

TikTok's parent has a new app: What to know about Lemon8

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This photo shows the logo and application page for the social media site Lemon8, in New York, Wednesday, April 5, 2023. Lemon8, is a photo-based app that could be described as a mixture of Instagram and Pinterest with sprinkles of videos that resemble those posted on TikTok. It launched in Asian markets in 2020 and has already made headway in countries like Thailand and Japan. Credit: AP Photo/Richard Drew

As lawmakers debate whether to ban TikTok nationwide, its Chinese parent company has introduced a new app that's already getting some traction.

The app, called Lemon8, is likely to face some of the same scrutiny as TikTok, which has been dogged by claims the Chinese government could force its parent company ByteDance to hand over U.S. [user data](#) or push misinformation on the platform.

TikTok maintains that hasn't happened. And it's [attempting to convince lawmakers](#) it can keep user data safe.

Meanwhile, ByteDance is pressing ahead with its expansion plans. Here's what you need to know about the company's new app:

WHAT IS LEMON8?

Lemon8 is a photo-based app that resembles a mixture of Instagram and Pinterest, and is sprinkled with videos that look like the ones posted on TikTok. Social marketing experts say the app is also reminiscent of the Chinese social media and e-commerce giant Xiaohongshu, which translates to "little red book."

Like TikTok, Lemon8's main feed features a "following" section that lets users look at content from creators they follow, as well as a "For You" section that recommends other posts. It also segments posts under different categories, like fashion, beauty and food, and allows users to explore content in other ways.

Similar to TikTok and other [social media sites](#), Lemon8 collects user data, such as IP address, browsing history, device identifiers and other information.

Both the Apple and Google Play app stores list its owner as Heliophilia Pte. Ltd., a Singapore-based company that shares the same address as ByteDance and TikTok.

HOW POPULAR IS IT?

Lemon8 was first launched in Asian markets in 2020 and has already made headway in countries like Thailand and Japan, with roughly 7.4 million and 5 million downloads respectively, according to the app analytics company data.ai.

It was introduced in the U.S. in February with little fanfare, but all that changed when media organizations started paying closer attention and some TikTok influencers began promoting it.

As of Sunday, the app had 290,000 downloads in the U.S., the vast majority of which happened in late March, according to data.ai. It's also listed as one of the most popular apps on Apple's app store.

Nicla Bartoli, the vice president of sales at Influencer Marketing Factory, said ByteDance reached out to her company in late February and gave a lengthy presentation about the app and how influencers can use it. She said the agency, which connects brands with influencers, is recommending that influencers try out the app but isn't doing the same with brands since Lemon8's user base is still relatively small.

It also remains to be seen if the app will take off more organically or flop. The last five years have been littered with [social media platforms](#) that got a lot of hype, only to vanish in the end, said Brendan Gahan, partner and chief social officer at the creative agency Mekanism. He pointed to examples like BeReal and Clubhouse, which garnered a lot of attention in the past two years before users turned their attention elsewhere.

"Social app success is difficult to achieve and harder to maintain," Gahan said.

WHAT HAS BYTEDANCE SAID ABOUT THE APP?

ByteDance did not reply to a request for an interview about how it plans to grow Lemon8. But the [company's general counsel Erich Andersen noted in an interview with the Associated Press](#) at a cybersecurity conference last week that it will continue to develop the app.

"We're obviously going to do our best with the Lemon8 app to comply with U.S. law and to make sure we do the right thing here," said Andersen, who also serves as TikTok's general counsel. "But I think we got a long way to go with that application—it's pretty much a startup phase."

As part of that work, ByteDance is already seeking job applicants for a few U.S.-based roles that will help grow the app's partnerships with influencers on beauty, food, health and other topics.

WHAT ELSE IS BYTEDANCE DOING?

Another app owned by ByteDance, called CapCut, is also listed on Apple's app store as one of the most popular apps in the U.S.

CapCut markets itself as an "all-in-one" video editing tool that allows users to cut or speed up their content, and do other things like add filters and music.

Data.ai, the app analytics company, said that app was released globally in April 2020, roughly a year after it was introduced in China. As of

Sunday, the group said the editing tool had been downloaded 60 million times in the U.S. and 940 million globally.

ARE LAWMAKERS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE OTHER APPS?

There is support for a bipartisan bill in the Senate, called the RESTRICT Act, that does not call out TikTok but would give the Commerce Department power to review and potentially restrict foreign threats to technology platforms. But it has faced some pushback from privacy advocates and ring-wing commentators who argue the legislation is too vague and could be abused.

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner, who sponsored the bill along with Republican Sen. John Thune, said in a prepared statement that the legislation would make it easier to go after other risky apps like Lemon8.

"For too long, our government has been playing a game of Whac-A-Mole when it comes to addressing the various foreign technology threats popping up all around us," said Warner, D-Va. "The RESTRICT Act would establish a risk-based, intelligence-informed process to evaluate and mitigate the risks posed by tech from adversarial nations, whether that be [Huawei](#), TikTok, Lemon8, or the next viral technology product pushed by an authoritarian nation."

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