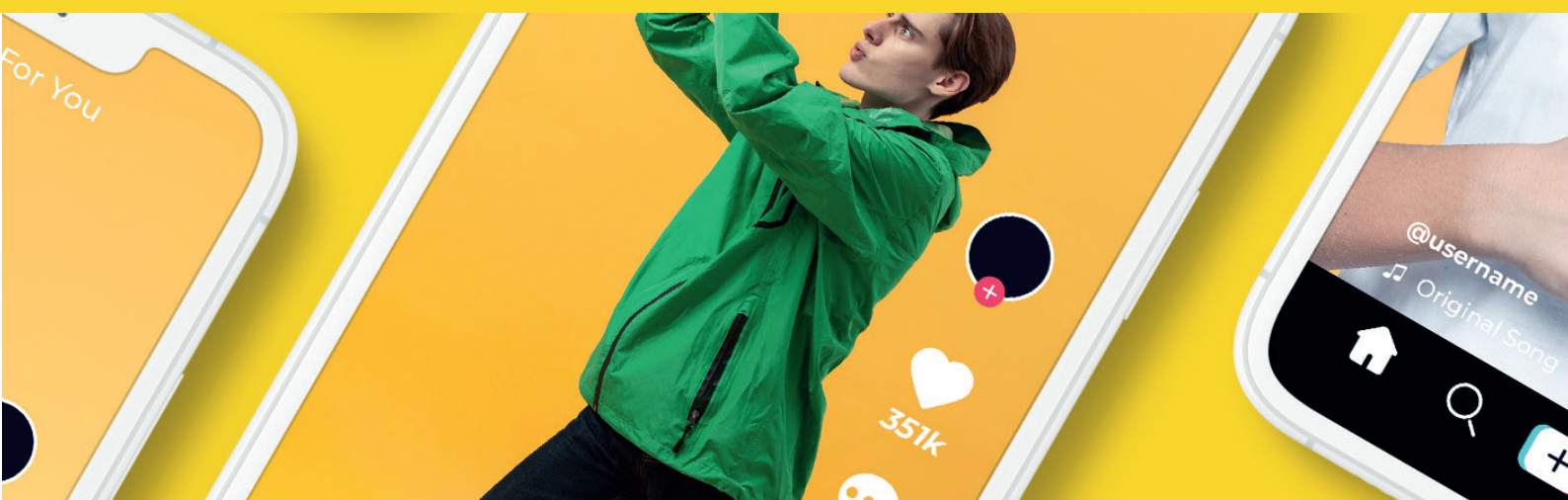




TikTok

Music, moods and hidden algorithms

By Eva Fog

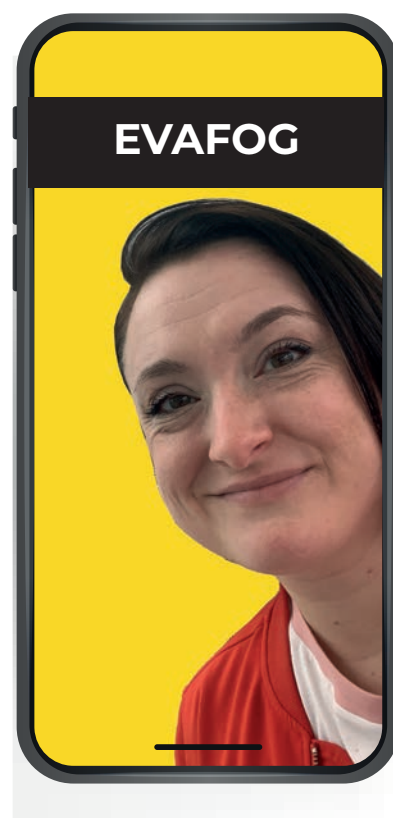


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eva Fog always seeks to bridge the gap, no matter if it's age, gender, or technical adeptness. As a speaker, consultant, and educator, she has traveled the world, collaborating with the EU, Microsoft Denmark, and Dell. From childhood, computers and technology have had a special place in her heart, and with a degree in pedagogy from 2009, she combines experience with data.

In 2015 she founded DigiPippi, an organization that aims to bridge the gender gap in technology by working with girls aged 7 through 13 years old and female tech role models. Work she has been awarded for twice.

She is also an avid TikTok Content Creator and creative person with a simple goal: make the world a better place.



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ABOUT THE REPORT

I went on TikTok in October 2019, already having studied it as a genre and from an educational perspective. Overall, I knew what it was and what was going on. Now I know I only saw the tip of the iceberg.

For eight months, I have talked to, seen, and heard the children and youths of Denmark and around the world up close and personal. Right there were few adults are or want to be, and I don't regret it for a second. Both as an educator but also as a creator.

Maybe it's the child in me who just fits in, the same way I've always clicked with children and young people in my work. Perhaps it's because I'm actually there - not as a spectator but as an active co-creator.

I released the first edition of my report in May 2020, with only the Danish market as focus. This second edition has been revisited, adding data from the Nordic countries, the UK, and the US. The goal is to create a better overlook as to how the media is evolving. This seems essential as a prophecy from the first edition published only 12 weeks ago in May 2020 has already been fulfilled.

"When I finish writing this report, TikTok may have a completely new design, and the composition of the audience will have changed." I was not wrong, but I couldn't have foreseen the amount of changes made. A whole range of new finds about data, the continuous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, wars, as well as additions to the Community Guidelines and data storage as a consequence, has followed.

Also, in-app changes with new features and efforts to further engage and keep the users have been added. Many of which seem to be a direct response to much of the bad publicity that has occurred. TikTok never does anything slow, that's for sure!

However, the importance of the message and understanding of the ecosystem the medium has created hasn't changed. No matter where users of TikTok will move in the future, the media has helped shape their relationship with social

media for posterity. With the success of this new type of platform, the first real competitors are on the way. That still doesn't change the fact that TikTok is a powerhouse of a media and worth a closer look.

Many adults haven't heard of TikTok at all, or only briefly encountered it through their children's use or news outlets portraying the newest 'find'. Still, the medium has become the fastest growing in the world in a very short time. Often the TikTok users are under the legally required age of 13 years old, which is nothing new for social media. Children are quick to adapt to new media, and in many European countries, children have internet access from kindergarten.

Most adults are still concerned about YouTube, Instagram, and Snap (chat). Still, the media consumption of the younger generations is much more fluid. Some media remain, while others perish in the digital cycle of life.

YouTube started as an attempt at video dating, and the media is currently the second largest search engine in the world. Only surpassed by Google and its parent company, that owns YouTube. YouTube has recognized the presence of children and created alternative outlets to help their parents. Instagram, which Facebook owns, also does its part to show that they are 'children friendly,' though not living up to the task entirely. Snap is a whole other story.

The reason I mention other social media at all is to create a relatable comparison. It would be tough for me to explain what TikTok is without a context that most people recognize. Without it would probably seem like a bunch of nonsense. Not that I can promise it makes sense after reading the report, but without the frame of reference, it would be impossible.

The development of this media plays a significant role in the design of the next, also indicating the chances for possible success. They feed off each other, opposing and collaborating with each other when seeking the attention, and return, of the users. Entertainment is big business, and everybody wants a piece. There are already 'old' and new competitors on the market that's courting the TikTok users (Reuters, 2020), and more will come.

It will be exciting to see when children and young people leave TikTok in favor of another media - if they do at all. Outside sources have certainly tried their best to shut the media down, with a ban in India, and Donald Trump fighting what could look like a personal vendetta against anything Chinese. TikTok especially. As of August 2020, we are all holding our breaths to see what will become of TikTok, as negotiations between TikTok parent company Bytedance, and Microsoft may determine if TikTok even exists in the US come October. Maybe TikTok, as we know it, will not last the year. Perhaps it will end up like YouTube, who won the battle for the users' attention and stay a more or less permanent part of everyone's life. With the 'war' being battled on the political fronts, it's hard to say where it'll end for TikTok as a media.

One thing's certain: It has set new standards for how a short-form media should work.

INTRODUCTION TO TIKTOK

The media we know today as TikTok is a fusion between a social media app known as Musical.ly, and a Chinese app called Douyin. Established in Shanghai in 2014, Musical.ly was acquired in 2017 by the owners of the Chinese company Bytedance, which already had the app Douyin.

Bytedance combined the two apps and relaunched the new combination outside of China as TikTok in late 2017 (The Verge, 2018).

TikTok / Douyin is the fastest growing social media in the world, with over 800 million active users (Business of Apps, 2020). Post the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers must surely have risen during the quarantines, but there's no data on it at the moment. A radical change in its userbase seems on its way, as India has decided to ban 59 Chinese apps (The Next Web, 2020), including TikTok, cutting off 1/3 of the users global (Verge, 2020). European countries are a relatively small part of the user base, while The United States and the UK are the new major markets. The Asian countries remain the largest userbase.

Bytedance doesn't differentiate between the users of TikTok and Douyin when it comes to their overall userbase. However, TikTok is not available in China, and Douyin is only available in China (China Social Media, 2019). It is essential to know this difference, as there are vast differences in the access, data, and security of each country.



By May 2020, the app has been downloaded over 2 billion times (Sensor Tower, 2020). In the first quarter alone, it was downloaded 315 million times. It's available in 154 countries and 40+ languages. Most of them Asian. In the Nordic countries, only Swedish is available.

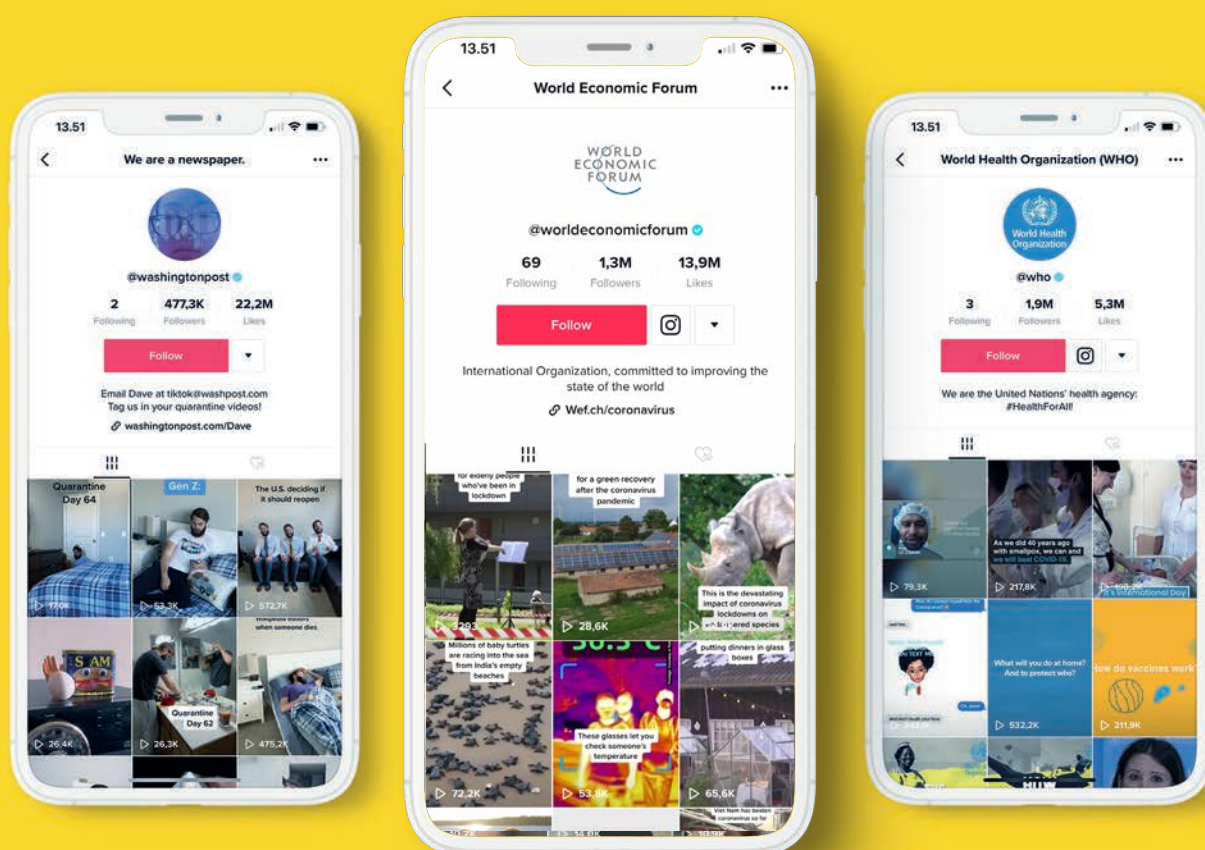
WHO USES TIKTOK

TikTok's core audience is young people worldwide between the ages of 16-24 (Business of Apps, 2020) (Global Web Index, 2019), with an estimated 63 % of users being between 10 and 29 years of age (Mediamix, 2020). Even with TikTok's official 13+ years limitation, it's clearly a sought-after media by the younger generations.

Although many consider TikTok to be a relatively closed system, this is not the case.

TikTok profiles are available on the Internet if you know the user's name and can be accessed at tiktok.com/@username. In June 2020, Bytedance had developed the website to such a degree that it works almost as well as the app. At the same time, Google and other search engines started indexing the videos in the same way as YouTube videos. However, if you have a closed profile, the content cannot be seen by anyone but your friends. It's also possible to view videos on the For You section in-app without an account.

Medias such as the World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, 2020), the Washington Post (Washington Post, 2020), and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) all have profiles. At the same time, many TV and movie stars have appeared. In the Nordic countries, the participation of official media and channels is somewhat lower. Still, several well-known people from TV, film, and other social media have started to emerge.

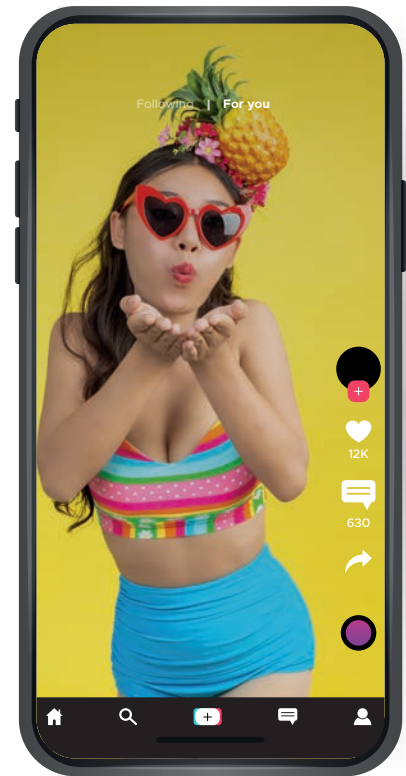


CONTENT

As a platform, TikTok is reminiscent of a mix between Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat. Contrary to these 'old' social media, users can easily reach 1000 views - people who watch their videos - in minutes and 'go viral' in hours. TikTok is designed to spread the content to as many people as possible, and they reward the users who frequently post and use the built-in features. At the same time, the app calculates what it should show you based on what you already liked, commented on, or shared. These recommendations happen through the section called For You, which is part of the first pages presented to you on the app. Friends' videos, people you already follow, are displayed in the 'Following' section.

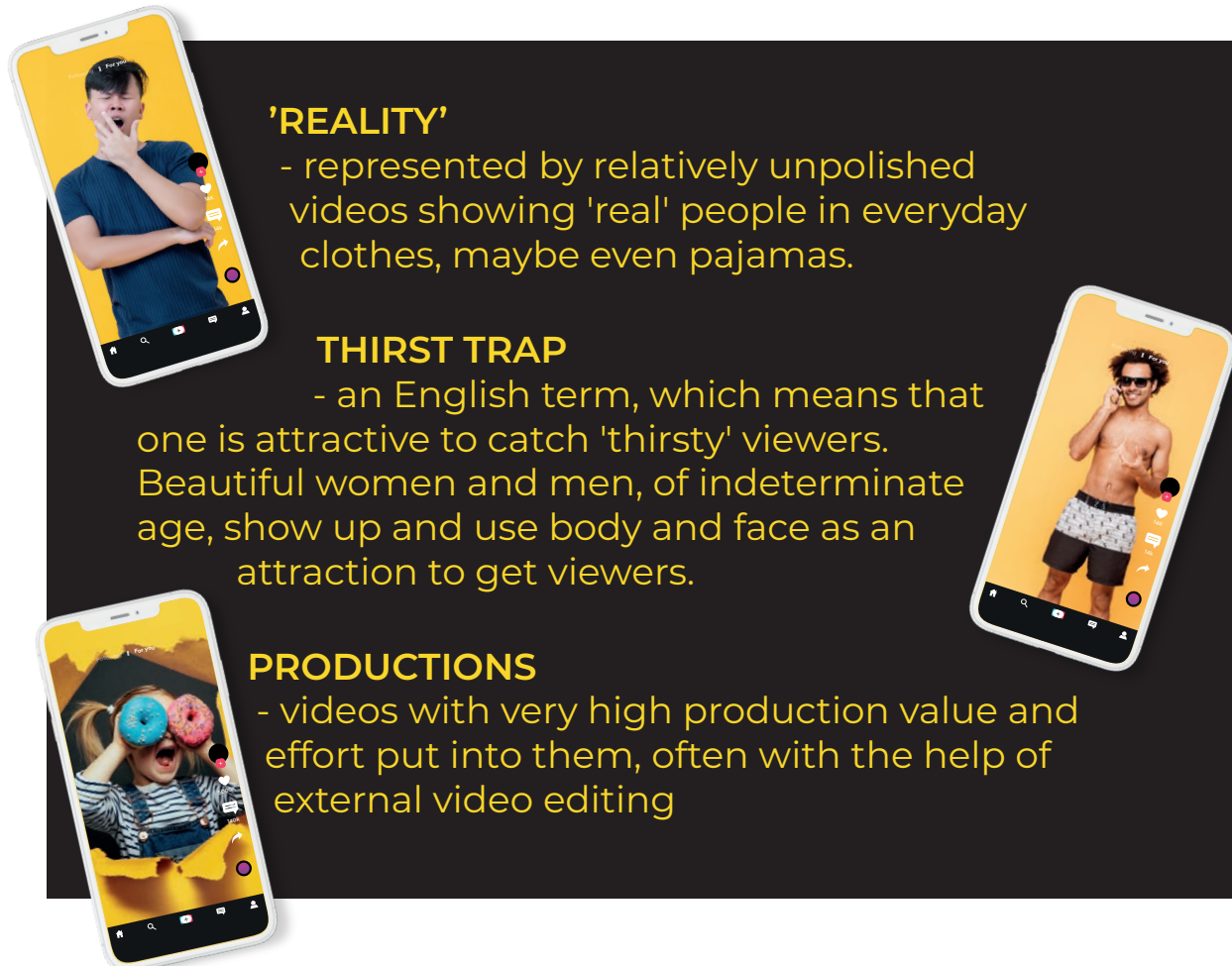
The format is short videos between 1 and 60 seconds, mostly around 15 seconds, where music or user-created audio, in-app filters, text, emoji's and animated gifs can be added. Through TikTok, the user has access to the same music found on, e.g., Spotify and iTunes. TikTok helps the user find the most popular or sponsored tracks or lets the user search for previously saved or new audio.

As with Musical.ly, many people start out by making dance videos where they perform trend dances such as Renegade. Like on YouTube, there are challenges, Q & A's and tutorials. Like on Snapchat, the videos are also used to address friends with a message, such as affirming friendship and 'look what I'm doing right now.' Another widely used feature is duets, where you can respond to or collaborate with someone else's video. A user with over 1000 followers can also go 'live' and make live chats. This function requires the user being at least 16 or 18 years old.



CATEGORIES

The videos can be divided into 3 general categories, while the elements of each are mixed a lot. Since the medium is continuously evolving, the content will also change in expression. However, to gain an understanding of TikTok, it is easier to start with these categories.



The app's algorithms, the software that determines how the media work and process content, are notorious for being less than transparent. It's close to impossible to project what will trend unless you're one of the coveted few Blue Checkmarks - TikTok approved content creators. It's all very secret and algorithm-based. I'll go more into detail in the section 'The good and the bad of the Algorithm.'

Similar to all other social media, you can use # (hashtag) in the description as a keyword, and @ (add) to tag friends and others you want attention from. TikTok will recommend useful search hashtags and also make it possible for you to see trending hashtags under the Discover feature.

THE GOOD AND THE BAD OF THE ALGORITHM

TikTok is based on one of the most advanced AIs - artificial intelligence - in the world (Analytic Steps, 2020). Exactly how it works, no one but Bytedance knows. However, the rest of the world doesn't stop guessing. Only two sources seem to have made somewhat of a realistic attempt in demystifying the algorithm. The first is an overlooked article where Cathrine Wang uses her experience as a Lead AI Engineer to speculate on how it's built (Cathrine Wang, Towards Data Science, 2020). The second is the anonymous man known as 'Bangorlol,' who has worked on reverse-engineering social media for years. His efforts went viral a couple of months after posting on the social online forum Reddit (Bangorlol, Reddit, 2020) and have been widely cited ever since. Their goals are very different – Chang wanting to explain the algorithm and 'Bangorlol' wanting to show the amount of data that's being pulled. They both show what the AI is capable of.

That's good and all, but to most people, it's not relatable at all and makes little sense. I will try to break it down for all to understand.

Some trends and possibilities are easier to spot without knowing how AI, codes, or machine learning works.

YOU GET WHAT YOU WATCH

I have created 4 different accounts in my time at TikTok, and depending on what I click 'like' on, watch, and who I choose to follow, my feed - my front page - changes the content. Except for TikTok's specially selected videos, the content of my accounts is vastly different.

As an experiment, I asked my Danish followers, generally aged 9 through 15 years old, to send me pictures and videos of what was on their For You Page. The patterns from the 50+ admissions were clear.

If you loved dance videos, that's what you mostly got. If you were into basketball, that sort of content was dominant. In April 2020, I had a conversation with a journalist from the Danish newspaper Politiken who had researched the dark sides of TikTok. He confirmed it with the words: "If my daughter had taken my cellphone and turned on my TikTok, I would have ripped the cellphone out of her hand." A Danish father, Kim Scheel, tried to mimic what he thought a child would choose and do on the media, getting some results he didn't like (Facebook, Kim Scheel, 2020). Unfortunately, his approach doesn't add value to the overall data, as it would be almost impossible for him to be unbiased in his approach. In general, we need more data to study the flow of the users better.

If you want to change your feed, it takes a while to re-educate the algorithm. It also doesn't help to delete the app. The data TikTok has collected about you is

now seem associated with that account forever. However, some local data can be removed with the app. Using the in-app options to block or choose 'I don't want to see content like this' speeds up the process. Also, the viewing time of a video helps train the AI, so watching the same video you like to the end several times seem to help with the re-education.

WHAT YOUR FRIENDS WATCH, YOU WATCH

Following and being followed is a big part of all social media. On TikTok, the algorithm also uses your friends/followers' preferences as a guide. I experienced this myself by being introduced to new videos on the For You page, where people I already follow/are 'friends' with have commented. It makes sense since we often surround ourselves with people, we already think we have something in common with, both in our analog and physical worlds.

YOU SEE WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CREATES

After the first login, you will be redirected to videos that are popular for your region - your country. It's been amusing to see myself on several of the mentioned For You Pages (FYP) I collected from the children. Due to regional differences in the User Agreement, as well as preferences and different sensibilities in different countries, it's a smart way to keep users watching. Unlike other social media, TikTok also has very keen regional filters in their AI. As a citizen in a small country of only 6 million people, it's nice not to be sorted with my Nordic brothers and sisters all the time. This AI sorting also has a downside when you're interested in distributing or viewing content outside of your own country.

Through one of my accounts, I have chosen to concentrate on English-speaking material, and I decided to select the United States as my country. Unfortunately, the algorithm hasn't followed my lead, continuing to show me other Danish TikTokers. My location data - GPS, mobile data, and IP address is still being collected and used to choose the origin of the shown content. It helps with the protection of copyright, of course. Still, it makes it hard to reach a global market organically if you're not from an English-speaking country.

VIRAL CONTENT AND THE ALGORITHM

It's not new that content can go viral on social media. This has happened with everything from cats to advertisements as the social media platforms have evolved.

Those born before the year 2000 may remember getting jokes or news through mails before the explosion of social media platforms occurred.



Unlike mails, that could only be sent to those whose mail address you had, the algorithms of social media distribute the content to anyone it deems interested. This is what makes 'going viral' possible. What counts as viral depends on the size of the market. In Denmark, 5000 shares and views can be viral, while in large countries like the US, it requires a little more zeros. It usually also requires a more active effort on the part of the viewer to make a video go viral. Therefore, the amount of viral content is limited. Just not on TikTok. Here, it's the algorithm that does much of the work and shares the videos without user interference. Again, it's done by collecting user behavior and information to make a calculation of what we might want.

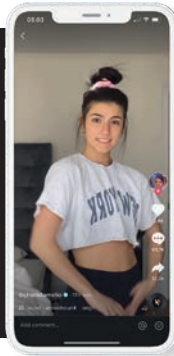
Because of that, anyone and everything can go viral without any living person being able to tell you precisely why. It hasn't stopped so-called experts, and you can find websites, YouTube videos, and TikToks trying to show or sell you "THE SOLUTION."

The fact of the matter is that people can spend days on the perfect video, and it'll only get 300 views. Creators can also spend 15 seconds on a video on toilet paper, which then goes viral throughout the Western world with 3 million views. From an outside perspective, it makes very little sense, but knowing that the algorithm scans all content in the world, it sees patterns we cannot fathom. All because of data.

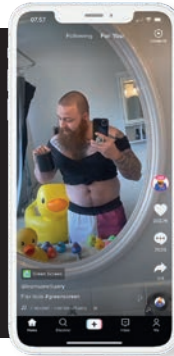
You don't even have to have a vast amount of followers to go viral, and there is no guarantee that you will go viral again. However, there are some indications that the algorithm rewards videos according to the reactions they initially receive (Cathrine Wang, Towards Data Science, 2020). A video spreads across the network to a certain number of people at a time, and based on their initial reactions, the spread begins. Therefore, a video can also go viral slowly and over time. I've tried both.

8 VIRAL HITS

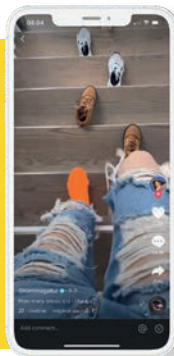
Charlie D'Amelio is one of TikTok's superstars. All her videos, which are mainly dance videos, go viral. With a fan base of 76.3 million and 5.6 billion likes, it has become the norm for her content.



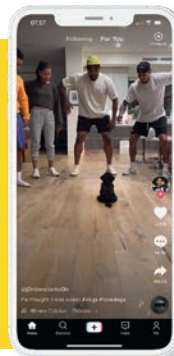
Kevin Clevenger, better known as @ironsanctuary, became famous at Christmas 2019 as he and other bearded men competed to decorate their beards. He is currently going viral with 'do-it-yourself' videos from the web.



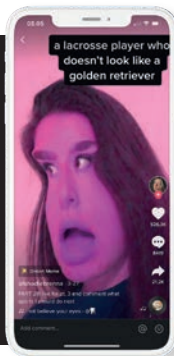
This viral video is linked to a trend based on the band MGMT's song Electric Feel. The rhythmic beat has been the basis of many viral videos, and several of them are about walking down steps, or stepping into shoes, to the beat.



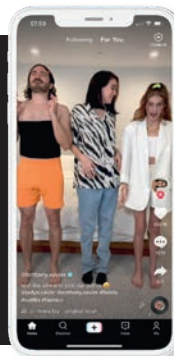
Pets go viral all the time. This selected viral video is also associated with a particular soundtrack. It is about doing a specific dance in front of your pet, hopefully getting a funny reaction. The soundtrack has also created other pet trends.



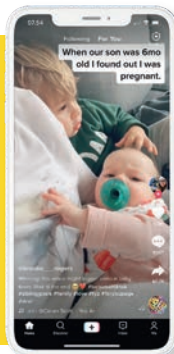
Filters and text are a big part of TikTok. In this viral video, they are used with a user-created viral audio called You Wouldn't Believe Your Eyes, referring to things 'you wouldn't believe unless you saw it yourself.'



Transitions and changes in clothing, scenery, or similar effects are featured in many viral videos. In this, they've created a 'clothing lottery' and use transitions and music to change the outfit between the participants.



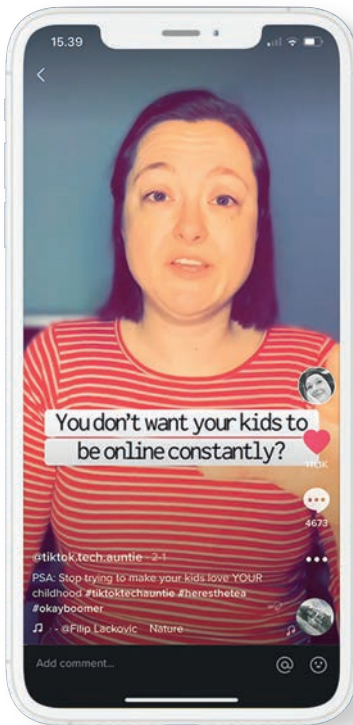
There are many 'feel-good' viral videos like this one. Babies, young children, and pets are a sure winner. At the same time, this video tells a real story about the bond between two siblings. Good stories often go viral.



The Corona pandemic has attracted a lot of quarantined families, and TikTok loves it. The number of parents participating in their children's TikTok videos has increased. It has introduced the older audience to the media.



2 OF THE TIMES I'VE GONE VIRAL



On January 2, 2020, I posted a video on my English TikTok. In a short time, I got thousands of views, likes, and comments, and the video was shared a lot of times. It just didn't stop there.

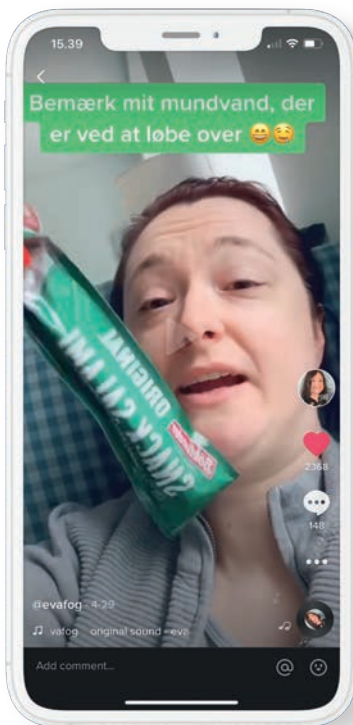
It continues to spread, and every day new comments, likes, and shares pop in. On June 14., 2020, it had achieved 629,000 views, 111,100 likes, just under 4,600 comments and 18,000 shares. Over 538,000 users have seen it, from Denmark to the United Arab Emirates. The video was an appeal to adults to understand children and adolescents as they are now, and not in comparison to 'when I was a child.'

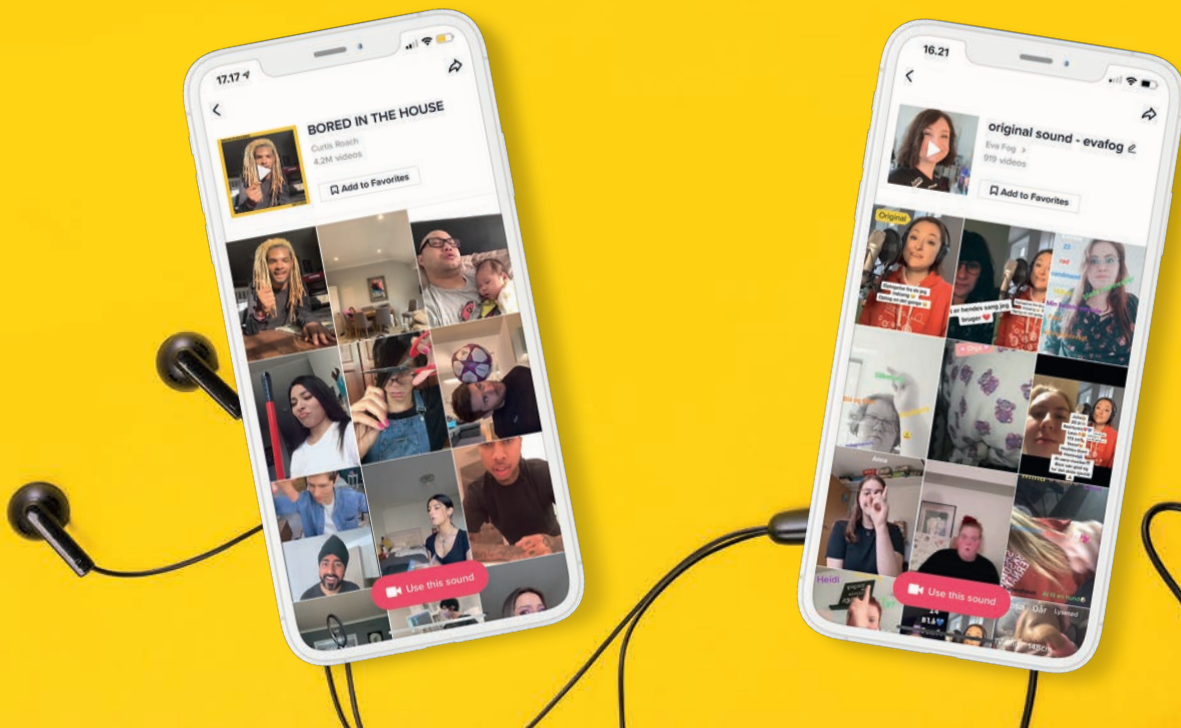
On my Danish profile, I posted a video about a snack sausage I love, and in two days, it received almost 31,000 views, 1,300 likes, 83 comments, and 134 shares. A little over 18,500 had seen it, and this time it was exclusively Danes.

After 12 days, the figure had risen to just under 63,000 views. Where the number ends, nobody knows, as TikTok has a tendency to 'revive' older and well-exposed videos.

The more 'popular' I've gotten, the wider the spread and the more views I've got. That's the natural progression of any social media. It's fascinating to see the percentage of views from followers versus the ones from the For You Page, as the latter is still the engine that makes sure I keep being presented to all. On any other media, I'd have to do the legwork myself or have a fanbase so loyal that they would do it for me.

Had I known that they would go viral, I would probably have put some makeup on or dressed nicer, but then again – that's the beauty and curse of TikTok.





THE ALGORITHM AND VIRAL SOUNDTRACKS

Another essential part of the algorithm is the audio in the videos. TikTok groups together all videos that use the same sound or music, thus making it very easy to discover others doing the same trends. In addition to that, the algorithm also boosts the associated videos for maximum viewing, often creating instant stars.

An example is the young rapper Curtis Roach, who, during the Corona crisis, made a very relatable and catchy rap called 'Bored in the house' (Roach, 2020). In true TikTok style, it spread like wildfire and is now part of the soundtrack the TikTok community will remember when looking back on the 2020 pandemic.

I had my own little viral audio track when I made a Danish version of a popular 'presentation' song (TikTok, Eva Fog, 2020). Contrary to regular videos, which can be easily tracked, copies of audio tracks quickly appear, making the original sound very difficult to find. That means you can easily encounter your audio in a video, but no longer associated with the original creator. Unless you are a big-time musician and TikTok really wants you there, that's not something you can do anything about. I've personally found 3 copies of my cover no longer connected to the original.

For up-and-coming musicians, which there are many on the media, that can be an issue. It can, however, also make people look for the song elsewhere and generate traffic to services like Spotify. For most, it's just a pain that follows with using TikTok.

THE ALGORITHM AND OUR CHILDREN

The way the algorithm selects and processes the content according to what they know about us can be useful with children using the media. TikTok has publicly joined the WePROTECT Global Alliance to help battle online child abuse and sexual exploitation (TikTok, 2020). They are also communicating with several child advocacy organizations worldwide to stop cyberbullying, sexually explicit content, and other forms of online hazards.

Although it's impossible to remove unpleasant people with bad intentions, the algorithm does its best to keep the user in a 'suitable corner.' In the new Transparency Report (TikTok, 2020), it was revealed that they have removed around 1 % of all videos posted, amounting to a staggering 49 million videos. Many of them to create a safe environment for all. This means that children and adolescents are mainly, though not solely, presented with age-appropriate and proper content, not being exposed to a lot of the dark sides of TikTok. Just like with the rest of our digital lives, it takes effort and persistence to find new areas of content. As mentioned before, the algorithm watches what you, your friends, and others like you from the same area do, choosing content popular and relevant through that. I have surveyed the Danish children, and very few have had awful content experiences on TikTok.

That's not the same as they're always introduced to age-appropriate content, as the age limit for the media still is 13 years old. Whether or not you approve of the general content on TikTok is another matter. Many adults find the dances sexual, but it's imperative to remember not to press adult sexuality onto children. They mostly see cool moves and cool people - not sexually explicit body movements. Let's remember that there's nothing new in parents not approving of the 'young people's way of dancing.'

As with all media's, parents should not let their children go online and explore alone if they are under the age limit of most media. That's not the same as hovering over them all the time. Still, it's essential to have an interest and constant dialogue about the day to day life on social media as well as with other of the child's interest. TikTok introduced Family Pairing in April 2020 (TikTok, 2020), following in the steps of most other digital platforms and creating a way to manage the child's usage and exposure.

It's important to say that this should never be used as a substitute for communication and engagement, nor be preferred to active participation. Trust and engagement are the best way to create a healthy relationship between parents and children. Otherwise, they're more likely to go behind their parents backs and not seek help when they have questions or experience unpleasant things online. And that will happen.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE ALGORITHM

Although most children and adolescents don't experience severe abuse or discomfort on TikTok, the media can't deny it exists on the platform. As with any social media, you can find just about anything and anybody – if you know where and how to look. With popularity, that number of users increase, and with more users, the company behind TikTok, Bytedance, wants to keep them there.

DISCRIMINATION

Unfortunately for TikTok, their lack of transparency has come to haunt them. Though publicly promoting an inclusive platform, supporting Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+, COVID-19 relief, education, the arts, and much more (TikTok, 2020), many people were outraged when a memo from TikTok was leaked in March 2020. The memo entailed orders for their human moderators to get rid of the obese, the 'ugly,' and people with a visible disability (Business Insider, 2020). Only 'desirable content' should end up on the For You Page and be promoted by the algorithm. It created a worldwide shitstorm, which intensified when more pages were leaked (The Intercept, 2020). TikTok responded, saying it was only regarding adds and not a general praxis. This and other unpleasant revelations shadows what good they're seemingly trying to do and is definitely not helping their general public image.

TikTok is not unfamiliar with being bashed for suppressing content they find 'inappropriate.' Specifically, information about the Chinese government and their treatment of other people and religions have been removed (The Guardian, 2019). A move that would be well suited with the general way the Chinese government would rule but very inappropriate for Western users. We simply don't like dictatorships and hail free speech. Something TikTok says they comply with, but unfortunately hasn't quite lived up to yet. They have, however, established headquarters in the US and India and also removed their offices from Hongkong, where the Chinese government has enforced strict national security laws (The Times, 2020). They've also established more open lines of communications with the general user, changing their Terms of Service and Privacy Policy at the end of June to reassure the users (TikTok, 2020). They also have regional managers for most parts of the world. But keeping up a global success is hard work, and TikTok seems caught between their own (bad?) judgment and the desire to please the Western market.

Many users have felt segregated or in TikTok lingo 'shadow banned'. Most suddenly experiencing student growth, fewer views on the For You, and generally lacking the number of interactions they've grown used to (HITC, 2020). There has been a lot of changes with the app in the past 6 months. Some of the affected



users may be creating less engaging content, which made them feel 'excluded.' At the same time, it was most likely the users who deselected them. But with the algorithm's tendency to pick and choose, it's pure speculation.

As the media develops and grows, so will the demands from users to both the 'stars' and TikTok. The main thing for TikTok is transparency – especially about data. I'll get into that in the 'Data and security' paragraph.

SEX AND BODY

One point where it becomes challenging to navigate online is when it comes to the body. As a non-physical place with physical beings creating content, there's bound to be problems.

Sex sells, no matter where we are. TikTok works hard to remove any type of real sexual content, including the more ludicrous and comical of its kind. Still, it's sometimes difficult to see where the line should be drawn. As already established, the algorithm is difficult to predict, and even more so when it comes to the body and sexuality. This makes it difficult for ordinary users to know when they are crossing the line and when it's 'safe.' There seems to be very little consistency in the selection process.

I've experienced getting a video taken down immediately because 'it was against Community Guidelines.' All I did was make a duet (video) with a woman being body positive. I showed my stomach and was otherwise very covered up in my part of the video. She danced in sports top and a pair of jeans.

Other videos of young women in bikinis dancing seductively, and young men showing up with trained and half-naked bodies do not receive the same treatment, but are allowed to stay up. Through my deep dive in the dark corners of TikTok, I've encountered videos I can best describe as 'soft porn.' Featuring women in tiny clothes, with enormous breasts and other prominent features. Fortunately, not something you'll generally encounter unless you start looking. Every time I have reported it and not once have the content been taken down after I flagged it as inappropriate.

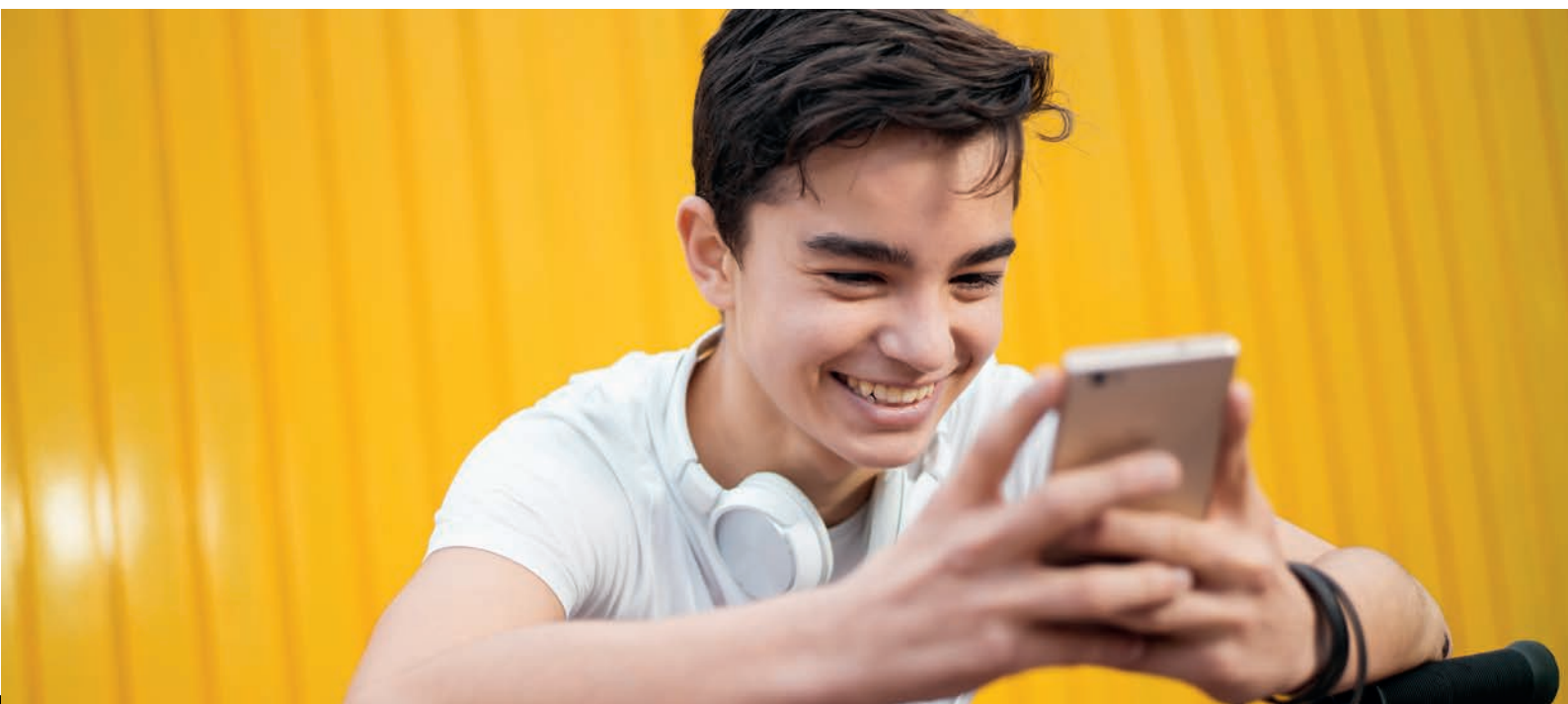
At the same time, a girl of 10 years told me in a comment that she had tried to have a video removed, just because she did a handstand and her stomach appeared. That was enough. In Denmark, a child's stomach will not raise any eyebrows. Still, if the idea is that everything can be sexualized, then the algorithm will see it as potential child porn. Why it doesn't think women in sexy lingerie is, is beyond me. Again, the algorithm has been taught how to respond, and only periodically let humans be the moderators.

SAFETY ON TIKTOK

Like all other social media, TikTok lives on data. As I've explained, each and every action we take forms a picture of who we are and what we want. That way, it can offer the user an experience that fits with that picture, and keeps you engaged longer. It helps make the user-experience better.

Data is a highly sought-after product, and when it comes to TikTok, it's evident that they gather a lot of it. Or have gathered. What we know is still based on the Reddit thread mentioned previously (Bangorlol, Reddit, 2020), or on other exposés. One of the most current issues found was the fact that TikTok and other apps are reading the clipboard information on iPhones (BBC, 2020). Something that was thought not to be possible.

Data is gathered on everything, and whether that data is sent to the manufacturer of an app or a worldwide company, it's equally bad in most cases. Everybody does it, and we allow it daily with every Google Search, Facebook, and Instagram post, not to mention every app installed. The data is collected and used to the extent permitted by us as end-users. Very few people read through the entire Term of Service Agreement when creating an account, or when using a product or app. Or after any updates, for that matter.



It is practically impossible to renounce the use of one's data 100% if you want to be a user of any digital and internet-connected products. As the world currently is, data is the currency we all pay to be connected, and it is a cumbersome job to dig through it. This is where TikTok, in many ways, has a big problem.

DATA AND SECURITY

TikTok has been heavily scrutinized by security experts and the legal system since it was launched. It has also been called the worst data collecting media ever by some. Again, mostly based on the Reddit discoveries of Bangorlol (Bangorlol, Reddit, 2020). Whether or not that's actually true, stands to be proven. As with other social media, TikTok's creator, Bytedance, has been accused of harvesting data, abuse it as well as sell it.

A German news outlet took a closer look at TikTok in 2019 (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2019), and found many signs that Bytedance was selling user data to, among others, Facebook. One Israeli security company found a lot of security holes that allow hackers to access users' data and accounts (The New York Times, 2020). Another company discovered that it was possible to upload and to replace existing videos (Latest Hacking News, 2020).

Because Bytedance is a Chinese company, many have been very concerned about what happens to the data collected from the rest of the world. With the continuous aggression against free speech and little to no privacy for the Chinese public, it's feared that TikTok's parent company, Bytedance, could be forced to deliver user information. Data, which no one can be sure how will be used. Bytedance has taken continuous steps to separate themselves from China to help remove the uncertainties. In late 2019, Bytedance finally separated TikTok from its Chinese cousin Douyin (Reuters, 2019) and promised to keep data outside of China. However, many felt unsure that they were keeping that promise (Reuters, 2019), keeping a close watch on the company. It wasn't possible to know where the data from European users were stored (Proofpoint, 2020) until the update of terms and safety on June 29, 2020. There have also been concerns about whether TikTok's processing of data complies with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Still, in April 2020, the European Commission stated that nothing indicated to a violation (Politico, Laura Kayali, 2020). At the present time, the EU is looking into their privacy policies (BNN Bloomberg, 2020) again, and several local data protection services have started their own investigations.

How TikTok responds and acts on these issues are crucial to whether the media will be able to keep working in the global marketplace.

TIKTOK AND MOBILE NUMBERS

One of the ways TikTok gains direct access to the user's privacy is through cellphone numbers. If you want to be able to use the built-in messaging system, you have to assign your phone number. It's not possible to settle for an email as with other media. That way, they get access to very personal data fairly quickly. Amongst others, your GPS position, and who your provider is. Although TikTok does not officially allow young people under the age of 16 years old to use the messaging system (BBC, 2020), it's easy to get around by lying about your age.

Depending on which operating system and app store are used, the number of permissions granted the app will vary. In other words, it's also the individual operating system that opens or closes access.

APPLE OR ANDROID

There will always be a difference between what data can be collected from an Apple product and from a product that uses Google's Android. The two providers have different security measures in place, providing both opportunities and uncertainties. Initially, using an Apple product is more secure, as they are incredibly closed and restrictive. Still, that security is often only superficial (CNET, 2020). If the manufacturer of the operating system isn't collecting data – which they are, apps you've installed does.

THE ECONOMY

The app is free, at least when you think of it in standard economic terms. All features are available to the user from the get-go at no additional charge, but that certainly isn't the same as it is free from financial gain. Far from it.

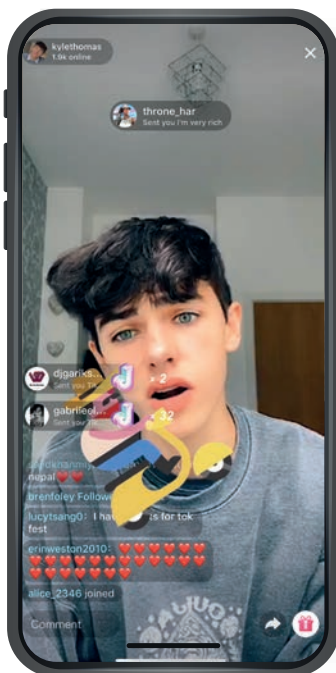
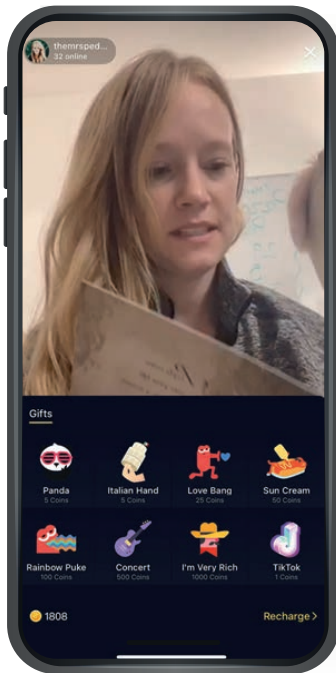
IN-APP PURCHASES

As mentioned earlier, users can make live chats once they have gained 1000 followers. As of December 2019, anyone 16 years or older is eligible to participate in this service (TikTok, 2019). Again, that doesn't mean that only 16+ users make 'lives,' which creates some issues in itself.

When 'going live,' TikTok broadcasts it, not only to your friends but to anyone they deem should be exposed, through the For You Page. Users can also share a link to a live chat with anyone they know, spreading it to basically everyone on the app.

Anyone partaking as a viewer can, in theory, purchase 'coins' (Tech Junkie, 2019) that can be turned into gifts for their favorite TikTokers. That's where the big bucks are. It's not legal for any under 18 years old, but any child with a parent's credit card attached to an app store can purchase them with a few clicks.

These micropays start at a minimum of £0.99/ \$1.99/ DKK 9 for 65 coins, equivalent to 1 coin for approx. 14 US cents, and ends at 6607 coins for £99.99/ \$134.99/ DKK 899.



In the live chat itself, you can then buy, e.g., a 'TikTok' for 1 coin, and if you have a lot of money, you can buy a 'Very Very Rich' cowboy for 1000 coins. After some complaints, the most expensive gift, 'Drama Queen,' was removed. It had a value of 5000 coins and was replaced by the 'TikTok' coin.

To make it even more exciting to give coins, icons appear on the screen when a gift is given. The small coins purchases provides a nice little pop-up, while the large ones provide animations that spread across the screen. There is no doubt that gifts are being given and 'streaks' - several of the same kind of gifts in a row - are also highlighted. There is an element of gamification over it, which is a known phenomenon from several Asian media.

One example is the Japanese media Showroom, who makes billions through virtual gifts (Btrax, 2019).

The same is true in Bytedance's native country of China (Wowza, 2020), where streaming services are a billion bucks' business. In the Western part of the world, we are more familiar with streaming services like Twitch, where you can give gifts - bits - to your favorite streamers (Twitch, 2020).

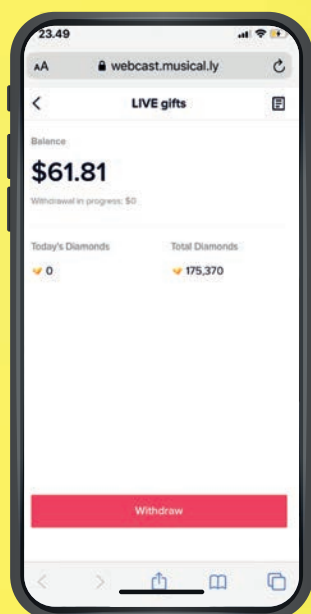
On TikTok, the receiving user can collect their 'gifts' after they have been transformed into 'diamonds.' And this is where it gets tricky.

TikTok takes 50% of all coin revenue before converting it to 'diamonds' (Advertismint, 2020). When a TikToker achieves a certain number of 'diamonds,' equivalent to \$ 50, they can get paid through PayPal (TikTok, 2020). This means a user has to collect 8333 coins to get \$50 into their bank account.

The ban on underaged gift-givers in 2019 happened as a response to several cases of famous content creators offering TikTok friendships, shoutouts (videos mentioning the donor's username) as well as private messages for the gifts (BBC, 2019). In my experience, the young users - fans - are very willing to give "proof of their 'love' to a favorite TikToker with gift-coins, and TikTok is earning a lot of money off this.

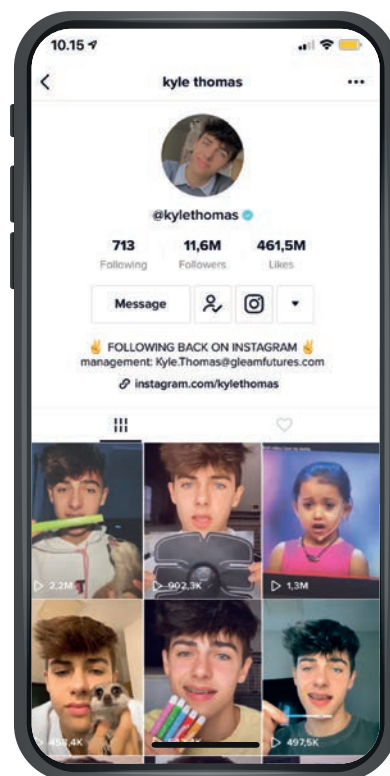
A SMALL FORTUNE IN MINUTES

I attended one of the big TikTokers live chat on a regular Friday night. 15-year-old Kyle Thomas from England has 16.1 million followers on the media and is one of the most popular content creators in the UK. Throughout the live chat, he promised shoutouts, his private cellphone number, and 'you become my best



friend online' for gifts to his young fans. In the barely ten minutes, I recorded the live chat, he received over 42,000 coins, and the one with the most gifts was a boy about 8 years old. Kyle is one of many popular TikTokers that does this; also promising follows, which to many smaller users are like social currency.

These so-called 'micro pays' are nothing new. It's been going on for years, with parents forgetting to provide a lock for any purchases without their consent. Back in 2011, there were major problems when very young children bought 'berries' and other things for thousands of dollars in a Smurf game (Version 2, 2011) (Digital Trends, 2011). It's still happening today (The Guardian, 2020), and many games and apps survive on this business model. The main difference, however, is that in these cases, it is more evident where the profit goes; to the developer. With TikTok, it's not nearly as clear, and there are far more parties involved.



A SURVEY

There aren't many statistics available when it comes to how the children, or anyone for that matter, uses money on TikTok. So I set up a poll to test my own Danish audience. Also, I asked some of the popular Danish TikTokers about their experiences from the other side of the screen.

The question to the children was simple – have you bought coins?

Out of 2636, 2372 answered no, and 264 responded yes. This is equivalent to about 10% of Danish TikTokers having bought and given gifts.

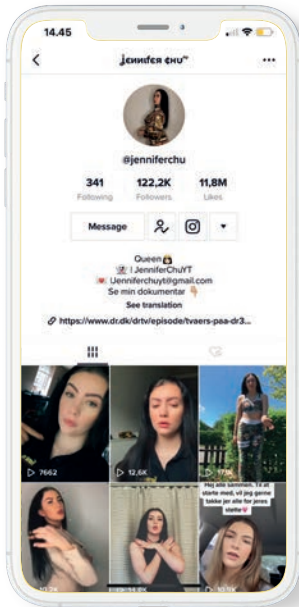
One of them was a 13-year-old girl. She said she had spent about DKK 300, equivalent to \$46, on gifts for 3 TikTokers. I asked her what she had gotten for it, and two of them had given her a shoutout. The last one she got nothing from.

Since it's officially not possible for a minor to buy into the app without parental approval, I asked if she had unrestricted access to in-app purchases. That is, she does not need a code from her parents when she wants to buy something. Quite right, and her mother had not been pleased when she discovered it.

Another girl aged 14-15 replied that she had spent about DKK 6,000/ \$920 in a week, while a 12-year-old girl told me she had spent DKK 600/ \$92, "because she didn't want the TikToker 'to stop'." The latter gave the money to one of the biggest stars on the media, so that's hardly going to happen.

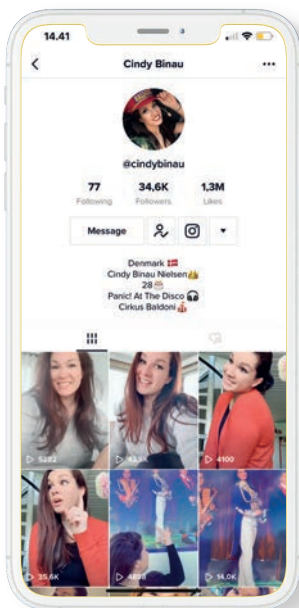
I asked several of the big Danish stars what they had experienced with gifts from Danish users.

Jennifer Chu, who has 122,000+ followers, showed me her current balance and told me it's quite common for her to get presents. Until she reached 7,000 followers, she also gave duets and shoutouts to the givers, but it became too much work as her audience grew. A quick estimate puts her total earnings at around DKK 1700/ \$261, far from a fortune.



A TikToker about Kyle Thomas' age with 32,000+ followers said that she also gets them, but that she hasn't reached the \$ 50 yet. When asked if she gives shoutouts and likes for gifts, the answer was blunt: "Oh yeah, so people send me more."

It's not possible to block gifts to stop children and young people from spending money on their TikTok idols, making it impossible to choose as a creator. It seems like a brilliant way for TikTok to earn money, as the amount of 'less than \$50 in gifts' users must be plentiful.



Circus Prinsess Cindy Binau, who has almost 45,000 followers and reaches many of the Danish children every day, had a straight-forward reply when asked if she gave the followers something in return for gifts: "I would never dream of 'asking' for money that way. I know many people who follow me are 8-14 years old, so they hardly know what 'money' is." She still experiences receiving small gifts, which she calls donations, but the amount is way below the \$50 limit, and will never leave the platform

Two big Danish YouTube stars, whose also big on TikTok, said they'd never gotten started doing live chats due to the amount of work they do as it is. They are also very skeptical of the entire gifting system. The general ignorance and lack of transparency of TikTok's live chats is a problem, and not everyone has enough understanding of the moral obligations that should accompany the status of an influencer.

PROMOTION

INFLUENCERS

As on YouTube and Instagram, users see content like clothes, makeup, toys, and kitchenware. Things that content creators have been given as gifts by companies, which they then promote on the media. Bytedance doesn't always get a share of the revenue as many deals are made between the influencer and the company. Whether or not the content creator has to announce that something is sponsored varies from country to country. In Denmark, it's required by law to flag any posts or videos with 'promotion' or 'sponsored' in a very visible way (Forbrugerombudsmanden, 2020).

With no real revenue opportunities built into TikTok for smaller content creators, it's clear that this trend will continue. I tried to use the TikTok for Business (TikTok, 2020) as an individual in May 2020 with a minimal budget. I got a mail saying my money would be better spend on their coming self-serve platform. A service still not available.

For the big companies and popular creators, there's a lot of money to be made in official collaborations.

OFFICIAL COLLABORATIONS

In 2018, TikTok began opening up possibilities to large companies that allowed the creation of campaigns under hashtags (#) (TikTok, 2020), and at the same time, offered collaboration with the biggest influencers on the app (TikTok, 2020). Companies like Universal Studios and Colgate gained access to the 2 billion users through these campaigns. More examples can be found in TikTok's official advertising section.

What all these campaigns have in common is the fact that they, very quickly, created viral trends that users themselves shared. In 2019 it was estimated that TikTok earned \$ 176.9 million (Business of Apps, 2020) on these collaborations.

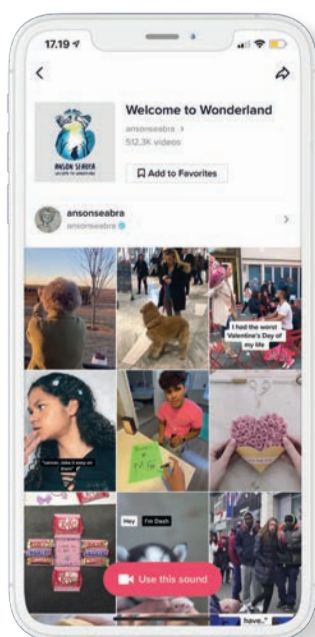
It's possible for anyone to create an ad account and then send out messages and products. At least in theory. Create an account, fill out a Google questionnaire, and you're up and running.

In many countries, TikTok is allowed to display adds in-app as well, directly exposing the users in the same ways as we've come to know Instagram and Facebook does. As a resident of Denmark, this 'opportunity' has yet to reach us, for which I'm thankful.

THE MUSIC

Music is one of the core values of TikTok. The opportunity to hear your favorite song or find new music is part of what the media does - and that's visible on the charts (Rolling Stone, 2020).

Musician Anson Seabra (Seabra, 2020) released, via TikTok, several videos of his beautiful and meaningful songs, and they became a viral success. In no time, his songs were on Spotify's hit lists, and he went from relatively unknown to a star. At least among TikTok's core group - the 16-25-year-olds - and there's money in it.



Today, TikTok is what YouTube was for aspiring artists in the early 2000s. Established artists also speculate in 15 seconds sound bites with an accompanying dance, an example being Drake and 'Toosie Slide' (Vanity Fair, 2020). But it's not all rosy. TikTok currently has a short-term rental agreement of music from the major record companies (Financial Times, 2020). Still, not all artists get paid for using their tracks. Exactly how it's connected is once again hard for the outsider. As I've mentioned, many artists release their own music in videos on TikTok. The most viral sensations can be lucky enough to end up on a list of selected music without being released at a music label. I contacted Koda, who takes care of Danish artists' interests. They couldn't inform me about the conditions in Denmark, as they are in negotiations with TikTok. It will be exciting to see what it brings, as Danish music is already well represented.

TIKTOK FAMOUS

If you haven't heard the name Charlie D'Amilio before, don't worry. Neither had the majority of Americans before Super Bowl 2020, where she was featured in one of the commercials for which the event is known (DigiDay, 2020). By the way – the entire D'Amilio family is verified, including the parents and dogs.

In England, The Brits awards show were also sprinkled with TikTok celebrities (TikTok, 2020), and New York Fashion Week also had its share on the seats (TikTok, 2020). In general, the US and the UK have included the new stars in their gossip columns, which must mean that TikTok stars 'have made it.'

The era of influencers has been going on for years now. Unfortunately, the content of the concept hasn't always been adjusted to the current reality, and not all countries have accepted to include TikTokers. In the Nordics, it's still not a part of mainstream culture. The general population is not yet familiar with the new stars, although the media has slowly begun to see the potential of covering them (Berlingske, 2019) for other than the potential dangers and horror stories. We're still not ready to include these social media stars fully.

VERIFIED

So being a popular TikToker doesn't mean anyone outside the media knows you. It's a joke among TikTokers, and songs have even been written about it, which, of course, has gone viral on the media (TikTok, Ryan Beard, 2019). Many who have had a fair amount of YouTube followers have exploded on TikTok, and the same goes for Instagrammers. Becoming a 'star' and 'known' can happen from one second to the next, which has created its own ecosystem. Just as we have seen it before with YouTube. But that's not the same as being a TikTok chosen creator.

The best way to get big, is to secure a place as one of the coveted TikTok 'Verified' or 'Popular Creator' (TikTok Addicts, 2019). The highest honor on the media. Though usually they give that to people already famous in mainstream media.

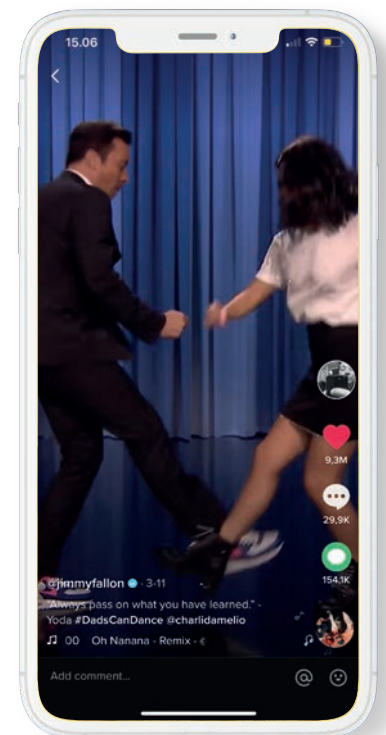
How TikTok chooses the common users is unknown. One of the 'chosen ones,' Rachel Pederson, shared a bit about it in a video on YouTube (YouTube, Rachel Pederson, 2020). Besides the basics of being a well-known public figure outside of TikTok, it's basically about who shows off the brand best. A human moderator group, of whom Rachel Pedersen is a part, also review potential candidates and find who's suited. Exactly how we can only guess, but it often leads to the previously mentioned collaboration deals and seats at the Brits and Super Bowl.

INSTANT STARS FOR 'NOTHING'

I've heard many of the older generations calling YouTube 'indifferent', tedious and pointless, time and time again. The understanding of the culture that has emerged over the past decade is very narrow, making it even more challenging to implement understanding and acceptance of the content on new media such as TikTok.

If you can't stand watching YouTube videos, chances are you can't endure most TikToks. In the section on going viral via the algorithm, I told about my snack sausage video, which had gone viral. The content of that video is as mundane and 'unimportant' as can be. Still, viewers were streaming in. And across the media, it seems that it's this kind of 'everyday things' that has gained momentum.

On TikTok, it's called 'relatable content.' There is nothing high-cultural about it, no screenplay, and little polish content. In the case of my video, there's me, my happiness over a snack, recorded on my mobile phone camera. And it works.



YouTube has long survived on the same premise - the relatable, girl/boy next door. With its short videos, it works even better on TikTok. It's personalities that are the essence. Not the content, and that's the first step to understanding what the new stars can do. Maybe they can also dance, sing, lip-sync, draw, or act. These are all secondary, because if you're not a person the users like, then they move on to the next video in a second.

There is nothing new about us making 'personality cults.' Worshipping individuals. That's been around as long as people have been willing to step forward in the limelight, regardless of context. In the past decades, the reality wave, as well as the spread of social media, has amplified the possibility of anybody becoming a 'celebrity.' This includes 12-year-old Lianna, whose most significant achievement is that she has a beautiful personality and is a dwarf (TikTok, 2020).

Or me with my snack sausage.



THE PEOPLE ON TIKTOK

It will be impossible for me to specify a particular kind of TikTok user. Ranging from Lianna at age 12, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, to little Sulaiman at age 6 and Will Smith, the breadth is vast. However, the basis of the media is ordinary people who just want to share something. There is no topic too big or small for TikTok, and that becomes very clear with a newly created TikTok account.

In other words, the people at TikTok are all sorts, with all kinds of life, focus, expression, and destinies. Social media is eminent for sharing snapshots of the individual's life, and this media is no exception.

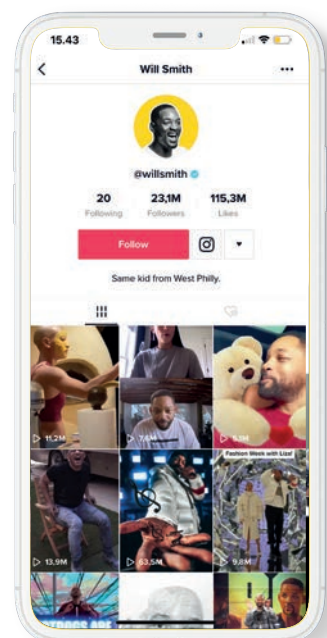
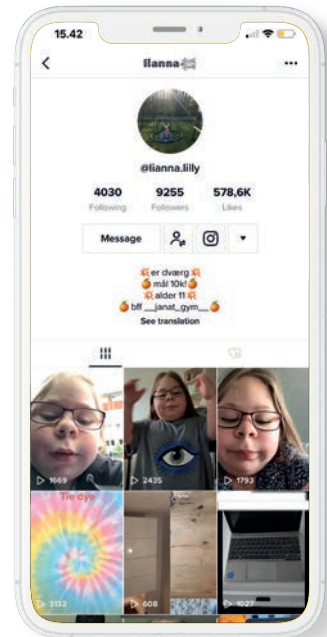
CHILDREN ON TIKTOK

In the US, over 30 % of the users are underaged, while in the UK, around 44 % of 8-12-year-olds are using it (Telegraph, 2020). The same numbers are true for the Nordic countries. In Sweden, it's estimated that 39 % of children between the ages of 11 and 13 years old use TikTok (Svenskarna Och Internet, 2019), and in Norway, the number of 9-10 year-olds is 43 %. Norway is also the country with the highest number of teenagers in the media – 70 % (Medietilsynet, 2020). In Denmark, it's estimated that about 20 % of the 9 to 13-year-olds use TikTok (DR Medieudvikling, 2020).

On one of my accounts, my videos are solely in Danish. My followers are mainly in the tween segment, 10-12 years, but also below and above. The youngest I've seen is 6 years, but it was below average. However, there is a selection of very young children who use the media with their parents and have 'guest appearances' on videos.

Children use TikTok in many different ways, but there are some trends that I see again and again. In general, their videos are characterized by childhood innocence, thankfully. While they may be rough on themselves or each other, it's no different than childhood in general or on other social media.

However, it's the openness and honesty that's noticeable in their videos. Videos that many children consider their personal space.



CONTENT TRENDS FOR CHILDREN

DANCE VIDEOS

Many children started on Musical.ly and continued as it changed to TikTok, and dance videos are very popular with this segment. Not least because TikTokers are continually developing new trend dances that many dance-happy girls and boys then learn and repeat in their own videos. The amount of dance videos among girls is higher. Still, there are many videos of friends dancing together - of both genders.

FOOD AND DRINKS

Popular videos where you make a cake, iced coffee and jelly fruits (fill a small plastic bag with liquid and pop it in your mouth so that the liquid flows out) are popular. Food and drink often play a role.

MOODS

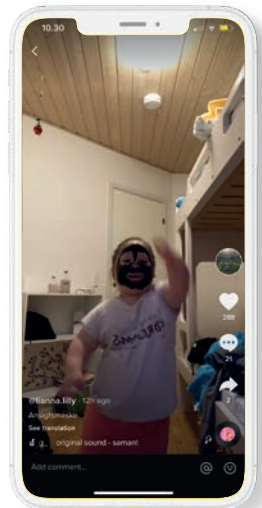
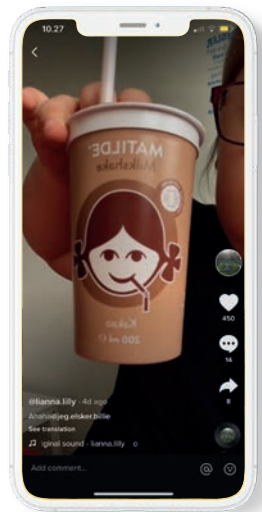
Using text, mime, dance, words, and video, everything from 'thank you for yesterday, it was nice' to 'I'm afraid my dad will die from the coronavirus.' Disagreements with friends are also addressed, and so is love, joy, and even deep existential crises.

GAMING

There are many videos about games such as Roblox, Fortnite, CS: GO, and The Sims. Content varies and show gameplay, favorite avatars from the game and presentation of gear. In this category, the boys are mostly represented. Still, there are quite a few girls as well, telling stories with their Sims and Roblox characters.

HERE AND NOW

It's probably not wrong to call this kind of video snapshots, and they mainly take place in the children's spare time. This includes recess. These also include dances, lip-syncs, and whatever else is trendy on TikTok.



BULLYING

There are no social media that doesn't have bullying. Social media reflects the physical life, and in any space with places to hide there is someone taking advantage of the opportunity. That said, it's not a 'bullying' media. Ugly things are said and written, 'hate' it's mostly called, and there are people who make so-called 'cringe' videos about other people's content. Videos whose sole purpose is to say nasty things about the other and/or their video. The frequency is, in my experience, no higher than, i.e., Instagram, where 'like terror' has long existed.

This is another area that's difficult to get a clear perspective on, as children and young people's fluid media consumption allows them to start a quarrel somewhere and continue it elsewhere. Many times, without adults discovering it.

Other adults and I on TikTok do a great job of following up if we see bullying going on, and the children even tags/calls on some of the adult users if help and back-up are needed.

However, let me emphasize that the vast majority of comments you receive are weird or relatively neutral. There is much love in our children and young people. But the foul language is undoubtedly present, and many feel free to test out their full vocabulary. Again, a sign that general upbringing and good behavior have not been transferred to the digital space. Looking at the adult's way of digital communication, it's probably not hard to understand why we're lacking in this area.





F OFF - IT'S NOT FOR ADULTS

The ignorance of the adult's understanding of TikTok is clear to see in the children, and it's not unusual to get comments that TikTok is a children's media - from the children themselves.

Or that it's disgusting that there are adults on. If the media was created as a children's platform, they would be right. Still, just because it is trendy among one type of user, it doesn't make it 'their media.' Although the message 'You have Facebook' also pops up once in a while. At the same time, the language of the adults is also of mixed caliber. Again, the filter most of us have when speaking with others in the physical spaces fail when it comes to faceless communication.

At one point, I used one of my TikToks to ask the children what the best and worst they had experienced on the media were. One adult responded that she had experienced intense hate - hatred - from a 9-year-old whom she didn't feel able to defend herself against.

YOUTH ON TIKTOK

Worldwide, young people between the ages of 16-24 are overrepresented on the media (Oberlo, 2020).

Many of the new stars are precisely in this age segment, and it's often those who pass on trends to the younger children. From the Nordic perspective, the teens usually follow many English speaking TikTokers, as the language is taught in schools from an early age.

The content of their videos reflects where they are in life, and behavior many adults would prefer them not to partake in is shown here, from drinking and smoking to fast cars and much more. There is also talk about gender, sex, and relationships. Some of the most popular profiles are couple profiles between the

ages of 16 and 21, where both participate in videos. Unlike the smaller children, the young people's profiles are more of a display - 'this is who I am,' rather than the natural stumbling around of a younger child - 'I'm trying to find out who I am.'

The content is more consistent, and there are fewer style changes.

ADULTS ON TIKTOK

It's estimated that about 37 % of the users are 25 years and older. In the Nordics, the number of adults on TikTok isn't very high. The amount of adult is the US and the UK is higher.

Throughout the world, adults use TikTok to create their own content to please themselves or to promote a message or business. Many of them having an 18+ written in their profile to signal that children should not be following. But they still do. There's a lot of parents on, mostly mothers. A lot of adults also give advice, talk current events and whatever else you see on other social media.

I'm part of the group of adults that, through education and jobs, have experience with children and young people. In many cases, it's the only adults the children can ask about digital or other things since many adults don't take their children's digital life seriously. A lot of time is spent answering questions from the younger users about anything from 'what's your favorite meal' to smoking and sexuality. There are many such adults on TikTok.

USERS FIGHT BACK

At TikTok, a kind of 'code of honor' has emerged - in the absence of better words. A type of user democracy that doesn't take kindly to things like bullying, violence, and grooming of minors. Not even presented as humor.

It has varying expressions; everything from uplifting and positive messages about the body, the mind, and the right to individuality, to something resembling vigilantly (Verge, 2020) (Bugle 24, 2020).

The tendency to 'stick up for each other' is quite common among users. Especially the young followers are ready to defend their 'idols,' and the concept of 'an army of 12-year-olds' on TikTok exists for the same reason.

This kind of 'vigilantes' most likely to have arisen because of the intimate and safe feel of the media. As a TikToker, you're part of a community, and TikTok may not always live up to what's expected.

PROFILE SELECTION

How you present yourself on the media is of great importance to most users – including on TikTok. Image, name, and profile text are one's digital first impressions. In countries that TikTok hasn't translated into, that sometimes poses a problem, since especially children have imaginative ways of writing things. Also, slang is very often used to write names that should probably never have been allowed.

USERNAME

It's possible to change names every 30 days, and as mentioned, there's no lack of creativity among the young users. Usernames with 'User' first and a lot of numbers afterward are basically autogenerated names you get when you create your account. Also, there are not many limits to what can be used of words, letters, and numbers. The older and more serious the user is about the content and presence, the less the namechanges occurs. Which is nice, because it's honestly impossible to keep track of people otherwise.

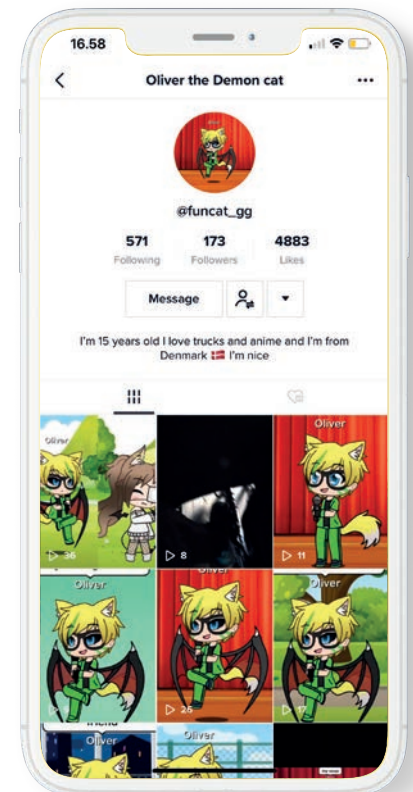
The choice of username can be country, hobby, and gender-specific. It can also be complete nonsense. Many will choose their real name, which is never a good idea if it's a minor.

I have noticed a certain gender weight concerning the words used in the names.

The more explicit choices are often male, and since TikTok filters offensive words whenever possible, it's usually spelled with fewer letters or numbers and symbols. An example could be fuck without a k. Girls will use different versions of the word bitch, but generally, stay away from very explicit words.

Gaming or sports names also mostly occurs on male accounts, but with Fortnite, Roblox, and Sims being a big favorite amongst girls, these will occur as part of a name.

Emma_is_mine is typically a combination girls make, and it most often refers to the best friend. Words like unicorn, butterfly, and others are usually also a female favorite.



PROFILE PICTURES

Many people choose to use a photo of themselves. Others choose to use one of their idols, e.g., a singer, footballer, or game character. There're also trends coming and going, like LEGO heads, which stem from a trend in 2019 where everyone should replace themselves with Star Wars LEGO. Also, 'club' pictures are chosen to show that you belong with a specific segment of users. Mostly in good fun. Beyond that, it's up to the imagination again, and there's plenty of it. In addition to the image, you can upload a 6-second video, which appears instead of the image in several places.

PROFILE TEXT

All profiles have a so-called 'bio.' It's a brief description below the profile picture, which is most often used to say something about the user and/or the channel content with a maximum of 80 characters. It's not a requirement to fill it, and the content is very varied.

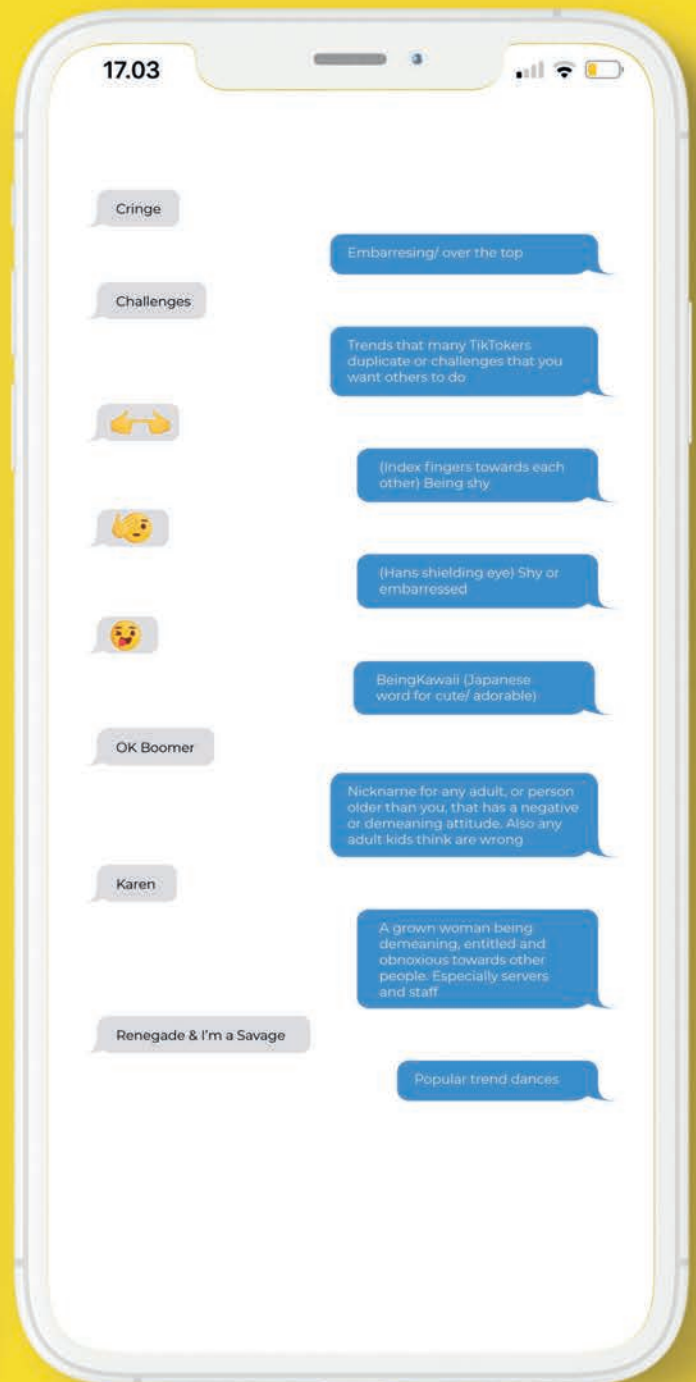
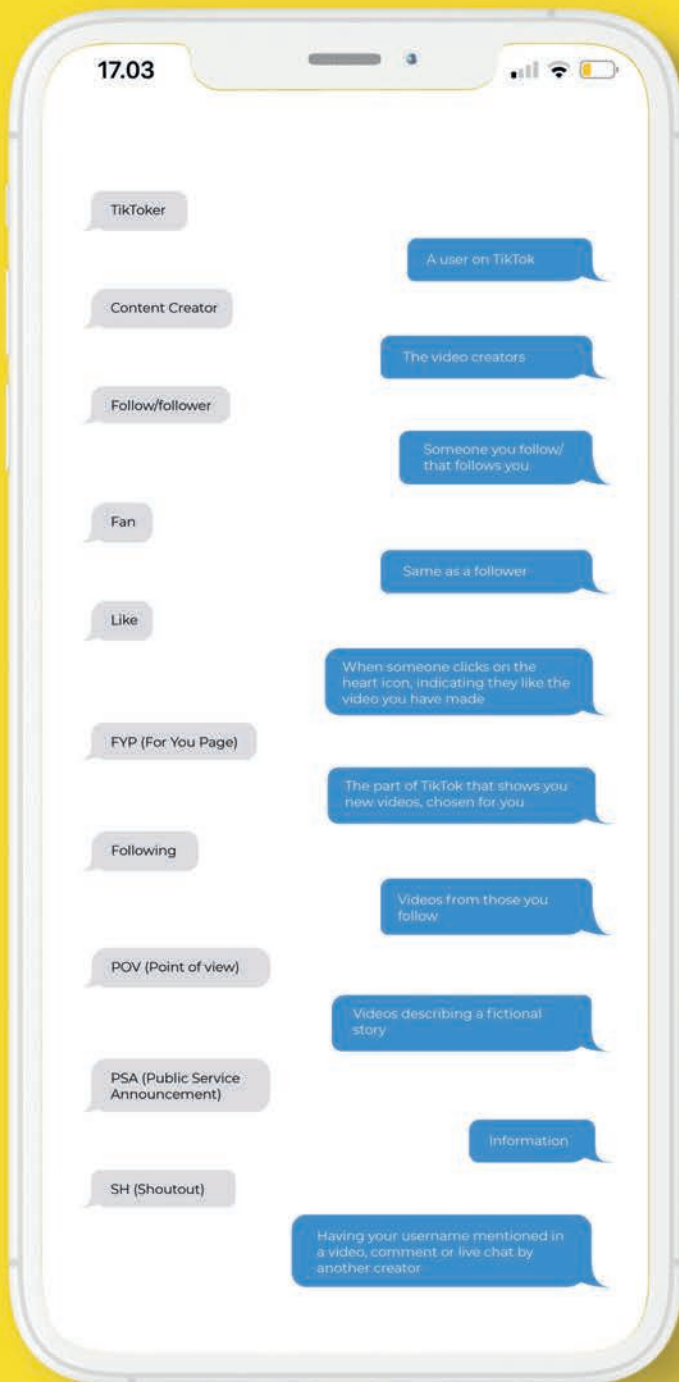
Users, who are serious about their content, often write about age, nationality, city, and interests. Relationship status is also a frequent choice, and sexuality, as well as gender identity, are also mentioned. Especially if it's a young person or an adult. As said earlier many adults indicate that children shouldn't watch or follow by using the 18+

Another tendency that prevails is a form of a disclaimer for one's participation in the medium. 'Just for fun,' 'It's cracked,' and similar statements can be found on some profiles. As many still haven't accepted their own presence on TikTok, it's a way to distance yourself from what you're actually doing.

Links to webpages, Instagram, and YouTube can also be added in the bio, helping users to find each other outside TikTok.



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