

# With TikTok's 'heating' tool allegations, are Instagram Reels more reliable?

Article

**TikTok's magic is no longer in its mystery.** The illusion of TikTok content being personalized for users through an all-powerful algorithm is fading.

- Two weeks ago, Forbes reported TikTok's use of a **secret "heating" tool** that allows staff to "hand-pick specific videos and supercharge their distribution." The tool may be used to boost specific influencers and brands, contributing to TikTok's increasingly corporate feel.
- TikTok has offered to share pieces of its algorithm with regulators to win support from lawmakers threatening to ban the platform in the US. But if TikTok is heating content, sharing the algorithm offers limited insight.

**What's at stake?** Overall US influencer marketing spend is growing, up 23.4% in 2023 over last year.

- TikTok's US influencer marketing spend growth will slow from 94.6% last year to 35.5% in 2023, though it's still the fastest-growing platform for creator spend.
- Instagram's influencer spend growth will slow to 23.2% from 27.2% in 2022.
- But Instagram is still way in the lead. It will corner 44.6% of US influencer spend marketing this year compared to TikTok's 17.1%

**TikTok's heating controversy doesn't mean marketers should abandon ship and move to Reels.** It's difficult to know how many Reels users actually exist because of the platform's broader base.

- Instagram's user base outnumbers TikTok's. This year, 133.5 million people in the US will use Instagram compared to 102.4 million TikTok users.
- Most of those Instagram users will be Reels viewers, because any video under 15 minutes **automatically uploads as a Reel** for public accounts.
- But that doesn't mean users are scrolling the Reels tab the same way they use TikTok. Reels aren't the main feature of the photo-sharing app, and **Instagram's head Adam Mosseri** said this month that the platform has overindexed on showing videos.

**What works on TikTok one day might not work the next.**

- TikTok's algorithm has always been a mystery, but marketers and creators were able to identify patterns of what works: short content with an attention-grabbing intro that reads as genuine.
- But if heating allegations are true, even these patterns may not hold up. Content creator **Meredith Dietz** says this has been her experience. "It feels cyclical. Five videos I post in a row

will do really well, and then 10 will do really poorly.”

**Think of TikTok and Reels as two different tools.** Dietz said the sharing culture is different on Instagram versus TikTok.

- “Returns are quicker” on TikTok, she said, meaning creators will know within a few hours if a video has reached the masses. That means if one video doesn’t go viral, creators can simply try again.
- On Instagram, payoff can come a bit later. “Instagram videos for sure have a second and third life in a way that TikTok doesn’t necessarily,” said Dietz, explaining that even several weeks after posting, a video may get a new wave of engagement.

**Marketing on TikTok:** “People will share videos with reckless abandon,” according to Dietz. Weird and experimental content pays off on the platform where two-thirds (67.0%) of users are ages 34 and under.

**Marketing on Instagram Reels:** “Relatable” content is key. People are most interested in sharing content with which they personally identify, rather than videos that exist for pure entertainment.

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