

TikTok's Year in Review: How the App Transformed Social Networking in 2019

And what that means for marketers next year

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Social networks are no longer what they used to be. Case in point: The rise of short video-app TikTok in 2019 is a sure sign that what defines a social network will be very different in 2020.

Since the 2000s, social networks were known as places where internet users could create profiles and interact publicly with a network of contacts. While those are still core characteristics, the meteoric rise of TikTok in 2019 has been a major factor in redefining the space.

While TikTok users can create a profile and interact with a network of contacts (which makes it a social network in our definition), the primary activity is watching or creating short videos. That makes TikTok part of a new type of “social entertainment” that’s capturing the attention of teens and young adults worldwide.

According to a September 2019 survey by Morning Consult, TikTok was used by about the same percentage of US internet users ages 13 to 16 as Instagram and Twitter. Overall, more than one-fifth (22%) of US Gen Z and millennial internet users used TikTok.

Social Media Platforms Used by US Gen Z and Millennial Internet Users, by Demographic, Sep 2019

% of respondents in each group

	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram	Snapchat	Twitter	Twitch	TIKTOK
Gender							
Male	95%	70%	69%	53%	50%	34%	21%
Female	92%	78%	79%	64%	42%	12%	23%
Age							
13-16	98%	79%	41%	68%	40%	31%	42%
17-21	97%	84%	68%	74%	52%	26%	32%
22-26	93%	75%	85%	63%	47%	23%	15%
27-31	92%	73%	88%	50%	49%	20%	12%
32-38	89%	61%	84%	40%	41%	15%	10%
Total	94%	74%	74%	71%	46%	23%	22%

Source: Morning Consult, "The Influencer Report: Engaging Gen Z and Millennials," Nov 5, 2019

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TikTok’s rapid growth has caused older consumers and industry experts to scratch their heads. [Leaked audio of a July internal meeting](#) showed Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg comparing TikTok with Instagram’s Explore tab—a place where users can discover personalized content from Instagram. That caused observers to question whether Zuckerberg fully understood the app and if Facebook could maintain its dominance. To be fair, TikTok’s algorithmically driven “For You” tab also shows personalized content, but the makeup of the content (often 15-second selfie-style videos) bears little resemblance to Instagram.

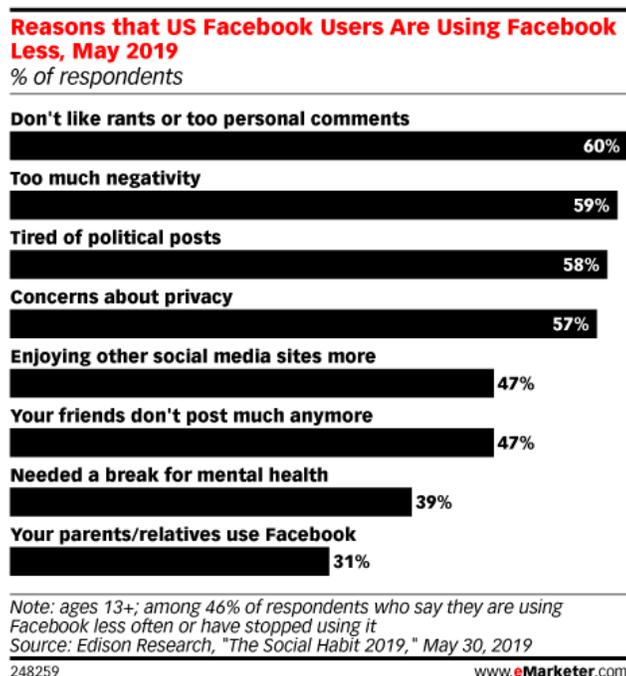
Despite that, Facebook has stayed well ahead. As the Morning Consult study shows, it is still used by a greater percentage of young users than TikTok, though it is losing users in the 12 to 24 age group, according to our latest forecast. Then there’s sister-app Instagram, which will continue to make up for Facebook’s losses among younger US generations.

But time spent on Facebook is declining, and the growing popularity of TikTok may help to explain why. Instead of sharing status updates, photos and links to articles (the type of content that typically appears in a user’s Facebook News Feed), TikTok users create content primarily to entertain their audiences.

In December 2019, TikTok released the TikTok 100, its ranking of the top videos, genres, creators and memes over the past year. The list

gives deeper insight into what exactly makes TikTok tick: fun, lighthearted content like a video of someone trying Kombucha for the first time or a man performing surgery on a banana—all set to background music, of course.

That's in stark contrast to traditional social networks like Facebook, which tend to be more serious and at times, negative. In fact, too much negativity was one of the leading reasons that US Facebook users ages 13 and older were using Facebook less in a May 2019 survey by Edison Research, cited by 59%. Not liking rants or too personal comments was the most-cited response.



At the same time, TikTok has also brought about a new wave of amateur content creators, many of whom have amassed followings that rival those of the more-polished influencers on other social platforms. According to the TikTok 100, this year's top creators were primarily ordinary teenagers who have risen to "TikTok fame." That's thanks to the app's algorithm that **serves viewers content even before it has proven engagement**, meaning that any user could become "TikTok famous" regardless of their follower count, likes or shares.

Other social apps also algorithmically recommend content to users based on previous viewing habits, but they prioritize content with high engagement rates. That's how the "Explore tab" on Instagram works, for example, making it harder for a regular person with a smaller following to get discovered there than may be the case on TikTok.

The jury may still be out on whether TikTok can sustain its success, but its impact on the social media landscape is not in question. In 2020 and beyond, marketers will have to grapple with how to develop content that resonates with social users who prioritize entertainment and authenticity over practicality and celebrity.

To learn more about marketing opportunities on TikTok, eMarketer PRO subscribers can read our recent report:

Report by Debra Aho Williamson Oct 30, 2019

Marketing on TikTok

MARKETING ON TIKTOK

Separating Fact and Fiction About This Buzzy Short-Video App

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