

# Analyzing TikTok's information dissemination and public relations role in global conflicts

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**Abstract.** This study dives into the impact of TikTok on information dissemination and public opinion during major international conflicts, and it focuses on the platform's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through a comprehensive analysis of user-generated content and media coverage, the study evaluates the effectiveness and limitations of TikTok as a news dissemination platform. In addition, this study evaluates TikTok's current public relations strategies to address data privacy and security issues, especially in the United States, and provides suggestions for improvement. The study identifies trends and differences in content consumption through quantitative methods, including data collection and analysis of TikTok videos and user surveys. The findings highlight TikTok's unique role in shaping global narratives, the challenges of regulatory scrutiny, and the need for more robust data protection measures. Finally, this study provides constructive suggestions for enhancing TikTok's data protection policies and improving its public relation efforts, and future development as a global information dissemination platform.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

With the development of science and technology in modern society, social media has become one of the main ways for people to learn about news. Compared with traditional media, social media spreads information faster, covers a broader range, and is less cost-effective. Users can learn about the latest news events through social media and interact online through comments, sharing, and likes. With the widespread use of social media, individuals' or organizations' voices are expanding, substantially influencing public opinion.

Among many social media platforms, TikTok stands out with its focus on short videos and unique algorithm recommendation mechanisms. These features and its diverse video creation tools have attracted a large user base and had a profound global impact. The diversity of its user base and the variety of topics it covers give TikTok a significant advantage regarding the effects of information dissemination.

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## **1.2 Research purpose and significance**

Firstly, this study aims to explore TikTok's coverage of major international conflicts and explore the impact and characteristics of TikTok's information dissemination and public opinion in these events by analyzing user-generated content and media reports related to conflict events. Understanding the specific reporting characteristics will help evaluate its potential and limitations as a news dissemination platform.

Secondly, this study will evaluate TikTok's current public relations strategy and propose improvement measures to respond to the US crisis. In addition, this study will also assess TikTok's current public relations strategy considering the current situation in the United States and propose corresponding improvement measures based on the research results to help TikTok respond more effectively to similar crises in the future and enhance its public relations capabilities and brand image.

Overall, this study will deepen the understanding of TikTok's role in information dissemination and public opinion guidance at major international events, evaluate the effectiveness of its public relations strategy, and provide constructive suggestions for its future development.

## **1.3 Research method**

This study primarily employs quantitative research to thoroughly examine TikTok's role in information dissemination and opinion formation during major international conflicts. The research process is divided into two main stages: data collection and analysis.

Initially, a representative sample of TikTok videos related to the selected international conflicts is identified, encompassing user-generated content and media organization videos. A structured questionnaire is also developed to survey TikTok users' perceptions of TikTok as a news source during conflicts. The questionnaire is distributed through social media channels, including TikTok, to ensure a diverse respondent group. Finally, the collected questionnaire data and video content are analyzed and visualized to identify trends and differences.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 History and development**

TikTok was launched in China by Byte Dance in September 2016 and was initially called "Douyin." One year later, Byte Dance accelerated its globalization pace and launched the global short video product TikTok [1]. In August 2018, Byte Dance merged Musical.ly with TikTok, further expanding its influence in the worldwide market [2]. It has rapidly become one of the world's most popular social media platforms. It allows users to create and share short videos, often accompanied by music. TikTok's recommendation algorithm connects content to audience targets better than other programs. Many of its users are young people from Generation Z. As of February 2024, the number of downloads is about 4.7 billion [3]. At the same time, TikTok has a solid market position and competes fiercely with Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. TikTok has a unique value proposition centered on short video content, user-generated creativity, and a robust algorithm. These three unique values make TikTok a leader in short video content. TikTok's mission is to "inspire creativity and bring joy [4]". The platform's vision is to become a leader in short videos, providing users with a diverse content creation space and the opportunity to express themselves.

## **2.2 TikTok strengths**

TikTok's recommendation algorithm is one of the cores of its success. The algorithm can quickly recommend personalized content by analyzing users' interests and behaviors, allowing users to discover new videos and creators when using TikTok constantly. This improves the user experience and dramatically increases user stickiness and activity. The more users there are, the more data the platform accumulates and the more accurate the algorithm can become. This forms a virtuous circle, allowing TikTok to rise rapidly and quickly and become one of the world's most famous short video platforms. TikTok has two significant characteristics and advantages in this process: influencers and user-generated content.

Influencers play a vital role in the TikTok ecosystem. They can create high-quality content, lead trends, and bring many benefits, such as increasing brand awareness and user trust and promoting brand-consumer interaction. Secondly, TikTok fosters community participation and encourages brands to join this trend by creating various challenges and using tags. For example, in July 2019, the Mexican fast food chain Chipotle launched the #GuacDance challenge, which aims to promote Chipotle's guacamole and attract more users to pay attention to and participate in brand activities to improve the brand image. During this event, to expand its influence, Chipotle set up the #GuacDance tag and invited famous TikTok influencers, such as big eater Matt Stonie and well-known dancer Michael Le, to promote the #GuacDance challenge through their fan base and influence. Influencers' participation significantly increased the event's popularity, and ordinary users uploaded their own #GuacDance videos, adding creative dances with guacamole, increasing the diversity and fun of the challenge. A large amount of user-generated content further promoted the viral spread of #GuacDance. During this six-day event on TikTok, the video was viewed nearly 430 million times [5].

## **2.3 Palestine-Israel conflict**

The background and importance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be traced back to the early 20th century when the Zionist movement and the Arab nationalist movement confronted each other in the Palestinian region. In 1948, the establishment of the State of Israel triggered the first Middle East War, which displaced millions of Palestinians. Since then, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has continued, involving multiple issues such as land, religion, and national identity. Recent important events include the Gaza conflict that broke out in May 2021 and the fierce confrontation between Israel and Hamas, which caused a large number of casualties and infrastructure damage.

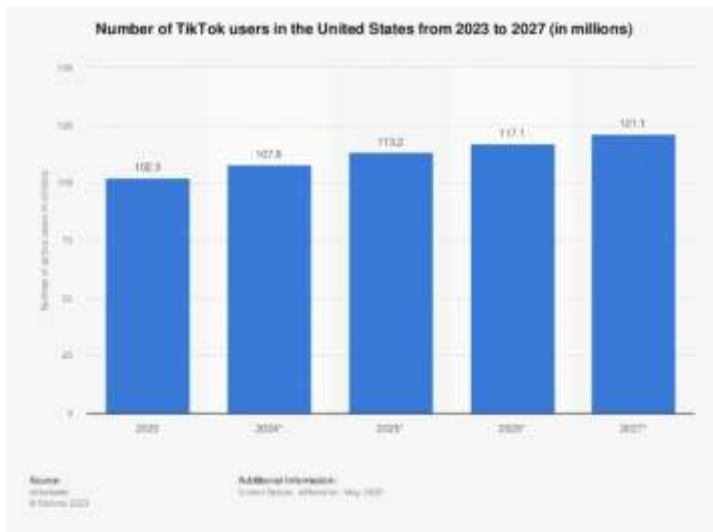
# **3 An in-depth analysis of TikTok**

## **3.1 User demographic and psychographic**

TikTok predominantly attracts younger users, specifically Generation Z and Millennials. This demographic trend is evident as over 68.3% of the user base comprises individuals aged 18 to 34 [6]. This age group is known for its tech-savviness, creativity, and preference for visual content, which aligns perfectly with TikTok's format.

TikTok's content is designed to appeal broadly across genders, as evidenced by its relatively balanced user base. Women make up 52% of the users, while men account for 48% [6]. This near-equal representation underscores the platform's inclusivity, making it an ideal space for brands aiming to reach diverse audiences (Fig 1).





**Fig. 2.** Number of TikTok users in the United States from 2023 to 2027 (in millions) (Data from: TikTok Statistics)

### 3.3 Regulatory challenges on data privacy and security issues

TikTok faces significant scrutiny over data privacy and security issues worldwide, with specific concerns raised by the United States and Southeast Asian countries like India and Indonesia.

Firstly, TikTok's data practices have prompted national security concerns in the United States. Lawmakers argue that the Chinese government could access the app's user data collection, given Byte Dance's Chinese ownership. These concerns led to calls for TikTok to store its data domestically and subject its operations to stringent regulations. The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) has been probing TikTok's data security practices to ensure that U.S. user data is not compromised [7].

India and Indonesia went a step further by banning TikTok outright, citing security risks and concerns about how the platform handles user data. The move reflects wider geopolitical tensions and domestic security concerns [8].

To address these challenges, TikTok has taken steps to increase transparency and build trust. For example, in the United States, TikTok is working with Oracle to store U.S. user data locally to meet the requirements of U.S. regulators [9]. Despite its efforts, the platform continues to navigate a complex and evolving regulatory environment to maintain its global operations and user trust.

## 4 Conflict overview

Today, with the spread of information on social media, more and more people have learned about the specific process of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the truth of the war. They all spontaneously organized collective marches to support those who were displaced and suffered in the war.

In other words, international and social media have played a vital role in shaping the narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Media reports are often biased and influence global public opinion. On social media platforms, supporters of both sides of the conflict seek sympathy and support from the international community by posting information, videos and

pictures. This information spreads quickly and profoundly affects people's views and attitudes towards the conflict.

Traditional media such as CNN, Fox News, and the New York Times have simple dissemination methods. The company and editors must strictly review the content reports of these media before they can be published. This review process ensures the accuracy and authority of the information, but it also limits the speed and diversity of information dissemination. Under the framework of traditional media, the content production and release cycle are long, and the editorial team usually proofreads and reviews the information multiple times to avoid errors and misleading information. This rigorous process helps maintain the credibility of the media, but it also slows down the timeliness of the news, especially when facing emergencies. In addition, the content and perspective of traditional media reports may be affected by editorial policies and commercial interests, resulting in certain limitations on the diversity and comprehensiveness of information. For example, CNN employees accused the network of being biased toward Israel, arguing that this amounted to journalistic dereliction of duty. Journalists reported that editorial directives from senior executives on social media, particularly since Mark Thompson became CEO, led to incomplete coverage of the Israel-Gaza conflict. Restrictions on quoting Hamas and an emphasis on Israeli perspectives over Palestinian perspectives skewed coverage. Employees described internal conflict and self-censorship, fearing that CNN's coverage served Israeli interests over journalistic integrity. Additionally, a directive CNN journalists received that they should avoid using the term "occupied" when referring to the Palestinian territories, despite the term being widely accepted in international law and other news organizations. Staff members believed the directive was part of a broader effort to frame coverage in a way that was more consistent with the Israeli narrative, leading to frustration and concerns about journalistic integrity. [10].

In contrast, TikTok has become an essential platform for spreading information related to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The platform is viral among younger audiences, who often prefer the concise, visually engaging content it offers over traditional news sources. One of the critical roles TikTok plays in the conflict is the sheer volume of content shared. Hashtags such as #Palestine and #Israel have racked up billions of views, with content ranging from on-the-ground reports to personal anecdotes from residents in the conflict zone. This makes TikTok an essential battleground for narrative control, with both sides of the conflict trying to influence public opinion. The platform's unique algorithm tends to prioritize emotionally rich, visually striking content, meaning videos depicting the human impact of the conflict tend to go viral quickly. For example, videos showing the daily struggles in Palestinian refugee camps, or the aftermath of airstrikes have attracted widespread attention. This trend highlights a shift in how younger audiences consume news, preferring first-hand accounts over traditional, potentially biased media coverage. To be more specific, influencers often speak as individuals and share their unique insights and experiences on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which are more personal and authentic. In contrast, although expert news analysis is professional and authoritative, it sometimes appears too rational and distant and cannot easily resonate with young people.

In addition, influencers vividly present the multifaceted situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a variety of content forms, such as videos, live broadcasts, pictures, and stories. They give viewers a more intuitive understanding of the reality of the conflict through personal interviews, on-site reports, and dialogues. This rich form of expression increases the readability and appeal of information and helps young people understand the complex international situation more comprehensively. For example, Mehnaz Shariff is a blogger who specializes in sharing crime and political news on TikTok [11]. She has a broad fan base and considerable influence as a mega influencer. In her video about the background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the number of likes reached 30,000 and triggered 3,000

discussions, which covered the historical background of the conflict, the current situation, the response of the international community, and many other aspects. Her video content is easy to understand and includes detailed information and data to help viewers understand complex global events better. Mehnaz uses her influence to guide the audience in rational discussions and improve everyone's attention and understanding of current affairs.

## **5 TikTok's public relations crisis management in the U.S**

### **5.1 Current challenges**

TikTok's rapid growth has attracted widespread attention from society and the government. Reports of multiple negative incidents, such as data breaches, the uncontrolled spread of harmful content, and allegations of censorship, fuel public and government scrutiny of the platform.

Firstly, the U.S. Congress has been concerned about TikTok's database. A Chinese company owns the app, and the government is concerned that data leaks could lead to national security issues. More specifically, citizens and the U.S. government are worried that the Chinese government can access citizens' data through the app to steal sensitive information. NSA Director and Central Security Bureau Director Nakasone said they must develop a policy that balances access to shared information while preventing adversaries from spying on U.S. data [12]. In addition, congressional hearings actively investigate related issues and pressure TikTok to address them transparently.

Secondly, with the continuous application and development of AI, people are increasingly concerned about their privacy issues, such as how AI collects, stores, and uses personal data. In addition, TikTok ensures that their data is protected in this process.

### **5.2 Suggestions for the future development of TikTok**

First, TikTok should regularly update its content moderation policies and practices. More specifically, TikTok needs to make public which content is illegal and how to deal with it. For example, accounts that face topics such as racial discrimination, gender opposition, and sexual harassment will be permanently banned.

Secondly, TikTok should regularly meet with relevant lawmakers in Congress or the Supreme Court to express their determination to resolve issues. This proactive approach can lift the veil of secrecy around the company. In addition, TikTok can imitate the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica Scandal, in which Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg testified before Congress to address data privacy issues [13]. Encouraging the CEO to participate in hearings and provide testimony can show that TikTok is willing to comply with US regulations and discuss topics such as data privacy, national security, and social media regulation, which can alleviate some lawmakers' concerns. At the same time, TikTok can also submit detailed written statements to congressional committees. These statements can provide detailed responses to specific questions raised by lawmakers.

Finally, TikTok should strengthen its communication with the public about its data privacy practices. First, through focus groups and questionnaires, TikTok can collect users' specific concerns about their data. Second, TikTok can provide clear and direct explanations by publicly disclosing its data collection and use practices. For example, TikTok insisted in a recent statement that American employees conduct TikTok US's content review, and that the data of all American users is stored in the United States and Singapore [14]. Such transparency will help alleviate users' privacy concerns. In addition, TikTok provides a user-friendly interface that allows users to access, download, and delete their data quickly. Finally,

TikTok can also promote and encourage users to enable two-factor authentication, such as security questions or mobile phone verification codes, to increase the security of their accounts.

## 6 Conclusion

As a user-generated content platform, TikTok has performed well in attracting users and promoting engagement, especially among young people. Through precise content recommendation algorithms and extensive cooperation with social media influencers, TikTok has become an essential platform for brand promotion and marketing activities. However, TikTok faces challenges in data privacy and content regulation, especially in the United States, where conflicts caused by data security issues have affected its public image and business operations. In addition, dealing with false information and harmful content is one of the public relations crises that TikTok must deal with continuously.

In the future, TikTok will continue to face strict regulations from the United States and other countries and may be forced to take more measures to protect user data. As digital media develops, TikTok's role evolves, expanding from an entertainment and social platform to an important business and advertising tool. To stay ahead, TikTok must continue innovating and providing more features and services while improving public relations strategies to maintain user trust and regulatory compliance. Transparent and effective communication, rapid response to public relations crises, and strengthening data protection measures are essential for its long-term development and global expansion. However, this study also has limitations, such as its focus on specific regions such as the United States, which may not provide a comprehensive global perspective. In addition, the rapidly changing digital environment and information dissemination mean that data and observations may quickly become outdated. Future research should expand the search geographical scope and study trends that change over time to further understand user behavior. By addressing these limitations, TikTok can better achieve a sustainable growth strategy in the digital field.

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