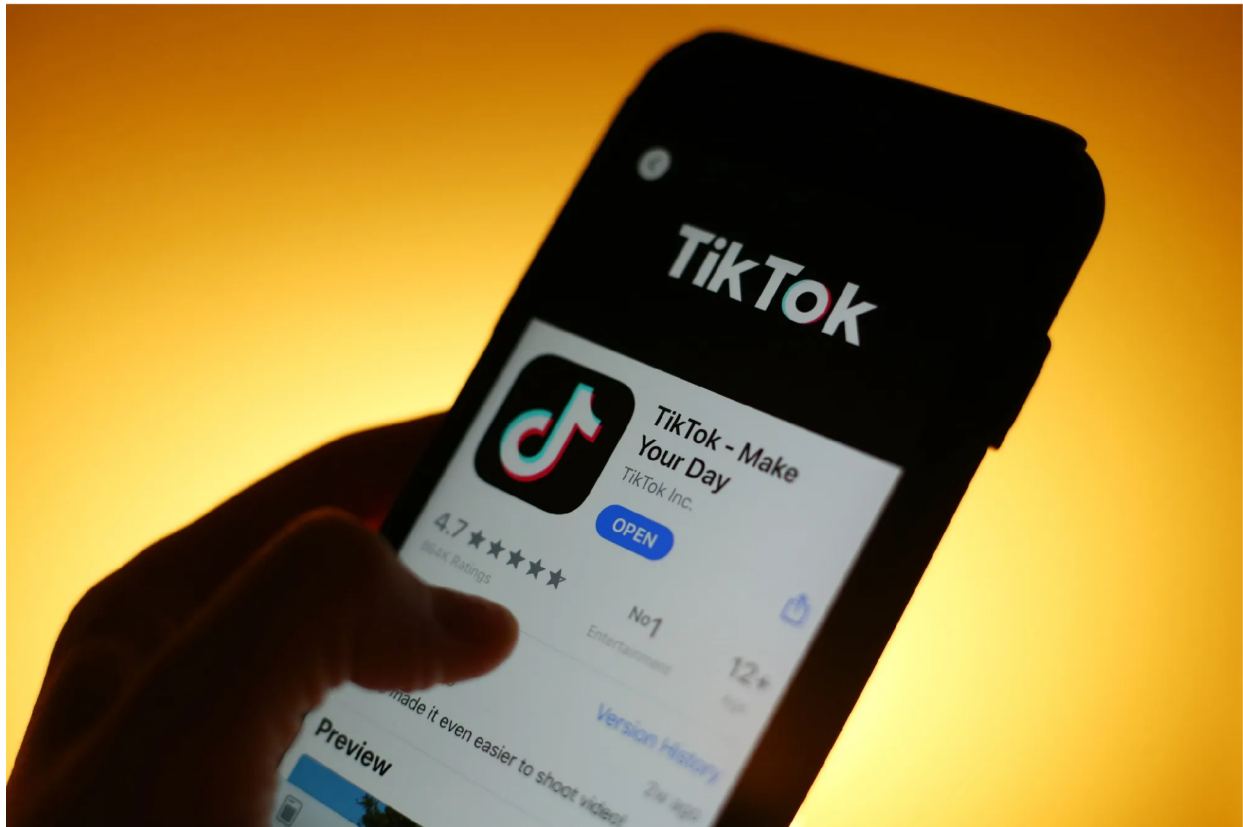


Technology

Gen Z Uses TikTok Like Google, Upsetting the Old Internet Order

- Combination of search, social and fun clips wins over young
- Rivals use upstarts to deflect claims they're anti-competitive



Photographer: Hollie Adams/Bloomberg

By Norah Mulinda and Amina Niasse

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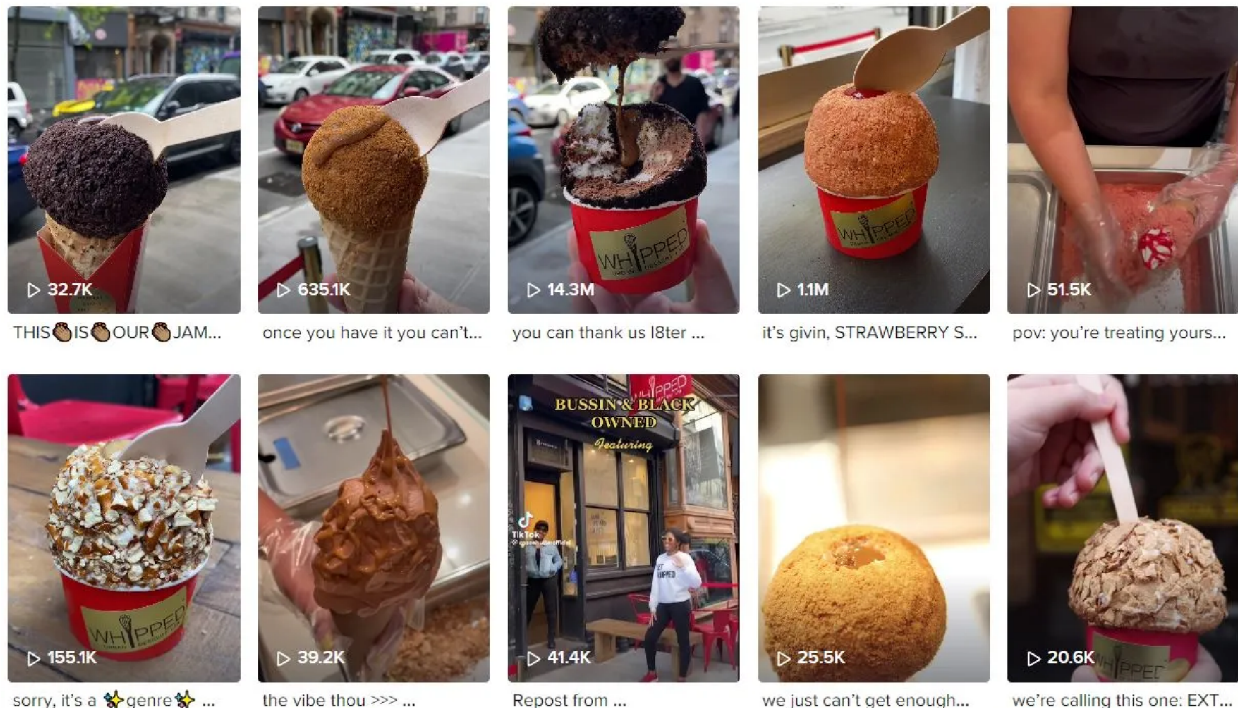
Google is for search. TikTok is for entertainment. At least that's how it used to be.

But for the rising generation of teens and young adults, TikTok is becoming the place to find information, taking on the functions of established internet giants. The service, which boasts more than a billion users, is more than just an app where 10-to-25-year-olds watch video clips, and the older guard is taking notice.

TikTok's sales are forecast to triple to \$12 billion this year, according to EMarketer -- paltry next to Google and Facebook, but big for a 5-year-old company. A third of its users are members of Gen Z, who number 67 million in the U.S. alone. That demographic is still forming shopping habits, making them crucial prospects for advertisers and technology companies. The younger users' affinity for an upstart is also offering tech companies a counterpoint to critics who say they violate antitrust law.

"I wouldn't be in the career position I'm in now at my current job, if it wasn't for TikTok," said Ezinne Ogbonna, 24, a software salesperson in the Dallas area. "I actually found a training program through someone's TikTok, did the training program and then landed the job that I have now."

Roughly 40% of young people today use TikTok or Instagram, owned by Facebook parent Meta Platforms Inc., over Google when searching for lunch recommendations, Prabhakar Raghavan, a Google senior vice president, said in an interview with TechCrunch this month. The data come from a survey of U.S. users ages 18 to 24. The search giant, which is facing multiple antitrust lawsuits, points to such findings to call out the strength of its competition.



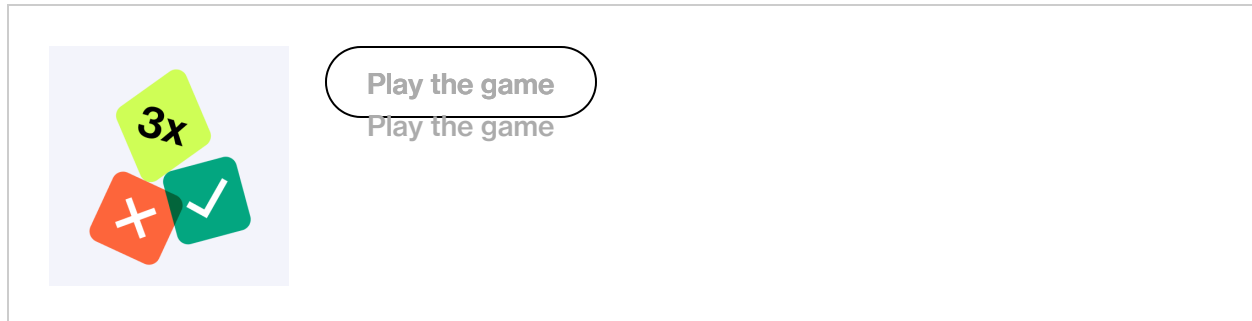
Whipped Urban Dessert Lab TikTok views Source: [tiktok.com/@urbandessertlab](https://www.tiktok.com/@urbandessertlab)

“We keep learning, over and over again, that new internet users don’t have the expectations and the mindset that we have become accustomed to.” Raghavan said in the interview. “The queries they ask are completely different.”

[Read more: Google is remaking search, maps for TikTok generation](#)

That was true for Leia Getahoun, who arrived in New York over the Juneteenth weekend for the start of an internship. With TikTok, the 20-year-old California college senior accessed search results created by average consumers or newly connected friends. The 15-second clips meant she didn’t waste time opening multiple tabs, suffer through longer videos or sort through years-old clippings.

“It’s my first week in New York, and I’m like, ‘OK, where are the good clubs that will have a lot of Black people and good music,’” Getahoun said. “After looking around I went to an event in the city that I found on TikTok and had so much fun, the atmosphere was great.”



Not everyone is so enamored with TikTok, which is owned by China’s [ByteDance Ltd.](#) US regulators have raised questions about whether data on American users ends up in the hands of the Chinese government. Management of the service has [said](#) China-based employees can access information from US users, but denied it goes to the Chinese Communist Party. The app has been [downloaded](#) more than 320 million times in the U.S., according to researcher Sensor Tower.

But for businesses looking to connect with young consumers, a key target for marketers, TikTok provides ready access -- fronted by a “For You Page” where users see recent postings and advertising.

Courtney Blagrove and Zan B.R., founders of Whipped Urban Dessert Lab, the world's first oat-milk ice cream shop, learned first hand how TikTok can help their business. The sisters' store on New York's Lower East Side had been open for just two weeks when the pandemic struck. When they finally got back open, they hired a social media manager to boost their presence on places like TikTok.

Carmel Drizzle

Short clips of caramel sauce being drizzled over a fresh scoop of ice cream or cookie crumbles falling from a cup have attracted more than 73,000 TikTok users to follow the ice-cream alternative.

"Social media was extremely important for us, not only for people to be able to see your product when they can't experience it for themselves, but also for mass messaging," B.R. said.

Nearly a year after ramping up their presence, sales are up 150% from 2021, and the store now serves roughly 500 customers in a day, often with lines wrapping around the corner. Appearing on a user's "For You Page" allows small businesses to attract viewers and potential customers from across the nation and the world.

"It's a business's dream for customers to request your presence," Blagrove said.

To the young users of TikTok, the appeal is the clips -- an entertaining, visual answer to their queries.

"We're just like kids who don't like to read books," said Getahoun, who attends the University of California at Berkeley. "You give them a picture book and suddenly they start seeing the vision."

– *With assistance from Mark Bergen*

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