even if their political positioning is opposite. They all use specific moods and aesthetics to achieve a high degree of emotionality. On the other hand, the content itself is also quite ambivalent

in itself, when, as we have shown, the creators mix different argumentative strategies such as humor, criticism and ridicule. The videos therefore require a certain degree of familiarity on the part of the audience, both in terms of understanding the logic of the platform, handling of affectivity, and knowledge of gender and sexuality issues as well as religious knowledge, in order to be able to classify the multi-layered levels of meaning of text, image and sound.

As our analysis has shown, the various aspects of the Christian activists' positions on gender and sexuality issues can be subsumed under the overarching themes of *gender identity*, *gender relations* and *sexual orientation*. It is important to see that themes we identified do not simply reproduce common arguments of Christian or secular debates. Instead, we see a different focus of Christian TikTokers positions on gender and sexuality issues in comparison to both, the positions of a more institutionalized Christian right on the one hand and progressive secular positions on these issues on the other.

The ideology of the Christian Right in relation to gender and sexuality issues, besides a firm stance against reproductive rights, includes a preference for a patriarchal family model and the rejection of rights related to sexual orientation or gender identity, such as the right to gay marriage or the rights of trans people, as [Lo Mascolo and Stoeckl \(2023, p. 13f\)](#) write. Both, the issue of gender relations and the issue of sexual orientation, as they emerge in our data, can be clearly linked to the discourses of an established Christian right, supported by institutional actors and their political opponents. This is because the focus on the patriarchal family model, based on a heterosexual relationship, as well as the question of sexual orientation, from which possible claims and rights can be derived, are highly contested fundamental issues, both in increasingly secular societies with a Christian heritage and in discourses within the Churches and Christian communities themselves. However, it is important to realize that it is not institutional discourse agents that are speaking here, but individual activists that. We therefore see forms of active citizenship and opportunities for participation in a discourse that is in many cases dominated by strong, globally present institutional actors and generally leaves little room for the voices of individual activists. This is also evidenced by the fact that in many of the Christian activists on TikTok we have analyzed, a denominational connection is not apparent and does not seem to play a role. While we see strong tendencies toward interdenominational cooperation in the more institutionalized, global Christian Right, the denominational position remains important there, but not for the Christian activists in our sample.

The situation is somewhat different with regard to our third topic of *gender identity*. The data reveals that the framing of gender identity on TikTok differs from that observed in discourses of the institutional Christian Right or in progressive secular contexts. In both of these contexts, the focus is on the question of which specific rights should or should not be derived from identities, rather than on the question of how gender identity is negotiated individually. Of course, the Christian right both in Europe and globally is engaged in a campaign against what is known as the "gender ideology." However, this term is not used uniformly and covers a broad spectrum of concerns that range from the fight against concrete rights for the LGBTQ+ community to the prevention of a supposedly totalitarian appropriation of society as a whole. The

concepts of gender and gender ideology are therefore also referred to as "symbolic glue" or "empty signifiers" ([Kováts and Pöim, 2015](#); [Mayer and Sauer, 2017](#)). Furthermore, even progressive discourses on gender identity, whether secular or religious, are not unambiguous in their use of the concept of gender and gender identity. Rather, they are more clearly linked to rights of minorities, such as the rights of gay or trans people.

The issue of gender identity presents itself differently in our data. Both conservative and progressive Christian activists treat gender identity as a characteristic of one's identity that is primarily to be resolved individually with God. Conservative Christian activists insist that one should accept God as the essence of one's identity and that God has created the binary gender identity in each individual and that this is just waiting to be recognized as the individual's true identity. In contrast, progressive Christian activists emphasize God's individual creation of each human and his unconditional acceptance of all identities. Consequently, we see a specific, individualistic approach to the concept of gender identity within both positions. This particular way of negotiating gender identity is not only evident in the content. It is also strongly underlined by the formal aspects of the videos. These are people who often speak from their private spaces and perform forms of intimacy with the help of various media techniques. They provide and perform insights into their private living spaces, their (couple) relationships or make get-ready-with-me videos, thus contributing to the creation of networked public formations that emerge through expressions of affect, as Papacharissi puts it.

There are several implications from our findings: In the broader social context, Christian activism on gender and sexuality issues on TikTok fits generally well with similar positions we see in other media contexts and from other actors. Nevertheless, the Christian activism we have analyzed has some distinctive features. We see a form of activism that focuses on individualistic and affective aspects to a much greater extent than in other contexts. This is because TikTokers in our sample are generally not concerned with discussing minority rights, but rather with debating Christian positions on gender and sexuality issues and which associated feelings are to be regarded as legitimate from a particular religious perspective. Deviations from this are discredited through various strategies, which in turn appeal to feelings such as empathy, love or disrespect.

Even if the significance of digital activism in the public sphere is far from clear, it can be concluded from our data that in the negotiations of gender identity and sexual diversity among Christian TikTokers, active citizenship is always also an affective citizenship, i.e., that both the emergence of the public sphere and the co-creation of subjectivity in it can only be understood with reference to affects and emotions that work to eliminate ambiguity on issues of gender and sexuality. Further research will have to show whether this specific link can be demonstrated in other religious contexts and on other political issues as well.

## 6 Conclusion

Our paper shows that both conservative and progressive actors see gender and sexuality as important issues in their online activity. It is particularly noteworthy that media techniques and argumentative strategies do not differ depending on where the



activists analyzed fall on the scale from conservative to progressive. All self-identified Christian activists in our sample use similar keywords and mix German and English to reach a wider audience. They try to spread their attitudes, and thus their belief system, in different ways adapted to the TikTok platform. This calls for more research on how different forms of (religious) activism are shaped and adapted by platform cultures and the (not transparent) logic of technical conditions such as algorithms. It becomes clear that the affordances of social media have been, and continue to be, crucial in driving social change and expanding who can participate and how discourses are shaped. It also shows that TikTok, a video-sharing platform that began as an entertainment platform, has taken a more serious turn in recent years and is now a major player in online activism. Our case illustrated this change and adaptation by Christian activists very well and shows that as technology is evolving, so is activism.

## Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent from the participants or participants legal guardian/next of kin was not required to participate in this study in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements. The social media data was accessed and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/national regulations.

## References

- Abbas, L., Fahmy, S. S., Ayad, S., Ibrahim, M., and Ali, A. H. (2022). TikTok intifada: analyzing social media activism among youth. *Online Media Glob. Commun.* 2, 287–314. doi: 10.1515/omgc-2022-0014
- Abdel-Fadil, M. (2019). The politics of affect: the glue of religious and identity conflicts in social media. *J. Relig. Media Digit. Cult.* 8, 11–34. doi: 10.1163/21659214-00801002
- Ayata, B. (2023). Affective citizenship: differential regimes of belonging in plural societies," in *Affect, Power, and Institutions*. 1st ed. (Routledge), 47–58.
- Ayoub, P. M., and Stoeckl, K. (2024). *The Global Fight Against LGBTI Rights: How Transnational Conservative Networks Target Sexual and Gender Minorities*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Bandy, J., and Diakopoulos, N. (2020). #TulsaFlop: A Case Study of Algorithmically-influenced Collective Action on TikTok. *arXiv [Preprint]*. doi: 10.48550/arXiv.2012.07716
- Bargetz, B., and Sauer, B. (2015). Der affective turn. Das Gefühlsdispositiv und die Trennung von öffentlich und privat. *Fem. Polit.* 24, 93–102. doi: 10.3224/feminapolitica.v24i1.19255
- Benhabib, S. (1992). *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (1. publ.). Cambridge: Polity Pr.
- Bennett, W. (2003). Communicating global activism. *Inf. Commun. Soc.* 6, 143–168. doi: 10.1080/136911803200093860a
- Berlant, L. G. (1997). *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Bösch, M. (2023). "Alternative tiktok tactics: how the german right-wing populist party AfD plays the platform," in *Fast Politics* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore), 149–167.
- Boyd, D. (2010). "Social network sites as networked publics: affordances, dynamics, and implications," in *A Networked Self. Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed. Z. Papacharissi (New York: Routledge), 39–58.
- Bramlett, B. H., and Burge, R. P. (2021). God talk in a digital age: how members of congress use religious language on twitter. *Politics Relig.* 14, 316–338. doi: 10.1017/S1755048320000231
- Cammaerts, B. (2012). Protest logics and the mediation opportunity structure. *Eur. J. Commun.* 27, 117–134. doi: 10.1177/0267323112441007
- Campbell, H. A., and Evolvi, G. (2020). Contextualizing current digital religion research on emerging technologies. *Hum. Behav. Emerg. Technol.* 2, 5–17. doi: 10.1002/hbe2.149
- Casanova, J. (1994). *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1. [print.]). Chicago, Ill. [u.a.]: University of Chicago Press.
- Cervi, L., and Divon, T. (2023). Playful activism: memetic performances of palestinian resistance in TikTok #Challenges. *Social Media Soc.* 9.1:205630512311576. doi: 10.1177/20563051231157607
- Cervi, L., and Tejedor, S. (2023). "OK boomer: "political" discussion and user reactions to political communication," in *Matteo Salvini's TikTok*, in *Fast Politics* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore), 127–148.
- Chen, Z., Oh, P., and Chen, A. (2021). The role of online media in mobilizing large-scale collective action. *Social Media Soc.* 7, 1–13. doi: 10.1177/20563051211033808
- Clough, P. T. (2007). *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham, NC [u.a.]: Duke Univ. Press.
- Datta, N. (2021). *Tip of the Iceberg*. Brussels: EPF.

## Author contributions

MH: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. KL: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

- Deutsche Bischofskonferenz (2024). *Völkischer Nationalismus und Christentum sind unvereinbar*. Available at: [https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse\\_downloads/presse\\_2024/2024-023a-Anlage1-Pressericht-Erklärung-der-deutschen-Bischoefe.pdf](https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2024/2024-023a-Anlage1-Pressericht-Erklärung-der-deutschen-Bischoefe.pdf) (accessed September 13, 2024).
- Einstein, M. (2024). "Faith-centric TikToks. Promoting Religion through personalized experience and engagement," in *Selling the Sacred: Religion and Marketing from Crossfit to QAnon (1st ed.)*, eds. M. Einstein, and S. M. Taylor (Routledge), 139–153. doi: 10.4324/9781100334229-12
- Ekman, J., and Amna, E. (2012). Political participation and civic engagement: towards a new typology. *Hum. Aff. 22*, 283–300. doi: 10.2478/s13374-012-0024-1
- Ekman, J., Gherghina, S., and Podolian, O. (2016). Challenges and realities of political participation and civic engagement in central and eastern Europe. *East Eur. Politics 32*, 1–11. doi: 10.1080/21599165.2016.1141091
- Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (2024). *EKD-Ratsvorsitzende Fehrs schließt sich Warnung vor AfD-Wahl an*. Available at: <https://www.ekd.de/ekd-ratsvorsitzende-fehrs-schliesst-sich-warnung-vor-afd-wahl-an-82908.htm> (accessed September 13, 2024).
- Evolvi, G. (2022). The theory of hypermediation: anti-gender christian groups and digital religion. *J. Media Relig. 21*, 69–88. doi: 10.1080/15348423.2022.2059302
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Soc. Text 25/26*, 56–80. doi: 10.2307/466240
- Fülling, H. (2019). "Flüchtlingspolitik als Konfliktfeld?" in *Flucht und Migration in Europa. Politik und Religion*, eds. O. Hidalgo, and G. Pickel (Springer VS, Wiesbaden).
- Garrett, R. K. (2006). Protest in an information society: a review of literature on social movements and new ICTs. *Inf. Commun. Soc. 9*, 202–224. doi: 10.1080/13691180600630773
- Habermas, J. (1995). *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Unveränd. Nachdr., 4. Aufl.). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Hautea, S., Parks, P., Takahashi, B., and Zeng, J. (2021). Showing they care (or don't): Affective publics and ambivalent climate activism on TikTok. *Social Media Soc. 7*, 1–12. doi: 10.1177/20563051211012344
- Hirji, F. (2021). Claiming our spaces: muslim women, activism, and social media. *Islamoph. Stud. J. 6*, 78–92. doi: 10.13169/islstudj.6.1.0078
- Islam, I. (2019). Redefining #youraveragemuslim woman: muslim female digital activism on social media. *J. Arab Muslim Media Res. 12*, 213–233. doi: 10.1386/jammr\_00004\_1
- Jewitt, C. (2014). "An introduction to multimodality," in *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, ed. C. Jewitt (London: Routledge), 14–27.
- Joyce, M. (ed.). (2010). *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change*. IDEA. Available at: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/digital-activism-decoded-new-mechanics-change> (accessed December 10, 2024).
- Khondker, H. H. (2011). Role of the new media in the arab spring. *Globalisations 8*, 675–679. doi: 10.1080/14747731.2011.621287
- Kováts, E., and Pöim, M. (eds.). (2015). *Gender as symbolic glue. The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe*. Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/11382.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2024).
- Lee, J., and Abidin, C. (2023). Introduction to the Special Issue of "TikTok and Social Movements." *Social Media Soc. 9*.1:205630512311574. doi: 10.1177/20563051231157452
- Lievrouw, L. A. (2012). "Alternative and activist new media," in *Media and cultural studies: Keywords*, eds. M. G. Durham and D. M. Kellner (John Wiley and Sons), 471–490.
- Limacher, K., Mattes, A., and Urbanic, B. (2023). "The christian right in Europe: Austria," in *The Christian Right in Europe: Movements, Networks and Denominations that Endanger Europe* (Bielefeld: Transcript), 129–146. doi: 10.1515/9783839460382-007
- Literat, I., and Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2023). TikTok as a key platform for youth political expression: reflecting on the opportunities and stakes involved. *Social Media Soc. 9*.1:205630512311575. doi: 10.1177/20563051231157595
- Lo Mascolo, G., and Stoeckl, K. (2023). "The European christian right: an overview", in *The Christian Right in Europe: Movements, Networks and Denominations that Endanger Europe* (Bielefeld: Transcript), 11–42. doi: 10.1515/9783839460382-002
- Lünenborg, M. (2020). "Affective publics: understanding the dynamic formation of public articulations beyond the public sphere," in *Public Spheres of Resonance. Constellations of affect and language*, eds. A. Fleig and C. v. Scheve (London/NYC: Routledge), 30–48.
- Mahmudova, L., and Evolvi, G. (2021). Likes, comments, and follow requests: the instagram user experiences of young muslim women in the Netherlands. *J. Relig. Media Digit. Cult. 10*, 50–70. doi: 10.1163/21659214-bja10038
- Marzouki, N., McDonnell, D., and Roy, O. (eds.). (2016). *Saving the People. How Populists Hijack Religion*. Oxford, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Mayer, S., and Goetz, J. (2023). "A European agenda?: the supra-national dimension of anti-feminism in europe," in *Global Perspectives on Anti-Feminism: Far-Right and Religious Attacks on Equality and Diversity*, eds. S. Mayer, and J. Goetz (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 95–115.
- Mayer, S., and Sauer, B. (2017). "'Gender ideology' in Austria: coalitions around an empty signifier," in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, eds. K. Roman, and D. Paternotte (London: Rowman and Littlefield), 23–40.
- McEwen, H., and Narayanaswamy, L. (2023). *The international Anti-Gender Movement. Understanding the Rise of Anti-Gender Discourses in the Context of Development, Human Rights and Social Protection*. UNRISD Working Paper 23-06. Available at: <https://cdn.unrisd.org/assets/library/papers/pdf-files/2023/wp-2023-4-anti-gender-movement.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2024).
- Moser, S. (2019). Über die Verwirrungen hinsichtlich der genderfrage oder braucht die römisch-katholische kirche eine reformation? *Labyrinth 20*, 113–138. doi: 10.25180/lj.v20i2.138
- Mouffe, C. (2002). "Für eine agonistische Öffentlichkeit," in *Demokratie als unvollendeter Prozess*, ed. H. Cantz (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag), 101–112.
- Mühlhoff, R., Breljak, A., and Slaby, J. (eds.). (2019). *Affekt Macht Netz Auf dem Weg zu einer Sozialtheorie der Digitalen Gesellschaft*. First edition. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Mutsavairo, B. (2016). *Digital Activism in the Social Media Era, Critical Reflections on Emerging Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 1st edn. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Novak, C., Haselbacher, M., Mattes, A., and Limacher, K. (2022). Religious "bubbles" in a superdiverse digital landscape? research with religious youth on instagram. *Religions 13*:213. doi: 10.3390/rel13030213
- Oskooui, K. A. R., Lajevardi, N., and Collingwood, L. (2019). Opinion shift and stability: the information environment and long-lasting opposition to Trump's Muslim ban. *Polit. Behav. 43*, 301–337. doi: 10.1007/s11109-019-09555-8
- Papacharissi, Z. (2014). *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Peter, C., and Muth, L. (2023). Social media influencers' role in shaping political opinions and actions of young audiences. *Media Commun. 11*.3, 164–174. doi: 10.17645/mac.v11i3.6750
- Peterson, K. M. (2022). *Unruly Souls: The Digital Activism of Muslim and Christian Feminists*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Sampson, T. D., Maddison, S., and Ellis, D. (2018). *Affect and Social Media: Emotion, Mediation, Anxiety and Contagion*. London: Rowman and Littlefield International.
- Sapag, M. P., Rastrilla, L. P., and García, A. R. (2023). TikTok: new media, old propaganda—state of the art and possibilities for political communication," in *Fast Politics* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore), 3–19.
- Schankweiler, K., and Wüschner, P. (2019). "Images that move: analyzing affect with Aby Warburg," in *Analyzing Affective Societies* (Routledge), 101–119.
- Schubert, E. (2009). Religion and citizenship: multiple identities in the modern world. *J. Inst. Humanit. IV*, 34–44. doi: 10.5040/9780755610372.ch-008
- Serafini, F., and Reid, S. F. (2023). Multimodal content analysis: expanding analytical approaches to content analysis. *Vis. Commun. 22*, 623–649. doi: 10.1177/1470357219864133
- Shin, D., and Jitkajornwanich, K. (2024). How algorithms promote self-radicalization: audit of tiktok's algorithm using a reverse engineering method. *Soc. Sci. Comput. Rev. 42*, 1020–1040. doi: 10.1177/08944393231225547
- Silberling, A. (2021). *TikTok Reached 1 Billion Monthly Active Users*. TechCrunch. Available at: <https://techcrunch.com/2021/09/27/tiktok-reached-1-billion-monthly-active-users/> (accessed September 27, 2021).
- Tsuria, R. (2020). Get out of church! the case of #EmptyThePews: twitter hashtag between resistance and community. *Information 11*:335. doi: 10.3390/info11060335
- Ural, N. Y., Burchardt, M., and Flam, H. (2024). "What emotions teach us about religion: sociological approaches and the affective turn," in *Research Handbook on the Sociology of Emotion* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing), 329–355.
- Vijay, D., and Gekker, A. (2021). Playing politics: how sabarimala played out on TikTok. *Am. Behav. Sci. 65*, 712–734. doi: 10.1177/0002764221989769
- WikiLeaks (2021). *The Intolerance Network*. Available at: <https://wikileaks.org/intolerancenetworf/tree/part-1/Fundaci%C3%B3n%20CitizenGO> (accessed September 12, 2024).
- Wimmer, R., and Joseph, D. (2011). *Mass Media Research: An Introduction, 9th edn*. Boston, Mass: Cengage/Wadsworth.
- Zeng, J., and Abidin, C. (2021). "# OkBoomer, time to meet the zoomers": studying the memefication of intergenerational politics on TikTok. *Inf. Commun. Soc. 24*, 2459–2481. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2021.1961007
- Zulli, D., and Zulli, D. J. (2022). Extending the internet meme: conceptualizing technological mimesis and imitation publics on the TikTok platform. *New Media Soc. 24*, 1872–1890. doi: 10.1177/1461444820983603