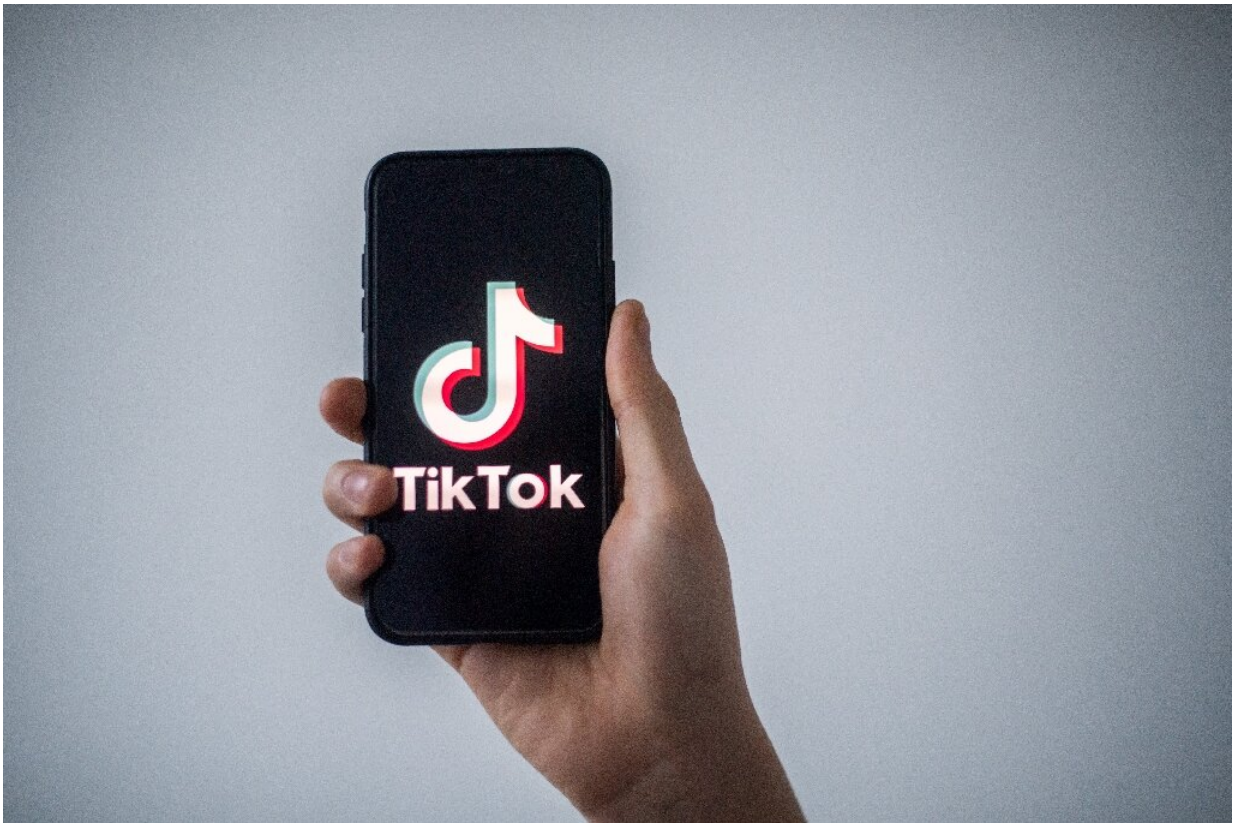


One billion users, but bans mount up for TikTok

February 23 2023, by Jules BONNARD



Global action against TikTok, owned by Chinese firm ByteDance, kicked off in earnest in India in 2020.

TikTok's breakneck rise from niche video-sharing app to global social media behemoth has brought plenty of scrutiny, particularly over its

links to China.

The European Commission is the latest organization to ban the app from its equipment, following similar moves in the United States.

So is TikTok a spying tool for Beijing, a fun app, or both?

Global action against TikTok, owned by Chinese firm ByteDance, kicked off in earnest in India in 2020.

It was among the Chinese apps barred after deadly clashes on the border between the two countries, with New Delhi saying it was defending its sovereignty.

The same year, US President Donald Trump threatened a ban and accused TikTok of spying for China—an idea that has gained ground in Washington.

TikTok was forced to admit ByteDance employees in China had accessed Americans' data but it has always denied turning over data to the Chinese authorities.

The company has moved to soothe US fears, announcing in June 2022 that it would store all data on American users on US-based servers.

However, in January US [federal employees](#) were banned from downloading the app, with the European Commission following suit on Thursday to "protect the institution's data", it said.

Bans have not halted TikTok's growth.

With more than one billion active users it is the sixth most used social platform in the world, according to the We Are Social marketing agency.

Although it lags behind the likes of Meta's long-dominant trio of Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, its growth among [young people](#) far outstrips its competitors.

Almost a third of TikTok users are between 10 and 19 years old, according to the Wallaroo agency.

Its rapid rise saw it grab more than \$11 billion in [advertising revenue](#) last year, a threefold increase in a single year.

TikTok's competitors quickly copied its short [video](#) format and continuous scrolling, but to little avail.

Creator appeal

TikTok's editing features and powerful algorithm have kept it ahead of the game, attracting an army of creators and influencers as well as creating many of its own.

But the algorithm is opaque and often accused of leading users into digital content silos.

TikTok and ByteDance employees also manually increase the number of views on certain content, according to a recent report in Forbes.

TikTok has said manual promotion only affects a tiny fraction of recommended videos.

Disinformation

The app is regularly accused of spreading disinformation, putting users in danger with hazardous "challenge" videos, and allowing pornography,

even though it is supposed to prohibit nudity.

French news site Numerama reported a TikTok "trend" recently that involved publishing photographs of penises.

Several children have also reportedly died while trying to replicate the so-called blackout challenge, which involves users holding their breath until they pass out.

And around one-fifth of videos on topical issues such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine were found to be fake or misleading in a study by misinformation group NewsGuard.

AFP, along with more than a dozen fact-checking organizations, is paid by TikTok in several countries in Asia and Oceania, Europe, the Middle East and Spanish-speaking Latin America to verify for internal moderation videos that potentially contain false information. The videos are removed by TikTok if the information is shown to be false by AFP teams.

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