Modern discourse on ADHD

in the English-speaking TikTok community

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Introduction and literature review (by Evangelina Kolbasina)

The discourse on ADHD as one of the most discussed categories of mental health (Horton-Salway, M.,et al, 2018) has been studied multiple times throughout the years with rather similar results. Recent study of ADHD discourse (van Langen et al, 2022) in psychoeducation, which is meant for children and their parents to understand the diagnosis and the way it is viewed by the therapist, has shown internal conflict of medical and psychosocial models, that, in return, cause "confusion, misrepresentation and decontextualization of ADHD". Another discourse study of information on ADHD (Erlandsson, 2016) provided to parents has uncovered an increasing reliance on the biomedical model, which may lead to the marginalization and less alternatives in approaches. Such findings were presented even before these studies (Schmitz, Filippone, Edelman, 2003) with additional findings of poor social representation (predominantly white boys) with focus on hyperactivity symptoms, reliance on medical model and language.

Similar results were found by Ponnou and Gonon (2017), who analyzed French media on their portrayal of ADHD. They have discovered a surprising disconnection between the messages delivered by the TV programmes aimed at the general audience and general/specialized press. In the first case, the media heavily leaned towards the medical model, focusing solely on the biological side of ADHD and the designated medical treatment. The researchers have also supplied that TV represents the main source of health information for the Europeans. On the other hand, newspapers have shown a more detailed approach to ADHD, trying to showcast the nuances of both medical and social parts of the issue.

Speaking of the media misrepresentation, Gonon, Bezard and Boraud (2011) have noted how the neuroscience data can be taken out of its context and then incorrectly presented to the audience, thus forming views that are again more supportive of the biological explanations than social, influencing the social representation of ADHD and causing misleading conclusions.

A more profound ADHD discourse analysis has covered press articles from 1985 to 2008 (Ray and Hinnant, 2009) and the authors have concluded that while ADHD appears to be generally normalized, it is still surrounded by stigmas such as medicalization and potential danger to the society. The studied media had focused on the learning difficulties as it was mostly referring to the children with ADHD, often excluding other categories of affected people or offering little diversity of situations.

A look at the previous discourse research on ADHD has highlighted a niche yet to be studied - ADHD discourse in the modern media like TikTok. This platform was chosen for its rather recent emergence - 2016 - and the enormous amount of users - over 1 billion per month, and among other topics it is used to spread mental health information (Zenone M, et al, 2021). Unfortunately, there is no stable or definitely reliable source of

statistics on TikTok with regards to the views or viewers count, however, the official website Tiktok hashtags have stated that under #adhd can be found 28,013 posts, accumulating over 125 million views (as of 21.05.2023). Such engagement can prove to be a source of information worth analyzing.

Moreover, it has already been used to analyze mental health, just not specifically ADHD. Milton et al. (2023) have described how TikTok users perceive content on mental health and its design to convey a sense of belonging, the communities on the application have produced social support that is viewed as helpful by the users. According to Basch et al. (2022), their study of mental health content has uncovered that majority of the videos display symptoms of mental distress, 60% have indicated validating or supportive messages, however, few of them offered actual coping strategies, and few of them were recorded by the mental health specialists. TikTok, thus, provides a platform of social support without need for paying or scheduling. Similar results were exposed by another research (Pretorius, McCashin, Coyle, 2022), where the findings included easily accessible mental health information with a limitation of low credibility.

Based on the above mentioned literature review was proposed a research concerning discourse on ADHD found on Tiktok. By the number of views, that counts in the billions, hashtags that include ADHD are also relatively popular and this allows us to see the relevant discourse on ADHD for today as well as it helps to understand the role of TikTok discourse in presenting ADHD. Which is important because today social media have a great influence on people's perceptions (Cheng, Z, et al, 2023). This is a new, previously unstudied discourse on a modern platform that is known to carry information regarding mental health. The findings could prove to be useful to the ADHD community, mental health professionals, content creators with similar specialization, social networks' moderators and executives.

Project objectives (by Daria Turbina)

The main purpose of this work is to explore the discourse on ADHD, to find out how ADHD is portrayed on the application: in what view (negative, positive, neutral), whether the TikTok community stigmatizes or normalizes the disorder, or misleads people, what kind of narrative messages are shown on TikTok under the most popular ADHD hashtags, what are the most common categories can be made out of the provided content.

Methodology (by Daria Turbina, Evangelina Kolbasina and Sergiy Proshliakov)

Tiktok's video content that can be used as a source of qualitative data comes in various forms: speech, sounds, music, on-screen text, captions, hashtags, emojis, gestures, facial expressions, lip-syncing, dancing, photos, comics, pictures, staged videos, filters, videos without their author being present (e.g. nature shots), and mix of any of these or more forms.

For the purpose of this study to create a discourse on ADHD any of the forms can be used, however, for a more convenient analytical approach only text analysis would be conducted. The type of text analysis must match the purpose, thus, we would be implementing discursive analysis. Discourse analysis is a combination of methods for interpreting various kinds of texts or statements, it deals with the analysis of various texts in written form, as well as the analysis of spoken language in various forms (Řiháček, T., et al, 2013).

The further purpose is to discover how the phenomenon we are interested in is described. We have to understand the language and context in which ADHD is discussed, we have to pay attention to how language and what words are used in discussions and conversations about ADHD, therefore, we would be collecting data on the English-speaking community of Tik-Tok.

Type: stop target analysis (ADHD 2022-2023). Data collection technique: Qualitative research via analysis of results of activities (text data). The choice of qualitative method is explained by descriptive aims of the research, collected data is suitable for further quantification. Participants: selected Tik-Tok videos according to the hashtags and date of publication. A more detailed description of the procedure follows in the next chapter. (written by Sergiy Proshliakov)

Data collection procedure (by Daria Turbina and Evangelina Kolbasina)

Due to the fact that the TikTok algorithms are based on the user's previous activity, for the first step to collect data, we would create a new account to avoid distorting the results by our previous activity. As a second step we would choose the ten most popular hashtags related to ADHD according to the number of views. We have selected the following hashtags: #ADHD, #adhdtiktok, #adhdcheck, #adhdawareness, #adhdtok, #adhdsquad, #adhdprobs, #adhdproblems, #adultadhd, #adhdmom. Within the ten presented hashtags, we would pick the ten most popular videos for each of the hashtags, which were filtered by the highest number of likes and their publication date (2022-2023). The amount of likes corresponds to their popularity and the date - to relevancy, both serving the goal of the study to obtain the most up-to-date data for the modern discourse.

While choosing these altogether 100 most popular videos, we would exclude videos that were considered irrelevant to our study, such as videos that did not use speech or used incomprehensible speech, non-English videos, advertisements, or repetitions of the same videos. We reject them, respectively, due to either the lack of data for analysis, fear of misinterpretation or mistranslation, non-authentic content or avoidance of askew data. In the final result after all the exceptions we would have 100 videos to analyze.

For the final and most important part of the research, discourse analysis of the data, we would select and then transcribe the following content: speech, on-screen text, captions, hashtags that are used in the video in addition to the main one. During transcribing background music, emojis, promotional branded hashtags used to enhance views, disclosing data or special effects would be disregarded.

Analysis (by Ekaterina Batueva)

Basic analytical concept: Discourses

In analyzing the discussion of ADHD on TikTok, the concept of discourses pertains to systems of values and representations that shape and regulate social practices on the platform. Discourses in this context encompass the various ways in which ADHD is spoken about, understood, and created by TikTok users. These discourses can influence the understanding, perception, and experience of ADHD within the TikTok community.

Our analysis of discourses will involve studying patterns, ideologies, and effects embedded in the discussions related to ADHD. We will explore how ADHD is structured, represented, and comprehended within the TikTok context. This includes the language used as well as overarching narratives and themes that emerge within the discourse.

Within the discourses on ADHD, several perspectives can be identified:

1.   Discourses focused on the medical aspects of ADHD: emphasizing symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment options.
2.   Discourses centered around personal experiences of individuals with ADHD, sharing stories, challenges, and strategies for coping.
3.   Discourses challenging dominant viewpoints, questioning widely accepted notions about ADHD, or offering alternative explanations and approaches

 Analysis goals

1. Ensuring diversity and representativeness of the selected material for analysis: Selecting videos excluding non-English videos, excluding videos with unclear speech, excluding duplicates and advertisements.

2. Examining public perceptions and views: Analyzing how the public perceives ADHD, what stereotypes and prejudices exist in discussions on TikTok.

3. Identifying dominant discourses and trends: Analyzing the discourses presented on TikTok to identify dominant trends.

4. Investigating prevailing norms and values: The goal may be to analyze the norms and values that are formed in discussions about ADHD on TikTok. This can help understand which aspects of ADHD and related issues are considered important or necessary for support and understanding within the community

Analysis procedure

1. Introduction to video clips

At the beginning of the research, we will familiarize ourselves with TikTok videos on the topic of ADHD without attempting analysis. This will help us gain an understanding of the videos and allow us to observe the discursive effects embedded within them. To analyze them, we can apply the following questions: What reality is constructed in the text? What function does the speaker's information serve and how does it impact your perception? What linguistic devices (words, metaphors, arguments) are being used?

Next, we will identify the main discourses on ADHD in TikTok: key themes, opinions, and attitudes towards the condition, and analyze the linguistic tools used to construct the discourse.

2. Selection of analysis sections

To create sections in discourse analysis, it is necessary to formulate a research question. For our study, the question will be as follows: What is the most prevalent opinion expressed in TikTok videos on ADHD? By using this question in the videos, we can select segments that directly address it. During the analysis, we will conduct relevance checks to ensure that we have not missed any important data segments, minimizing the risk of overlooking crucial information.

3. Discursive construction

When analyzing discourses about ADHD on the TikTok platform, we will focus on identifying constructions related to this topic, aiming to understand how ADHD is interpreted and expressed in TikTok videos. In our analysis, we will employ the "principle of variability" to explore different contributions to the topic of ADHD and identify constructions and attitudes towards the disorder. It is important to pay attention to how the disorder is discussed in different contexts and how constructions vary among different video creators. Additionally, we will observe implicit meanings expressed through language choices. For example, we can observe how individuals with ADHD are portrayed, which common stereotypes are applied to the disorder, what emotions are associated with it, and how it is discussed.

4.   Identification and naming of interpretive repertoires/discourses

While watching TikTok videos, it is important to identify different ways of constructing the concept of "ADHD" in the videos. We will pay attention to differences in speech, presentation, and content about ADHD, as well as search for similarities and differences across the videos. We will consider the possibility of using "in vivo" statements, which are the assertions that video creators themselves use to describe ADHD. These codes can accurately express the themes of this repertoire. Furthermore, we will formulate

definitions/brief descriptions for each of the identified discourses and choose names/definitions for their precise characterization.

5. *Action orientation*

To identify the functions and consequences of the identified discursive constructions, it is important to pay attention to what these repertoires "do" and what functions they serve in the local interactive context, how their usage achieves specific goals. For example, one can observe a speaker in a video discussing their difficulties with concentration and impulsivity and using various strategies or advice for managing ADHD. In this case, the function of this discourse may be to seek support from other TikTok users, share experiences, or inspire other individuals with ADHD. In the "action orientation" approach, we will strive to understand the communicative goals of the speaker that are achieved through discourses (seeking approval, support, sharing experiences with other network users).

6. *Location and Subjectivity*

In this section, we will focus on the subjective positions offered by different interpretive repertoires or discourses. We will analyze the forms of identity constructed by these repertoires or discourses, the roles assigned to individuals with ADHD within these discourses, and the rights attributed to different types of social actors in these discourses. We will examine how people with ADHD are represented: as victims, fighters, or experts in the field. Additionally, we will pay attention to the influence of identity construction and role assignment within ADHD discourses on subjective experience. For example, do individuals with ADHD feel heard, recognized, or marginalized within these discourses?

7. *Practices*

In analyzing practices, we will pay attention to the approaches/strategies that are recognized within these discourses. For example, is the importance of treatment, therapy, time management, or other management mechanisms emphasized? Through analysis, we will identify the range of possible actions or, conversely, actions that are excluded within these discourses. For instance, are certain strategies or approaches to managing ADHD presented as ineffective, unacceptable, or illegitimate? We will observe how these possibilities for action differ for different types of social actors: whether certain strategies or approaches are preferred or expected from specific groups of people based on social or age categories. At the end of the analysis, we will observe whether these discourses are more conforming and reinforcing of existing norms and structures or whether they express views that call for reevaluation and transformation of the current situation.

Example of collected data (by Evangelina Kolbasina)

Example based on 5 tiktoks under #adhd collected on April 21st, transcribed with line distribution, discursive constructions are underlined.

Transcript 1 (10.2022)
1 Text: How to know if you have ADHD: randomly zoned out…, very indecisive, forgetting
2 why you walked in a room, reading a whole page and nothing goes in so have to read
3 again, random bursts of energy, not sitting still until someone calls it out, mood swings.
4 Hashtags: #adhd, #relatable
5 Caption: Just a couple of the traits I have

Transcript 2 (02.2023)
6 Text: Married with ADHD
7 (dialogue) Speech: A - Honey, I am just too tired to clean up dinner.
8 B - It's okay, honey. We'll just leave it till tomorrow.
9 B - Honey, what are you doing?
10 A - My brain found the energy to strip the wallpaper and left half done six years ago.
11 B - And you're in your nice clothes. I shouldn't have said anything. I'm sorry. And now
12 you've lost your dopamine for the task? Well, you've got a whole 'nother section.
13 A - Just think we'll be ready to paint in another 12 years.
14 B - I love you.
15 Hashtags: #neurodiversity, #ADHD, #ADHDHack, #ADHDTip, #Autistic, #neurovariant,
16 #AuADHD, #ActuallyAutistic, #AutisticAdult, #Neurodivergent, #MadPride,
17 #NeuroSpicy, #AutisTikTok, #Representation, #DisabilityRights, #DisabilityAwareness,
18 #Activism, #Disabled, #Disability, #DisabilityActivism, #DisabilityPride, #ChronicIllness,
19 #ChronicPain, #Spoonie, #Accesibility, #DEI, #DEIA, #Therapy, #Therapist,
20 #TherapySession, #Fun, #Humorous, #Funny, #Captioned,
21 #Empathy, #Love, #Joy
22 Caption: Why do I have energy to do one thing when I don't have energy to do another?

Transcript 3 (03.2023)
23 Text: The 5 ADHD love languages. Letting us info dump, reminding us to eat and drink,
24 body doubling with us to make tasks easier, willingly accepting our random gifts,
25 telling us that something is "urgent" so we actually get it done.
26 Hashtags: #adhd, #adhdrelationships

27 Caption: Okay but why are these so <u>accurate in relationships</u> with ADHD?

<u>Transcript 4 (10.2022)</u>
28 Text: 4 <u>things you do because of your ADHD</u>. 1. <u>Color while talking on the phone,</u> 2.
29 <u>Singing while completing tasks</u>, 3. <u>Chewing gum while working</u>, 4. <u>Shaking your leg</u>
30 <u>while reading</u>
31 Speech: Let's talk about ADHD and <u>stimming.</u> Stimming or self-stimulating behavior,
32 that's where <u>you repeat specific movements or sounds as a way to self-soothe</u> or
33 <u>remain engaged in a situation</u>. This is also <u>referred as "fidget to focus"</u>,
34 <u>hyperactive people - you know what I'm talking about</u>.
35 Hashtags: #adhd, #adhdawareness, #adhdcoach, #adhdstruggles, #adhdprobs,
36 #adhdsquad, #adhdcommunity
37 Caption: Which one of these <u>do you do </u>the most?

<u>Transcript 5 (04.2023)</u>
38 Text and speech: People with ADHD. Do you have ADHD? Yes, they are <u>distractable</u>,
39 yes, they are <u>impulsive</u>, yes, they are <u>easily annoyed</u> by things happening in the room.
40 They sometimes have a <u>high level of emotionality</u> as well, not always, but often.
41 <u>However,</u> people with ADHD can have a <u>hyper focus and incredible ability to focus on</u>
42 things <u>they really enjoy or are intrigued by.</u>
43 Hashtags: #adhd, #adhdtiktok, <u>#adhdcheck, #adhdawareness</u>, #adhdtok
44 Caption: How People With ADHD <u>Hyperfocus - Neuroscientist</u>

Analysis example based on collected data example (by Evangelina Kolbasina)

Identification and naming of discourses.
There are several discourses that were identified in the video transcripts.
1.   ADHD traits, both positive and negative, with an inclination towards negative descriptions, however, with positive attitude towards them. The positive traits seem to compensate for the negative traits. Negative traits are acknowledged and understood by the creators, while positive traits are being praised.
2.   Medical language, it is used to describe the processes occurring within ADHD, the dopamine release, stimming, hyper focus.
3.   Depersonalization, the body is posed as affected by ADHD irregardless of a person's desires. There is a separation between the body and the mind, the mind is seemingly overrun by the biology of ADHD.
4.   Reliance on others, as a form of coping strategy and a way to show others how they can be supported.
5.   Relatability, a lot of creators try to make themselves relatable for the viewers, perhaps to be shared and liked more.

Action orientation.

The action orientation of the above stated discourses revolve around bringing awareness, building an 'honest' image of the disorder, showing empathy and understanding towards the negative symptoms, engaging others to join the community, sharing personal experience and relating it to others.

Location and subjectivity.

Under the identified discourses people with ADHD are presented in a mostly positive light - they are affected by their symptoms, but they are not devastated by them, they know themselves or they want the others to know them too. They are not ashamed of their condition, openly stating it and relating to their community or to the audience in general. They themselves identify several communities they belong to - ADHD, autism, or both, plus neurodivergency. Majority of the toktoks related to the community, however, their content can be consumed by the outsiders as well, meaning it is understandable to others, and close to a half of tiktoks used humor to convey their message, thus bringing normalization into the topic.

Practices.

For the last part of the analysis there is evident lack of data to process. However, there is an emphasis on the social support that can be interpreted as favoritism of the social disability model. Creators actively seek and show support, share their struggles to be understood and show ways they can be helped by their social circle. There was no direct call to disregard the medical system, rather it was not mentioned in these particular tiktoks. Since the medical language was used, it would seem the model is known within the community.

Naturally, this analysis was made only as an example and cannot serve as an actual modern discourse on ADHD in the English-speaking community as it is severely limited by the amount of data.

Risks and limitations (by Daria Turbina)

TikTok is algorithmically driven, so TikTok suggests you recommended content that the app thinks you'll like the most. But the recommended videos are not based on their popularity or number of "likes," the recommendation system works in a way that tracks user's interactions with videos, such as commenting, following an account, sharing a post or skipping a video. For that reason we did not use the videos that were suggested to us by TikTok , instead we used filters to select videos that are the most popular for the ten selected hashtags, thereby avoiding the fact that TikTok could suggest us videos based on our previous TikTok usage history. But another possible problem remains. TikTok's system also considers the user's country or device type settings. Therefore, we cannot be sure that when we are on the territory of the Czech Republic TikTok shows us the same ten most popular videos for the selected hashtag that it would show us if we were in another country or on another continent or with different device type settings.

The next problem is the very fact that only the ten most popular hashtags and the ten most popular videos related to these hashtags were chosen for analysis. Thus, we cannot provide an analysis of the more extensive discourse in TikTok, but only the most popular.

We have focused solely on the English language in order to avoid translation inaccuracies, this thereby limits our study to one language and does not cover the area of other languages

Ethical considerations

We cannot take consent to use the data or participate in the research. The most important reason is that TikTok is a public platform, though to protect user privacy, usernames and profiles were excluded from this study. But we included other public data in this study, such as captions, text in videos, and hashtags that do not contain names or brands. We don't use names in hashtags in order to keep anonymity, and we don't use brands in order to keep authenticity of content.

The next problem is that among the hashtags, that we have, has formed a separate category (#adhdmom). In our study we do not exclude the use of hashtags that refer to a particular gender, although we do not analyze them in a specific category. We analyze videos without reference to gender, even though it would be possible to make individual conclusions for a particular category, this is not the purpose of our work, that is, our goal is not to create any parallels between the genders or to study one specific category of ADHD separately. Since our goal was to collect the most relevant information by selecting the ten most popular hashtags according to the number of views, the fact that one hashtag refers to a particular gender, does not disrupt the general discourse formation. To further protect this vulnerable group, we will provide transcripts without

this hashtag, so that it cannot be taken without context, thereby providing additional anonymity.

Another problem is that we cannot know the real age of users who create and consume content on TikTok. Despite the fact that officially registration in this application is allowed from 13 and in some countries from 14 years old, and also statistics show that teenagers and young adults are the most frequent users, we cannot know the real information about users' age.

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