STATE OF WISCONSIN CIRCUIT COURT DANE COUNTY

STATE OF WISCONSIN
17 W. Main Street
Post Office Box 7857
Madison, Wisconsin 53707

Plaintiff,

v.

Case No. 26-CX-___
Complex Forfeiture: 30109

TIKTOK INC.
5800 Bristol Parkway, Suite 100
Culver City, California 90230

TIKTOK LTD.

TIKTOK PTE. LTD.
1 Raffles Quay, #26-10
South Tower, Singapore 048583

TIKTOK USDS JOINT VENTURE LLC
5800 Bristol Parkway, Suite 300
Culver City, California 90230

BYTEDANCE LTD.
P.O. Box 309
Ugand House South Church Street
George Town, KY1-1104
Cayman Islands

BYTEDANCE INC.
250 Bryant Street
Mountain View, California 94041

Defendants.

COMPLAINT

If you require the assistance of auxiliary aids or services because of a disability, call (608) 266-4311 (TTY -- 711) and ask for the Dane county circuit court ADA coordinator.

The State of Wisconsin (hereinafter "State" or "Plaintiff"), by its attorneys, Attorney General Joshua L. Kaul, Assistant Attorney General Brittany A. Copper, and Assistant Attorney General Colin T. Roth, brings this action against Defendants TikTok Inc., TikTok Ltd., TikTok Pte. Ltd., TikTok U.S. Data Security Inc., TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC, ByteDance Ltd., and ByteDance, Inc. (hereinafter collectively "TikTok"). The State alleges that TikTok violated Wisconsin's Deceptive Trade Practices Act, Wis. Stat. § 100.18(1), and created a public nuisance, and seeks injunctive relief, restitution, civil forfeitures, supplemental civil forfeitures, an amount reasonably necessary to remedy the harmful effects of the violation, abatement of the nuisance, reimbursement for the cost of Wisconsin's abatement efforts, and costs and fees for investigation and prosecution.

Introduction

1. TikTok, one of the largest social media platforms in the world, engineers its social media app (TikTok App) to be addictive, and markets the TikTok App to children. TikTok also misleads Wisconsin consumers about the safety of its TikTok App and the nature of the content available on its platform.

2. TikTok has over 1 billion users worldwide,[1] and over 200 million users in the United States.[2] A significant portion of TikTok's users is under 18 years old, and many users are under 13, including in Wisconsin. These users, including children, are key to TikTok's multibillion dollar revenue stream.

3. TikTok's business model is predicated upon compelling its users to spend as much time as possible on the TikTok App. In TikTok's own words, "[t]he advertising-based business model encourages optimization for time spent in the app" and "create[s] incentives for companies to grow at the expense of their users." TikTok monitors the amount of time users spend on the TikTok App down to the minute, and imposes strict limitations on any platform changes, including safety changes, that could decrease stay time because every minute spent on the TikTok App increases the profitability and its bottom line.

4. The TikTok App works much like a slot machine. It employs a variety of features which its own employees have described as "coercive design tactics." Addictive design features include the Recommendation Engine algorithm, infinite scroll, video auto-play, push notifications, and TikTok Live. These TikTok App design features foster psychological dependence and take advantage of some of the same dopamine-inducing strategies employed by the gambling industry—they are designed

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[1] *Thanks a Billion!*, TikTok: Newsroom (Sept. 27, 2021), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/1-billion-people-on-tiktok?lang=en [https://perma.cc/KS2C-T37S].

[2] *Announcement from the New TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC*, TikTok: Newsroom (Jan. 23, 2026), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/announcement-from-the-new-tiktok-usds-joint-venture-llc?lang=en [https://perma.cc/5595-37PJ].

to be addictive so that users keep coming back and spending as much time as possible on TikTok's product.

5. This is particularly harmful for children. As internal TikTok documents note, the TikTok App "is particularly popular with younger users, who ... have minimal ability to self-regulate effectively" and "do not have executive function to control their screen time[.]"[3]

6. TikTok has known for years that excessive, compulsive, and addictive use of the TikTok App is harmful to children and teenagers. Its executives admit that "[t]he product in itself has baked into it compulsive use"[4] and that the algorithm might impact young users' opportunities to sleep, eat, and interact with others.[5] Despite its full knowledge of the potential for serious harm, including sleep deprivation, depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicide, and death, TikTok deliberately and successfully targets its product to minors as a core demographic. As a result, young users, including young Wisconsinites, use the TikTok platform at extremely high rates and suffer because of it.

7. TikTok misrepresents to users and the public the nature of its product and the risks associated with it. For example, TikTok misrepresents the frequency and severity of alcohol, tobacco, and drug content, sexual content, nudity, mature/suggestive themes, and profanity on the TikTok App as mild/infrequent when

[3] TT-MS-AG-000229158.
[4] TT-MS-AG-000285717, at 51:42.
[5] TT-MS-AG-000285717, at 49:24.

it is frequent and intense. Likewise, it misrepresents the age-rating in the Apple App Store, Google Play, and Microsoft stores. TikTok also misrepresents the effectiveness of Restricted Mode and Family Pairing, and its enforcement of Community Guidelines. Moreover, it misrepresents the safety of the TikTok App to users as young as 13 years old, despite knowing that young people are harmed by its design features.

8. TikTok misleads Wisconsin users about the safety of its platform while it intentionally implements "coercive design tactics" that manipulate young users to increase their habitual use of the platform and exploit young users' inability to self-regulate. Likewise, TikTok executives and employees know about the harms of increased screen time: that "compulsive usage correlates with a slew of negative mental effects" and "interferes with . . . sufficient sleep, work/school responsibilities, and connecting with loved ones."

9. In response to criticism, TikTok implemented certain tools that it claims help users reduce the time they spend on the platform and other harms caused by the algorithm. But TikTok's representations regarding these tools are also misleading and false: TikTok knows that these measures are ineffective, either because only a tiny percent of its users actually use those tools; because the tools do not work as advertised; or because the tools do not meaningfully reduce users' time spent on TikTok or prevent other harms.

10. While TikTok's user base and corporate revenue have soared, children's mental health, including the mental health of children in Wisconsin, has suffered.

Wisconsin and the United States as a whole are experiencing what the United States Surgeon General called a "youth mental health crisis"[6]

11. Excessive use of social media platforms, including the TikTok App, contributes to a growing youth mental health crisis for Wisconsin. The number of Wisconsin teens experiencing a major depressive episode and those considering or attempting suicide is increasing. The number of teens with anxiety, or those reporting feeling sad or hopeless is also rising. And there has been a substantial increase in the rate of young adults who have a mental illness.[7]

12. TikTok deceives its users into believing that the TikTok App is far safer for children than it is. It falsely portrays the TikTok App as a safe place where young users and parents can easily control their engagement. None of this is true. Children using the TikTok App are pitted against exploitative and manipulative design features that cause behavioral, emotional, and physical harm.

13. The State thus now brings this action to remedy and end TikTok's unlawful behavior and the ensuing harm to the children of Wisconsin.

Parties

14. The Plaintiff, the State of Wisconsin, has its principal offices located in Madison, Wisconsin. The address of the Wisconsin Department of Justice is 17 West

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[6] Off. Surgeon Gen., *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory* (2023), https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf.

[7] Wis. Off. Child.'s Mental Health, *Belonging 2025 Annual Report* 9, https://children.wi.gov/Documents/ResearchData/Annual%20Report%202025_pages%20-%20Online%20links.pdf [https://perma.cc/62UM-AQJF].

Main Street, Post Office Box 7857, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7857. The Wisconsin Department of Justice brings this action in the name of the State.

15. Defendant TikTok Inc. is a for-profit entity incorporated in California. It operates a social media application and platform known as "TikTok." TikTok Inc. is headquartered at 5800 Bristol Parkway, Culver City, California 90230.

16. Defendant TikTok Ltd. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of ByteDance Ltd. and is incorporated in the Cayman Islands. TikTok Ltd. is the parent company of wholly-owned U.S. subsidiaries TikTok Pte. Ltd. and TikTok Inc. Apple's App Store lists TikTok Ltd. as the developer of the TikTok app.

17. Defendant TikTok Pte. Ltd. is an entity headquartered at 1 Raffles Quay, #26-10, South Tower, Singapore 048583. Apple's App Store lists TikTok Pte. Ltd. as the "seller" of the TikTok App. The Microsoft Store lists TikTok Pte. Ltd. as the publisher of the TikTok app. The Google Play Store identifies TikTok Pte. Ltd. as the developer and provider of the app.

18. Defendant ByteDance Inc. is a for-profit entity incorporated in Delaware and wholly-owned by ByteDance Ltd. ByteDance Inc. is headquartered at 250 Bryant Street, Mountain View, California 94041.

19. Defendant ByteDance Ltd. is a multinational internet technology holding company and parent company of TikTok Ltd., TikTok Pte. Ltd., TikTok Inc., and ByteDance Inc. ByteDance Ltd. is headquartered in Room 503 5F, Building 2, 43 North Third Ring West Road, Beijing 100086 China and maintains a registered

address in the Cayman Islands at P.O. Box 309, Ugand House, South Church Street, George Town, KY1-1104, Cayman Islands.

20. Defendant TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC is a Delaware limited liability company and successor entity to some portion of TikTok's U.S. operations. TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC was formed in January 2026 to assume responsibility for portions of TikTok's operations in the United States following the required divestiture of ByteDance Ltd.'s interests in those operations. ByteDance Ltd. retains a 19.9% ownership interest in the joint venture. TikTok has represented that TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC will continue operating TikTok in the United States, retrain and update the content recommendation algorithm using U.S. user data, safeguard the U.S. content ecosystem, and have decision making authority over content moderation and trust and safety policies.

21. TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC continues TikTok's U.S. operations and maintains continuity of same business enterprise, including substantially the same employees, customers, and purpose. It had actual or constructive notice of the State's claims before or at the time of the restructuring transactions.

22. TikTok transferred portions of its U.S. workforce to the joint venture; TikTok Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Shou Zi Chew serves on its board; and its CEO, Adam Presser, previously held executive positions at TikTok and TikTok U.S. Data Security Inc.

23. There is no separation between and among the ByteDance and TikTok Defendant entities. ByteDance Ltd. exercises control over TikTok Inc., TikTok Ltd.,

TikTok Pte. Ltd., TikTok U.S. Data Security, and ByteDance Inc., which are its alter egos. ByteDance Ltd. created portions of the platform's source code and TikTok's algorithm, which it still owns.[8] ByteDance Ltd. has participated in selecting TikTok's key personnel. High-level employees have held simultaneous positions within ByteDance and other TikTok entities. For example, in April 2021, Shou Zi Chew was appointed TikTok's CEO while also serving as ByteDance Ltd.'s Chief Financial Officer. He reports to ByteDance Ltd.'s CEO. Former TikTok and ByteDance employees have likewise described ByteDance Ltd.'s functional control over TikTok entities and their personnel.[9]

24. Defendant entities have and continue to conduct the business practices described herein through a common enterprise of interrelated companies that have common ownership, officers, managers, business functions, addresses, and employees that engaged in a common scheme.

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[8] *TikTok Inc. v. Garland*, 604 U.S. 56, 63 (2025) (per curiam) ("ByteDance Ltd. owns TikTok's proprietary algorithm, which is developed and maintained in China."); Letter from Shou Zi Chew, Chief Exec. Officer, TikTok, to U.S. Sens. 4 (June 30, 2022), https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/tik-tok-s-response-to-republican-senators/e5f56d3ef4886b33/full.pdf [https://perma.cc/C96W-V5JH]; Zhou Xin & Tracy Qu, *TikTok's Algorithm Not for Sale, ByteDance Tells US*, S. China Morning Post (Sept. 13, 2020), https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3101362/tiktoks-algorithm-not-sale-bytedance-tells-us-source [https://perma.cc/LNK2-48CC].

[9] Drew Harwell & Elizabeth Dwoskin, *As Washington Wavers on TikTok, Beijing Exerts Control*, Wash. Post (Oct. 30, 2022), https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2022/bytedance-tiktok-privacy-china/; *TikTok Names CEO and COO*, TikTok: Newsroom (Apr. 30, 2021), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/tiktok-names-ceo-and-coo?lang=en (announcing that ByteDance CFO Shou Zi Chew would simultaneously serve as TikTok's CEO).

Jurisdiction, Venue, and Tolling

25. This action is brought pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 100.18(11)(d) to enjoin and restrain violations of Wis. Stat. § 100.18(1), a Wisconsin law prohibiting false, deceptive, and misleading representations.

26. This action is further brought pursuant to the Attorney General's authority under Wis. Stats. §§ 832.01 and 832.02, as an action to enjoin and abate a public nuisance.

27. This Court has personal jurisdiction over TikTok under Wis. Stat. §§ 801.05(1)(d), (3), and (4). TikTok has engaged in substantial business contacts within the State of Wisconsin and has directed its deceptive marketing at consumers in Wisconsin.

28. Venue is proper in Dane County, Wisconsin under Wis. Stat. § 801.50(2)(a).

29. The State of Wisconsin and TikTok, Inc. entered into a written agreement tolling any applicable statute of limitations during the period of March 2, 2022, to June 1, 2024.

Facts

A. The TikTok platform.

30. TikTok operates a social media platform that centers on short videos created and uploaded by users, often set to popular music, which TikTok makes available in its music library. The TikTok platform is available via a web browser on the internet or as an application to download on smartphones and tablets. Most users

download the TikTok App. Users can download the TikTok App from the Apple App Store, the Google Play Store, or the Microsoft Store. The TikTok App was the most downloaded app globally in 2022.

31. At various points in time, consumers have been able to access the TikTok platform and view content without registering for an account or going through TikTok's age verification system.

32. To register to use the TikTok App, users must provide a birthday. TikTok permits users as young as 13 years old (as self-reported) to create an account and access the TikTok App. Users can only access the TikTok App if they entered a birthday that indicates they are at least 13 years old. TikTok knows which users have stated, via entering a birthdate, that they are 17 years old or younger.

33. When opening the TikTok App, a user lands on the TikTok App's "For You feed." The For You feed is a never-ending stream of videos personalized for the user by TikTok's algorithm (the Recommendation Engine).

34. Users of the TikTok App can also search for content using keywords and hashtags.[10] When a user types in the TikTok App's search bar, the "Autocomplete" function will suggest search results.

35. TikTok publishes "Community Guidelines," a set of rules governing the content users are allowed to post on the TikTok App. TikTok relies on "content

[10] On social media, a hashtag is the "#" sign in front of a word or phrase that users create to categorize a post by topic. A search for a hashtag will result in posts tagged with that term.

moderation" to police the Community Guidelines. Moderation is carried out through artificial intelligence and human moderators.

B. TikTok creates and utilizes design features it knows sacrifices children's health and well-being.

36. TikTok's model, like those of other social media companies, is based on the monetization of its users: sell access and information about its users to advertisers and companies so they can sell their product and services. In addition to selling targeted ads, TikTok runs an ecommerce platform. Every user, and every minute that user spends on TikTok's platform, helps generate revenue for TikTok. The result is a business model based on user engagement: the more users on a platform, and the more time a user spends on the platform, the more ads the platform can sell and the more information it can collect.

37. A large portion of TikTok's U.S. user base is children. In July 2020, TikTok reported that more than one-third of its 49 million daily users in the United States were 14 or younger.[11] More recently, a 2024 Pew Research Center Survey reported that the majority (63%) of teenagers (age 13–17) use the TikTok App, with most (57%) of teens using TikTok daily.[12] Almost a fifth (17%) of American teens describe using the TikTok App "almost constantly."[13]

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[11] Raymond Zhong & Sheera Frenkel, *A Third of TikTok's U.S. Users May Be 14 or Under, Raising Safety Questions*, N.Y. Times (Aug. 14, 2020), https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/14/technology/tiktok-underage-users-ftc.html.

[12] Michelle Faverio & Olivia Sidoti, *Teens, Social Media and Technology* 2024, Pew Rsch. Ctr. (Dec. 12, 2024), https://www.pewresearch.org/internet /2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023/ [https://perma.cc/AGU8-QGZW].

[13] *Id.*

38. Internal documents reveal that U.S. children average nearly two hours a day on the TikTok platform, with many spending more than four hours a day on TikTok's platform.

39. Young users are especially critical to TikTok's business. Indeed, a report commissioned by TikTok to assess the value of the TikTok App for businesses found that TikTok is "undeniably powerful at reaching younger audiences[.]"[14] And internal documents showed that younger generations opened the TikTok App more frequently, spent longer time on it, and had higher engagement than older generations. Minors spend 25% more time on the TikTok App than adults. TikTok employees described how certain minor safety features, like stronger age-verification, were "hard to sell" internally "as it will negatively impact growth."

1. The TikTok App's core design features are coercive and induce overuse, which harms children.

40. The TikTok App is highly addictive because TikTok intended it to be so.

41. TikTok's business model creates a strong incentive to encourage addictive behavior to increase user retention and time spent on its platform. Researchers studying the effect that social media has on the brain have shown that social media exploits "the same neural circuitry" as "seen in those with gambling

[14] Kantar, *The Power of TikTok: Achieving Breakthrough Brand Building with TikTok*, TikTok for Bus., https://www.tiktok.com/business/library/the-power-of-tiktok.pdf [https://perma.cc/4FMN-VCNN] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

addiction and recreational drug users" to "keep consumers using their products as much as possible."[15]

42. TikTok knows that social media apps that rely on advertising-based business models—like its own—use coercive design features that induce users into spending as much time on the apps as possible. Indeed, a June 2021 internal "Digital Wellbeing" product strategy document acknowledged:

> Mistakes made by first generation social media companies have become clear as we have uncovered that ad-based models create incentives for companies to grow at the expense of their users. Infinite scroll, video auto-play, and constant notifications are some of the powerful coercive design tactics that we are realizing tend to benefit companies and advertisers more than users.

43. Yet, TikTok built these exact coercive design features described below—Recommendation Engine, infinite scroll, autoplay, and push notifications—that employ the same neurobiological reward tactics.

44. As a 2022 product strategy document on "Digital Wellbeing" from its Trust and Safety team admits: "[t]he TikTok product experience utilizes many coercive design tactics that detract from user agency such as infinite scroll, constant notifications, and the 'slot machine' effect."

45. TikTok knowingly created platform features intended to cause excessive, compulsive, and addictive use, despite knowing that young people are more susceptible to—and acutely harmed by—those features. Such design features, include

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[15] Jena Hilliard, *Social Media Addiction*, Addiction Ctr. (Sept. 9, 2026), https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/social-media-addiction/ [https://perma.cc/EPU2-AHK8].

(1) its Recommendation Engine; (2) infinite scroll; (3) auto play; (4) push notifications; and (5) and LIVE.

a. Recommendation Engine

46. TikTok's Recommendation Engine and For You feed are the heart of its addictive platform features. The Recommendation Engine is a complex series of algorithms that powers the For You feed. The For You feed delivers users an endless stream auto-playing videos that the Recommendation Engine predicts will keep them on the TikTok App. The Recommendation Engine is content-agonistic or, in TikTok's own words "content-neutral," i.e., it "recommends videos to users based on content-neutral user and community behavior."[16] According to TikTok, this feed is "central to the TikTok experience and where most of our users spend their time."[17]

47. The Recommendation Engine pervades almost every aspect of a user's experience with the TikTok App, including following friends and creators, shopping, and going "LIVE."[18]

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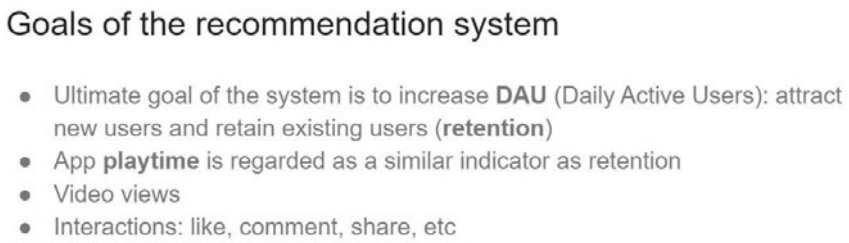
[16] TTI-AG-LIT-009304480, at slide 4. As described in an internal TikTok document, the recommendation system's "algorithm doesn't care about the content—it doesn't have an agenda. It doesn't qualitatively understand" the content. TTI-AG-LIT-009644333. Another internal document similarly espouses TikTok's recommendation system as "content-neutral" because "it recommends content based on behavioral and certain device signals, not on the semantic nature of the content itself," "[d]oes not promote or suppress particular political agendas, views, or content," and "[d]oes not 'understand' content." TTI-AG-LIT-009304480, at slide 33 (emphasis removed).

[17] *How TikTok Recommends Videos #ForYou*, TikTok: Newsroom (June 18, 2020), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/how-tiktok-recommends-videos-for-you?lang=en [https://perma.cc/H5B5-8JAC].

[18] *How TikTok Recommends Content*, TikTok: Help Center, https://www.tiktok.com/support/faq_detail?id=7655285288050104852&category=web_account [https://perma.cc/49VP-5GL5] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

48. TikTok's Recommendation Engine is carefully designed with a clear end goal: to maximize use by trapping a user's attention and minimizing their ability to control the time they spend on the TikTok App—in other words, to addict users.

49. TikTok sets forth these goals in an internal "Onboarding Presentation" that describes the "[g]oals of the recommendation system" as increasing how long users spend on the TikTok platform and how often they engage with it:[19]



50. An internal document titled *TikTok Algo 101*, "explains frankly that in the pursuit of the company's 'ultimate goal' of adding daily active users, it has chosen to optimize for two closely related metrics in the stream of videos it serves: 'retention'—that is, whether a user comes back—and 'time spent.'"[20]

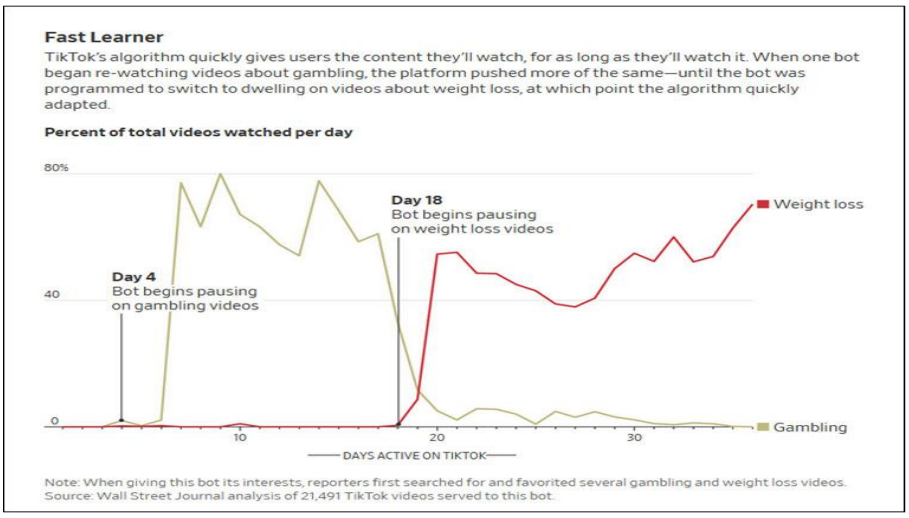
51. This algorithmic encouragement of continuous scrolling and interaction makes it hard for users to disengage from the platform. A TikTok-funded study, which imaged the brains of users of the TikTok App and other social media platform, found

[19] TT-MS-AG-000201228, at slide 5.

[20] Ben Smith, *How TikTok Reads Your Mind*, N.Y. Times (Dec. 5, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/05/business/media/tiktok-algorithm.html.

that users engaged with the TikTok App about 10 times a minute, twice as often as with peer apps.[21]

52. As the Recommendation Engine learns from and refines what users see, one especially pernicious technique TikTok's Engine uses to keep users engaged is trapping them in "filter bubbles"—rabbit holes of a single type of content. These bubbles form when the Recommendation Engine learns that a user is more likely to engage with a specific type of video and then reinforces them by recommending even more versions of those videos—stringing them together in an endless reel, making it especially difficult for users to disengage and overloading the brain's reward system. *See* Figure A below, from the *Wall Street Journal*, showing how quickly a user can become trapped into compulsively using the TikTok App by a filter bubble.[22]



(Figure A.)

[21] *TikTok Ads Break Through Better Than TV and Drive Greater Audience Engagement*, TikTok for Bus., https://www.tiktok.com/business/library/TikTokDrivesGreaterAudienceEngagement.pdf [https://perma.cc/ZE5Z-CLHH] (last visited Oct. 13, 2026).

[22] Tawnell D. Hobbs et al., '*The Corpse Bride Diet': How TikTok Inundates Teens with Eating-Disorder Videos*, Wall St. J. (Dec. 17, 2021, at 10:45 ET), https://www.wsj.com/tech/how-tiktok-inundates-teens-with-eating-disorder-videos-11639754848.

53. Internally, TikTok's documents show that algorithms like its Recommendation Engine are designed to "maximize engagement," and can lead users to filter bubbles of harmful content. For example, in an internal test in 2023, TikTok employees used test profile for a 16-year-old boy located in the United States on the live platform in real time. They found that a dense filter bubble of suicide, self-harm, and eating disorder content formed after approximately 1.5 hours of scrolling and using search terms containing keywords related to those harms.

b. Infinite scroll

54. Infinite scroll is a coercive design tactic that induces users' compulsive use of the TikTok App. Infinite scroll is a feature where the TikTok App automatically and constantly loads new videos in an endless stream without ever reaching a "last" video.

55. Endless scrolling causes young users to spend more time on the platform by making it harder to disengage. This perpetual stream is designed to "keep [users] scrolling, and purposely eliminate any reason for [them] to pause, reconsider or leave."[23] The user's experience is a continuous "state of flow" that immerses users, distorts their perception of time, and is associated with problematic use of social media platforms.[24]

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[23] Von Tristan Harris, *The Slot Machine in Your Pocket*, Der Spiegel (July 27, 2016, at 17:25 PM), https://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/smartphone-addiction-is-part-of-the-design-a-1104237.html [https://perma.cc/3DWQ-Q6PJ].

[24] Yao Qin et al., *Flow Experience Is a Key Factor in the Likelihood of Adolescents' Problematic TikTok Use: The Moderating Role of Active Parental Mediation,* Int'l J. Env't

56. Internal documents show that "continuous scroll [and] few or no breaks between content" makes it more difficult for users to manage their time spent on the platform. [25] Yet TikTok intentionally maintains those features to encourage more time spent on the platform.

57. Children are particularly susceptible to the effects of infinite scroll because their brains are more vulnerable to the dopamine hits delivered by the variable rewards they may discover if they just keep scrolling; and they naturally lack the impulse control necessary to stop even when their continuous scrolling interferes with daily needs or responsibilities.[26]

c. Autoplay

58. Another feature is called "Autoplay," which means that a video automatically begins to play in the users' For You feed when the user launches the TikTok App. This feature is designed to immediately grab the user's attention and immerse them into the platform.

59. The autoplay feature encourages young users to continuously watch video because it does not require user intervention to choose to view a video. This

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Rsch. & Pub. Health 1, 1, 14 (2023), https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9915640/pdf/ijerph-20-02089.pdf.

[25] TT-MS-AG-000200103 at -109.

[26] *See* Baroness Kidron et al., 5Rights Found, *Disrupted Childhood: The Cost of Persuasive Design* 20 (June 2018), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329035489_Disrupted_Childhood_The_cost_of_Persuasive_design.

reduces so-called "friction" in the user experience and keeps young users on the platform for longer periods of time.

60. TikTok employees internally tested Autoplay in chats and determined that it boosted user sharing and play duration.[27] TikTok deploys Autoplay to exploit young users' novelty-seeking minds and their especially strong desire to see new activity. TikTok does not allow users to disable the Autoplay feature.

d. Push Notifications

61. Push notifications are TikTok-created signals that display on a user's device to alert the user of activity on the platform to prompt a return to or continued use of the TikTok App. Push notifications are integral to TikTok's business goal of prolonging youth time spent on the platform.

62. TikTok's design relies on well-understood neurological and psychological phenomena, including using sounds and vibrations to trigger sudden dopamine releases and preying on youth's social sensitivity and fear of missing out on seeing new activity.[28]

63. TikTok employees observe that the overarching goal of push notifications is "to encourage users to open the App more and stay longer[.]" TikTok operationalized this goal by creating a variety of push notifications, to "[f]ind the best

[27] TT-MS-AG-000268398.

[28] *See* Trevor Haynes, *Dopamine, Smartphones & You: A Battle for Your Time*, Harvard Univ.: Science in the News (May 1, 2018), https://archive.ph/9MMhY [https://perma.cc/7HTS-5W7Y].

push time and the best push count for every user to maximize [daily active users] and retention."

64. TikTok also utilizes the concept of variable reward schedules—the same psychological mechanism that underlies the addictive nature of slot machines—in deploying its push notifications. Variable rewards provide positive stimuli at random, unpredictable intervals interspersed with neutral stimuli. When a positive stimulus is received (*e.g.*, a notification that someone "liked" your post), it creates a psychologically pleasing dopamine release, keeping a user in a feedback loop to continually check the app for more rewarding stimuli.[29]

e. TikTok Live & TikTok Stories

65. Another addictive feature is TikTok LIVE which allows users to broadcast and watch live videos. TikTok LIVE is extremely popular. In 2022, of the 83 million daily U.S. TikTok App users, 20% watched LIVE every day. Over 110,000 U.S. TikTok App users streamed themselves on LIVE every day, for, on average, one hour every day. TikTok has described LIVE viewers as a "committed" user base, with 62% of them watching it daily.[30]

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[29] Rasan Burhan & Jalal Moradzadeh, *Neurotransmitter Dopamine (DA) and its Role in the Development of Social Media Addiction*, 11 J. NEUROLOGY & NEUROPHYSIOLOGY 1, 1–2 (2020), https://www.iomcworld.org/open-access/neurotransmitter-dopamine-da-and-its-role-in-the-development-of-social-media-addiction-59222.html [https://perma.cc/KS3X-HH4J].

[30] *Growing Your Community with TikTok LIVE*, TikTok for Bus. (July 19, 2022), https://ads.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/growing-community-tiktok-live [https://perma.cc/MY2W-JTDS].

66. By default, TikTok LIVE content is available only once, while the creator livestreams. This ephemeral nature of TikTok LIVE videos encourages users to visit and remain on the platform longer. Other features of TikTok LIVE, including virtual cash contributions (buying virtual "Coins" to purchase virtual "Gifts") and the ability to earn rewards that can be cashed out, serve to gamify the feature and further addict users.

67. Although LIVE has a current hosting minimum age of 18 (previously 16), TikTok knows its lax age verification measures allow kids access. Further, all TikTok App users, including minors, can view the ephemeral LIVE videos.

68. TikTok Stories is another ephemeral feature that drives young users to visit and remain on the TikTok App. TikTok Stories are short videos that vanish after 24 hours. By design, this rapidly disappearing content pressures users to check the TikTok platform more frequently.

2. TikTok knows the TikTok App's design harms children's health, safety, and well-being.

69. TikTok markets itself to minors and reassures parents even though its employees internally acknowledged that "[s]ocial media is inherently dangerous and all minors are at risk when they engage on the platform."

70. TikTok's targeted focus on increasing young users' time on its platform is no accident: internal TikTok documents note that young users are "more easily persuaded" than adults; that they "likely don't understand risks of unhealthy usage

as well as older users", and that they "are particularly sensitive to reinforcement in the form of social reward and have minimal ability to self-regulate effectively[.]"

71. Adolescence, ages 10 to 19, is a highly sensitive and vulnerable period of brain development and when risk-taking behaviors peak.[31] Adolescents are still developing executive function, related to their ability to regulate time management, attention, and impulse control, well into their early twenties.[32] And adolescent brains are sensitive to rewards, [33] including social rewards and punishments.[34]

72. The TikTok App's "coercive design tactics" are particularly effective at enticing younger users, as such users "have minimal ability to self-regulate effectively."

73. TikTok's design choices exploit teens sensitivities to rewards by using variable rewards that produce dopamine rushes. The report *Disrupted Childhood*: *The Cost of Persuasive Design,* co-authored by a future TikTok executive Alexandra Evans, explained how "[v]ariable rewards hold a special thrill, as the user anticipates a reward that they know could come," which cause "individuals [to] experience a dopamine rush as they anticipate the unknown outcome."[35]

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[31] Off. Surgeon Gen., *supra* note 6, at 5.

[32] Nat'l Acads., *Social Media and Adolescent Health* 51 (2024), https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/27396/chapter/4#51.

[33] *Id.*

[34] *See* Maria T. Maza et. al., *Association of Habitual Checking Behaviors on Social Media With Longitudinal Functional Brain Development,* 177 JAMA Pediatrics 160 (2023), https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2799812.

[35] Baroness Kidron et al., *supra* note 26 at 20.

74. In a 2021 "Digital Wellbeing Product Strategy," TikTok employees highlighted "Compulsive Usage and Lack of Agency" as a "User Problem[]" because "compulsive usage on TikTok is rampant."

75. That report acknowledged that "compulsive usage correlates with a slew of negative mental health effects like loss of analytical skills, memory formation, contextual thinking, conversational depth, empathy, and increased anxiety[.]" It also stated that "compulsive usage interferes with essential personal responsibilities like sufficient sleep, work/school responsibilities, and connecting with loved ones[.]"

76. Separately, internal TikTok documents have acknowledged that "minors do not have the executive function to control their screen time[.]"[36] As a result, an internal planning document showed that 34% of the TikTok App users, ages 13 and 17 years old, averaged over two hours on the platform, 25% over 2.5 hours, and 10% of users in this age range averaged more than four hours per day.

77. Internally, executives admit that the platform "in itself has baked into it compulsive use,"[37] and employees state that its design features "detract from user agency." TikTok's internal documents recognize the importance of agency, "the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices" users well-being, including minors. Yet its employees admit that "user agency is very limited on TikTok due to the problems [they] see related to addictive behavior."

[36] TT-MS-AG-000229158.
[37] TT-MS-AG-000285717, at 51:42.

78. TikTok also knew its platform could cause harm to young users. Internal documents acknowledge that social media use for minors "can lead mental health risks," such as depression and anxiety. It also acknowledged that "[m]inors are especially prone to social comparison" and that such comparison "driven by social media is associated with body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and depressive systems."

79. Likewise, TikTok knows that the TikTok App can harm children's sleep. Internal documents acknowledge "sleep is critical for the healthy physical, cognitive and emotional development of children." Internal documents also recognize that "[s]creen time and social media use at night are associated with delayed and inadequate sleep" with research suggesting "a causal relationship between social media use at night and delayed sleep."

80. TikTok's employees internally state that "[t]he use of TikTok at night delays sleep for some users, disturbing their sleep patterns and preventing them from getting the minimum recommended amount of sleep." And they admit that "[u]sers are active on TikTok when they should be sleeping. Usage data indicates this is an issue for more than 20% of minors . . . ."

81. Yet internal TikTok data showed that almost 20% of users aged 13–15 and 25% of users aged 16–17 remained active on the TikTok App between 12:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m.

82. In short, TikTok knows the design of its TikTok App is harmful to children, but it markets the TikTok App to them anyway.

C. TikTok misleads Wisconsinites about the safety of the TikTok App and the content on its platform.

83. TikTok tells parents that its platform is appropriate for child users and that its safety tools protect them from mature and harmful content. The reality is different. Child users can readily encounter content inconsistent with TikTok's age ratings and Community Guidelines. The safeguards TikTok promotes to parents, including Restricted Mode, Family Pairing, and its protections for child users on TikTok LIVE, fail to deliver the protections TikTok promises. Moreover, TikTok employees recognized that the difficulty of locating and using these tools further limited their value, stating that the tools were "not always easy to find or understand." These are not isolated failures of individual features, but a system-wide failure to protect child users. Together, they undermine TikTok's broader representation that its platform provides a safe and age-appropriate experience.

1. TikTok misrepresents the safety of the TikTok App and its addictive design.

84. TikTok has actively misrepresented on its website the platform's safety for young users. It falsely represented:

A. "We work to make sure this occurs in a supportive space that does not negatively impact your physical or psychological health."[38]

[38] *Mental and Behavioral Health*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (April 17, 2024), https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/mental-behavioral-health?cgVersion=2024H1update [https://perma.cc/P4Q4-RPAT].

B. "Creating a welcoming environment where everyone feels safe is our highest priority."[39]

C. "We are deeply committed to TikTok being a safe and positive experience for people under the age of 18. . . ."[40] It goes on to say, "We do not allow content that may put young people at risk of psychological, physical, or developmental harm."[41]

D. "We have a vibrant and inspiring community on TikTok, and it's important that our platform remains a safe, supportive, and joyful place for our community."[42]

85. The CEO of TikTok has said the following in public forums:

A. In written testimony to Congress on March 23, 2023, CEO Shou Chew, explained that he is "responsible for all business operations and strategic decisions for TikTok," and that "[s]afety and wellness—in particular for teens—is a core priority for TikTok."[43]

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[39] *About*, TikTok, https://www.tiktok.com/about?lang=en [https://perma.cc/K84L-TW5L] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

[40] *Youth Safety and Well-Being*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (April 17, 2024), https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/youth-safety?cgVersion=2024H1update [https://perma.cc/EF85-VX5A].

[41] *Id.*

[42] *Enhancing the LIVE Community Experience with New Features, Updates, and Policies*, TikTok: Newsroom (Oct. 17, 2022), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/enhancing-the-live-community-experience.

[43] *TikTok: How Congress Can Safeguard American Data Privacy and Protect Children from Online Harms: Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Energy & Com.*, 118th Cong. 1 (2023), 9, 3, https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IF/IF00/20230323/115519/HHRG-118-IF00-Wstate-ChewS-20230323.pdf (written testimony of Shou Chew, CEO, TikTok Inc.).

B. Shou Chew's written testimony further noted that TikTok "will keep safety—particularly for teenagers—a top priority[.]"[44]

C. And Shou Chew's testimony touted that "TikTok also has taken numerous steps to help ensure that teens under 18 have a safe and enjoyable experience on the app. . . . We launch great products with a safety-by-design mentality, even if those features limit our monetization opportunities."[45]

D. In a TED Talk in April 2023, Shou Chew referred back to his commitments before Congress, reiterating his first commitment "that we take safety, especially for teenagers, extremely seriously, and we will continue to prioritize that."[46] He went on to say, "[y]ou know, I believe that [we] need to give our teenage users, and our users in general, a very safe experience. . . . If they don't feel safe, [we] cannot fulfill [our] mission. So, it's all very organic to me as a business to make sure that I do that."[47]

86. Relatedly, TikTok Executives have misrepresented TikTok's extensive efforts to encourage addiction to its platform through the development of compulsive design elements:

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[44] *Id.* at 2.

[45] *Id.* at 4.

[46] Shou Chew, *TikTok's CEO on Its Future—and What Makes Its Algorithm Different*, at 25:27–26:19, TED (Apr. 2023), https://www.ted.com/talks/shou_chew_tiktok_s_ceo_on_its_future_and_what_makes_its_algorithm_different [https://perma.cc/9EVZ-5YSR].

[47] *Id.*

A. When asked by Congress in October 2021 if the TikTok App is specifically designed to keep users engaged as long as possible, TikTok's Vice President and Head of Public Policy testified: "[W]e want to make sure that people are having an entertaining experience. You know, like TV or movies, you know, TikTok is meant to be entertaining. But we do think we have a responsibility along with parents to make sure that it is being used in a responsible way."[48]

B. In the April 2023 TED Talk, Shou Chew reiterated that TikTok's "goal is not to optimize and maximize time spent. It is not."[49] He further denied that TikTok has a financial incentive to maximize users' time spent on the platform, stating: "Even if you think about it from a commercial point of view, it is always best when your customers have a very healthy relationship with your product."[50]

87. TikTok's corporate statements belie TikTok's relentless targeting of young users' time and attention through addictive design features, and its measuring of success based on metrics such as how many young people use the platform per day and month, how long they spend watching videos, how many videos they watch, and whether they keep coming back.

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[48] *Protecting Kids Online: SnapChat, TikTok, and YouTube: Hearing Before S. Subcomm. on Consumer Prot., Prod. Safety, & Data Sec. of S. Comm. on Com., Sci., & Transp.* 59, 117th Cong. 1 (2021), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-117shrg54901/html/CHRG-117shrg54901.htm.

[49] Chew, *supra* note 46, at 20:41-20:55.

[50] *Id.* at 23:26–23:57.

88. Internally, one TikTok employee acknowledged that while the TikTok App's features, like the algorithm, are powerful at keeping people engaged and on the TikTok App, "I think that we need to be cognizant of what it might mean for other opportunities," clarifying that "I literally mean sleep, and eating, and moving around the room, and looking at somebody in the eyes."[51]

89. By engaging in these and similar misrepresentations, and by failing to disclose critical, material information regarding its platform's risks, TikTok misleads and deceives its users. TikTok's deception and lack of transparency prevents young users and their parents from making truly informed decisions about platform usage.

2. TikTok misrepresents the nature of the content on the TikTok App and its age appropriateness through app ratings.

90. TikTok has misled Wisconsin consumers about the nature and frequency of mature content available on its platform and the age appropriateness of the TikTok App through the age-rating representations it makes in the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, and Microsoft Store.

a. TikTok's misrepresentations in the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, and Microsoft Store.

91. Apple requires app developers to complete an age-rating questionnaire describing the app's content and features. Apple instructs that app developers "have to do [their] part" to keep kids safe and to "[m]ake sure kids are getting age-

[51] TT-MS-AG-000285717, at 49:23.

appropriate experiences inside [their] app."[52] Apple also tells developers to answer the age-rating questions honestly. Doing so helps parental controls work correctly and warns users about an app's content. Apple cautions that an incorrect age rating could surprise consumers or attract regulatory attention.[53]

92. Apple's age-rating questionnaire is a self-reporting process. It requires the developer to identify the app's features and controls and to disclose the frequency of potentially objectionable content, including profanity or crude humor, mature or suggestive themes, sexual content or nudity, and alcohol, tobacco, or drug use or references.[54] The developer selects the response that describes how often each type of content appears in the app, and Apple uses those answers to calculate the app's age rating.[55] Importantly, if the developer believes that Apple's assigned age rating is too low, the developer can override Apple's calculation and select a higher age rating.[56]

93. Historically, TikTok reported that the TikTok App contained only "infrequent/mild" profanity or crude humor, mature or suggestive themes, sexual

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[52] *App Review Guidelines*, Apple: Developer (Oct. 16, 2026), https://developer.apple.com/app-store/review/guidelines/ [https://perma.cc/WB3X-746U] ("Introduction").

[53] *Id.* § 2.3.6.

[54] *Age Rating Values and Definitions*, Apple: Developer, https://developer.apple.com/help/app-store-connect/reference/app-information/age-ratings-values-and-definitions/ [https://perma.cc/2TMV-QFYE] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026)("Age rating categories").

[55] *Set an App Age Rating*, Apple: Developer, https://developer.apple.com/help/app-store-connect/manage-app-information/set-an-app-age-rating/ [https://perma.cc/BPT9-9CP7] (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

[56] *Id.*

content or nudity, and references to or use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. Those descriptions appeared on TikTok's App Store listing.[57]

94. Based on its answers, the TikTok App was assigned a "12+" rating. Among other things, Apple described that rating as permitting infrequent or mild language and mature or suggestive themes. The next and highest available rating was "17+," which covered frequent or intense offensive language, violence, mature or suggestive themes, sexual content or nudity, and alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. TikTok could have selected the higher rating. It failed to do so.[58]

95. Apple revised its rating system in 2025 to provide ratings of 4+, 9+, 13+, 16+, and 18+. Under that system, TikTok again reported only "infrequent" profanity or crude humor, mature or suggestive themes, sexual content or nudity, and alcohol, tobacco, or drug use or references, in order to support a "13+" app store rating. Apple's 13+ category permits infrequent instances of drug-related content, sexual content or nudity, and realistic violence, along with frequent profanity or crude humor and certain other content. Apple's 16+ category includes frequent mature or suggestive

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[57] *musical.ly and TikTok Unite to Debut New Worldwide Short-Form Video Platform*, TikTok: Newsroom (Aug. 2, 2018), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/musical-ly-and; *App Store Preview: TikTok—Videos, Music & LIVE*, Apple, [https://perma.cc/9Y47-JXCU] (Aug. 2, 2025).

[58] *Age Ratings Values and Definitions*, Apple: Developer, https://developer.apple.com/help/app-store-connect/reference/app-information/age-ratings-values-and-definitions/ [https://perma.cc/83GA-PSD4] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026) ("Age ratings on OS versions earlier than 26").

content, while its 18+ category includes frequent content related to alcohol, tobacco, or drugs, sexual content or nudity, and realistic violence.[59]

96. Like Apple's age-rating process, the age-rating processes used by the Google Play Store and the Microsoft Store depend substantially upon information supplied by the app developer. Both Stores participate in the International Age Rating Coalition ("IARC"), which provides a common rating system for participating in digital storefronts. The developer must complete a questionnaire describing the application's content and functionality, which IARC then uses to generate ratings under the standards applicable in different jurisdictions. In the United States, the developer's responses generate ratings based on standards promulgated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board ("ESRB"), such as Everyone, Teen, or Mature 17+.[60]

97. Both Google and Microsoft require developers to provide accurate responses to the IARC questionnaire.[61] Google explains that content ratings are

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[59] *TikTok—Videos, Shop & LIVE*, Apple: Apps, https://apps.apple.com/us/app/tiktok-videos-shop-live/id835599320 [https://perma.cc/DC3X-M5V2] (last visited Oct. 6, 2026) (displaying a 13+ rating and identifying the specified content categories as "Infrequent"); *Age Ratings Values and Definitions*, Apple: Developer, https://developer.apple.com/help/app-store-connect/reference/app-information/age-ratings-values-and-definitions/#age-rating-values [https://perma.cc/K2XS-QWEM] (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

[60] *How IARC Works*, Int'l Age Rating Coal., https://globalratings.com/how-iarc-works/ [https://perma.cc/HRA9-LQ2A], (last visited Oct. 6, 2026); *Ratings Guide*, Entm't Software Rating Bd., https://www.esrb.org/ratings-guide/ [https://perma.cc/7HZZ-D32W], (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

[61] *Content Ratings*, Google: Play Console Help, https://support.google.com/googleplay/android-developer/answer/9898843?hl=en [https://perma.cc/RQ22-PHB7] (last visited Oct. 6, 2026) ("You must accurately complete the Play Console questionnaire for every app . . . . Misrepresentation of your app's content may

intended to inform consumers, "especially parents," about potentially objectionable content in an application and may be used to filter or block applications from particular users. Google warns that misrepresenting an application's content may result in its removal or suspension and requires a developer to submit a new questionnaire when changes to an app's content or features affect the developer's prior responses.[62]

98. Microsoft similarly explains that age ratings identify the audience for which an application's content is suitable and uses the IARC-generated rating information when displaying applications to consumers in different markets.[63] Like Google, Microsoft also makes developers responsible for accurately completing the IARC questionnaire to obtain the appropriate rating.[64] That accuracy requirement is part of Microsoft's Store Policies, and Microsoft warns that applications that violate those policies may fail certification or be removed from the Microsoft Store.[65]

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result in removal or suspension . . . ."); *Microsoft Store Policies* § 11.11, Microsoft (Sept. 15, 2026), https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/apps/publish/store-policies ("You are responsible for accurately completing the International Age Rating Coalition (IARC) rating questionnaire during submission to obtain the appropriate rating.").

[62] Google: Play Console Help, *supra* note 61 ("All apps must have a content rating from the IARC . . . ."; ratings are intended to inform consumers, "especially parents"; "[m]isrepresentation . . . may result in removal or suspension . . . .").

[63] *Age Ratings for Add-Ons*, Microsoft, https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/apps/publish/publish-your-app/add-on/age-ratings, (last visited Oct. 6, 2026) (describing age ratings as "content suitability classifications that indicate the appropriate audience").

[64] *Id.*

[65] *Get Started with the Microsoft Store: Frequently Asked Questions*, Microsoft (Aug. 17, 2026), https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/apps/publish/faq/get-started-with-the-microsoft-store ("Violations can result in failed submissions or removal from the Store.").

99. The TikTok App is rated "Teen" on the Google Play Store and Microsoft Store in the United States. Under the ESRB standards used by IARC in the United States, a Teen rating is generally suitable for users age 13 and older and may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, or infrequent use of strong language. By contrast, the next higher ESRB rating, Mature 17+, is generally suitable for users age 17 and older and may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, or strong language.[66] Although TikTok's underlying questionnaire responses are not publicly available, the resulting Teen rating demonstrates that TikTok represented its content and features are mild enough for a middle-school-aged audience.

100. The TikTok App's Teen rating is also significant because the IARC questionnaire considers the user-generated content available through the application in determining the app's rating. The questionnaire asks whether users can freely exchange content they create, including communicating with other users, commenting on content, sharing photographs, or exchanging other user-created material.[67] It also asks whether users may publicly share nudity or graphic violence and whether content exchanged between users is moderated.[68] These questions

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[66] Entm't Software Rating Bd., *supra* note 60 ("Rating Categories"). *Ratings Guide: Rating Categories*, https://perma.cc/7HZZ-D32W (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

[67] *Online Interaction or Content Exchange*, Google: Play Console Help, https://support.google.com/googleplay/android-developer/answer/7021383?hl=en [https://perma.cc/XRU8-REMG], (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

[68] *Public Sharing of Nudity or Gore*, Google: Play Console Help, https://support.google.com/googleplay/android-developer/answer/6160452?hl=en [https://perma.cc/73DT-RX92], (last visited Oct. 6, 2026)..

matter because the resulting rating reflects not only TikTok's own content, but its representations about the user-generated content available to platform users.

101. The difference in an app's rating directly affects children's access. Apple's parental controls can prevent children from downloading apps that exceed the maximum age rating selected by their parents and may also prevent those apps from appearing in portions of the App Store. By retaining a 12+ rating, and now a 13+ rating, the TikTok App remains available under parental-control settings that would otherwise restrict an app rated 16+, 17+, or 18+.[69] [70] Google Play and Microsoft similarly use age ratings in parental controls that restrict children's access to apps based on their maturity level.[71] Thus, the TikTok App's 12+, 13+, and Teen ratings do more than describe the platform's content—they allow the TikTok App to remain accessible to child users who could be prevented from accessing it if the platform were rated for an older audience.

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[69] *Maintaining a Safe App Store Experience*, Apple (Sept. 17, 2026), https://support.apple.com/en-us/122712 [https://perma.cc/U9ZM-T2TY] ("Screen Time—Content Restrictions help prevent your kids from downloading apps that exceed the age ratings you have set. They also stop your kids from seeing those apps in certain places in the App Store . . . .").

[70] TikTok can voluntarily raise its Apple App Store age rating to 16+ or 18+ at any time by overriding Apple's calculated age rating. It has chosen not to do so.

[71] *How to Set Up Content Restrictions on Google Play*, Google Play Help, https://support.google.com/googleplay/answer/1075738?hl=en [https://perma.cc/LK6K-YCV5] (last visited Oct. 6, 2026) (parental controls permit users to "choose the highest content rating" allowed for app and game downloads or purchases); *Get the Microsoft Family Safety App*, Microsoft, https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/family-safety/get-the-microsoft-family-safety-app [https://perma.cc/9M84-P6NA], (last visited Oct. 6, 2026) (Family Safety can block inappropriate content and notify parents when children seek to download "a more mature app or game from the Microsoft Store with age limits.").

102. TikTok's ratings represent that its platform is appropriate for users as young as 12 or 13, and that the mature content available to those users is sufficiently limited to justify those ratings. As a result, it also represents that it contains "infrequent" profanity or crude humor, mature or suggestive themes, sexual content or nudity, and alcohol, tobacco, or drug use or references. Those representations are false and misleading.

103. The TikTok app still contains frequent profanity or crude humor; alcohol, tobacco, and drug use or references; sexual content or nudity; and mature/suggestive themes. The TikTok App also still contains intense: profanity or crude humor; alcohol, tobacco, and drug use or references; sexual content or nudity; and mature/suggestive themes.

104. The State's own research has shown that these types of content are readily accessible on the TikTok App to 13-year-old users in Wisconsin. Within the first fifteen minutes, a test account registered to a 13-year-old was presented with profanity, sexual inuendo, sexually explicit lyrics, and mature content on their algorithmically driven For You Feed without having searched for it. The For You Feed delivered to this test account, without searching or engaging with content, a video of an individual imitating sexual movements with sound effects and the words "when he gets up at 5am for work and decides to wake you up too" and a video of an adult singing an explicit song about giving oral sex.

105. Users can also search for and find this content on the TikTok App when they are registered as only 13 years old. The State's research with the test account

registered to a 13-year-old in Wisconsin revealed, among other things, sexual content, profanity, and mature themes. For example, a search for the term "straight teeth," a euphemism for oral sex, revealed: multiple videos showing, with imitations, how to hide oral sex at school; sounds indicative of someone receiving oral sex; and videos implying someone was giving oral sex offscreen to the person on camera. A search for "dating" provided videos with profanity and a video of an adult saying, "I haven't been fucked the way I really need in a long time," and soliciting viewers to leave a comment with their age and city so "maybe one of you can change that."

106. Search results for "drinking," showed multiple videos of individuals who appeared intoxicated and one with an individual and the words "you're so drunk you can't even type." And a search for "🍃 Buy" revealed, among others, multiple videos of individuals who appeared under the influence; an individual who appears under the influence, with words about buying "za," slang for cannabis, and showing a jar of what appears to contain cannabis; a prank video of someone attempting to purchase cannabis with a junior high school ID; and a video depicting a cartoon person acting like they were buying cannabis from a dealer.

b. TikTok was warned that its app rating was inaccurate.

107. The fact that the TikTok App's rating has remained at tiers designed to reach middle-school aged children is particularly deceptive given that TikTok received direct notice that its rating understates the mature content available on the platform. [redacted]

[redacted]

108. [redacted]

109. Despite [redacted], TikTok retained the TikTok App's 12+ rating and now retains a 13+ rating. TikTok continues to characterize the relevant content as "infrequent." The same evidence also undermines the TikTok App's Teen rating in the Google Play and Microsoft Stores, as ESRB uses similar types of content descriptors to distinguish a Teen rating from a Mature 17+ rating. Thus, TikTok's representations concerning the nature and severity of content available to child users are inconsistent with its age ratings across all three major app stores.

110. Further, TikTok represented that the TikTok App was appropriate for users as young as 12 or 13 in app ratings, when, as described above, it knows that the TikTok App is particularly addictive and harmful for teens.

[redacted]

3. TikTok misrepresents the scope and effectiveness of its Community Guidelines

111. TikTok reinforces its representations that the platform is appropriate for child users through its Community Guidelines. But TikTok misrepresents that its Community Guidelines provides a safe experience while TikTok allows prohibited content to remain available. TikTok misrepresents the effectiveness of its content moderation system, the application of its Community Guidelines, and the role of outside experts in its Community Guidelines.

a. TikTok misleads users about its enforcement of Community Guidelines.

112. TikTok tells consumers that the Guidelines are intended to help keep the TikTok platform a "safe and positive experience," "apply to everyone and everything on our platform." It purports to inform users what content TikTok permits and prohibits and what content is ineligible for recommendation in the For You Feed.[75]

113. TikTok further represents that it enforces the Community Guidelines through content moderation. It has claimed that when it "identif[ies] content that falls under "Not Allowed" rules in our Community Guidelines, we'll remove it."[76] TikTok has claimed that this removal applies to all content, stating that TikTok

[75] *Community Guidelines*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Aug. 25, 2026) https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/overview [https://perma.cc/4MWA-BK7R].

[76] *Id.*

"remove[s] any content—including video, audio, livestream, images, comments, links, or other text—that violates [its] Community Guidelines."[77]

114. TikTok has described its moderation system as including age-restricting mature content so that it is viewed only by adults 18 years and older.[78] For example, TikTok states "We Age-Restrict Content" and that "[w]hen we identify content that falls under the "Age-Restricted" standards in our Community Guidelines, we make it viewable only for adults."[79]

115. TikTok similarly represents that its recommender systems are designed with safety in mind, and that certain content unsuitable for a general audience, which includes child users, is not recommended in users' For You feed, or has its recommendation limited.[80]

116. The Community Guidelines identify categories of content that TikTok represents it will remove from the platform, restrict to adult users, or make ineligible for recommendation in the For You feed. Those restrictions apply to content concerning, among other things, sexual activity and sexually suggestive behavior, alcohol, tobacco and drugs, suicide and self-harm, disordered eating and body image, and dangerous activities. TikTok further represents that certain content may be

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[77] *Community Guidelines*, TikTok: Introduction (Oct. 2022).

[78] Julie de Bailliencourt, *Helping Creators Understand Our Rules with Refreshed Community Guidelines*, TikTok: Newsroom (Mar. 21, 2023), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/community-guidelines-update?lang=en.

[79] TikTok: Policies & Engagement, *supra* note 75.

[80] *How TikTok Recommends Content*, TikTok: Help Center, https://www.tiktok.com/support/faq_detail?id=7655285288050104852&category=web_account [https://perma.cc/49VP-5GL5] (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

permissible in isolation but harmful when repeatedly recommended, including dieting, extreme fitness, sexual suggestiveness, and certain mental health content, and that TikTok interrupts repetitive patterns to prevent users from viewing such content too frequently.[81]

117. For example, TikTok's Community Guidelines have expressly represented that TikTok prohibits content that is particularly harmful to children, by stating:

A. "We do not allow showing, promoting, or engaging in youth sexual or physical abuse or exploitation. This includes child sexual abuse material (CSAM), grooming, sextortion, sexual solicitation, pedophilia, and physical or psychological harm of young people."[82]

B. "We want TikTok to be a place where you can discuss emotionally complex topics in a supportive way without increasing the risk of harm. We do not allow showing, promoting, or sharing plans for suicide or self-harm."[83]

C. "We want TikTok to be a place that encourages self-esteem and does not promote negative social comparisons. We do not allow showing or promoting disordered eating and dangerous weight loss behaviors."[84]

D. "We do not allow showing or promoting dangerous activity and challenges ... This includes dares, games, tricks, inappropriate use of dangerous tools, and eating substances that are harmful to an individual's health."[85]

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[81] *For You Feed Eligibility Standards*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Aug. 25, 2026), https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/fyf-standards [https://perma.cc/J66T-C2N5].

[82] *Safety and Civility*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Apr. 17, 2024) https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/safety-civility?cgVersion=2024H1update.

[83] *Mental and Behavioral Health*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Apr. 17, 2024), https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/mental-behavioral-health?cgVersion=2024H1update [https://perma.cc/4G48-YTS4].

[84] *Id.*

[85] *Id.*

E. "We do not allow the trade of alcohol, tobacco products, and or drugs. We also do not allow showing, possessing, or using drugs."[86]

118. For certain content, like online sexual exploitation and CSAM material, TikTok promises a "zero tolerance polic[y]."[87]

119. TikTok has also represented that it was "[s]trengthening enforcement of sexually suggestive content" and excluding even "borderline" or "suggestive" content from the For You feed. TikTok identified adult innuendo, profanity, and sexually suggestive content as themes its system was designed to prevent from reaching accounts aged 13 to 17. TikTok described investments in automated detection intended to prevent suggestive content from being recommended to or searchable by teenagers.[88]

120. As already alleged, drug-related, sexual, and other mature content and profanity are abundant on the TikTok App, and, contrary to TikTok's representations, users under 18 can readily access it. The Community Guidelines mislead users by creating an impression that this kind of content is unavailable on the TikTok platform and, in particular, that it is unavailable to minors.

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[86] *Regulated Goods and Commercial Activities*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Apr. 17, 2024), https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/regulated-commercial-activities?cgversion=2024H1update.

[87] Eric Han, *Protecting Against Exploitative Content*, TikTok: Newsroom (Mar. 5, 2020), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/protecting-against-exploitative-content?lang=en.

[88] *Strengthening Enforcement of Sexually Suggestive Content*, TikTok: Newsroom (Dec. 30, 2022), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/strengthening-enforcement-of-sexually-suggestive-content?lang=en [https://perma.cc/CM8Q-98C7].

b. TikTok misleads users about the effectiveness of its content moderation system.

121. To further its deception that it effectively removes violative content, TikTok routinely publishes Quarterly Enforcement Reports on its website, which tout a high volume and percentage of content removed "proactively" from the TikTok App. For example, TikTok touts "the speed, scale, and precision of [its] Community Guidelines enforcement." And that "[t]his is reflected in our highest-proactive removal rate in Q2 2026, with 99.5% of violative videos removed *before* they were reported to us."[89]

122. TikTok has long made statements to this effect, including when speaking to reporters, parents, and government regulators. For instance, CEO Shou Chew testified to Congress on March 23, 2023, that "anything that is violative and harmful we remove."[90] Similarly, when he testified to Congress on January 31, 2024, Chew claimed that TikTok's "robust [C]ommunity [G]uidelines strictly prohibit content or behavior that puts teenagers at risk of exploitation or other harm, and we vigorously enforce them."[91] TikTok repeated that latter statement on its website.[92]

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[89] *Community Guidelines Enforcement Report*, TikTok: Transparency (April-June 2026), https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/transparency/cg-report.

[90] *TikTok: How Congress Can Safeguard American Data Privacy and Protect Children from Online Harms: Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Energy & Com.* 42, 118th Cong. 1 (2023), https://www.congress.gov/118/chrg/CHRG-118hhrg53839/CHRG-118hhrg53839.pdf.

[91] *Big Tech and the Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis: Hearing Before the S. Judiciary Comm.* 11–12, 118th Cong. 2 (2024), https://www.congress.gov/118/chrg/CHRG-118shrg57444/CHRG-118shrg57444.pdf.

[92] *TikTok CEO Shou Chew's Opening Statement - Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis*, TikTok: Newsroom (Jan. 31, 2024), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/opening-statement-senate-judiciary-committee-hearing?lang=en.

123. These representations are particularly significant to parents. Together with the TikTok App's age-rating representations, the Community Guidelines convey that although the TikTok App is a user-generated content platform, TikTok identifies mature and harmful content and either removes it, restricts child users' access to it, or limits its recommendation.

124. TikTok's representations about its "proactive removal" data similarly creates a misleading picture of its moderation system because it does not disclose the amount of content it misses and that remains on the platform for users, including children, to view. [93]

125. Significantly, TikTok's own internal reviews of content have demonstrated the significant amount of content it misses.

126. For example, following a 2021 Wall Street Journal investigation, TikTok employees conducted a "postmortem" investigation consisting of a review of 1,278 videos delivered to a test account that had been served content focused on sex and kinks. They determined that 441 of the videos, or 35%, violated its policies, principally because the videos contained sexually explicit language. Its moderation system had missed 253 of those violating videos. In other words, more than half of the violations TikTok employees ultimately identified had escaped moderation and were delivered through its recommendation system.

[93] TT-MS-AG-000009884, at 888. (TikTok acknowledged internally that its moderation accuracy metrics are "largely misleading," because they "do not account for the content that we miss.")

127. The same review showed that contrary to its Community Guidelines, TikTok allowed drug-related videos and would classify them as "Not Recommended" for the For You Feed. But even that limited restriction was not reliably enforced. TikTok found that 60% of drug related videos delivered to a test account should have been designated "Not Recommended" but were nevertheless approved for recommendation by its content moderation system.

128. In a later internal review, TikTok employees identified 428 eating disorder and extreme diet and fitness items that violated its policies but had escaped moderation, remained on the platform for a median of 210 days, and continued to be recommended through search. This was not harmless "leakage." TikTok employees internally acknowledged that making eating disorder content accessible to minors could normalize weight loss and influence young users to develop disordered eating. TikTok thus knew that its failure to enforce its own rules allowed children to continue to encounter content the company had prohibited.

129. A separate 2022 internal analysis showed the high rates at which certain categories of content leak through its moderation processes, including: 35.71% of "Normalization of Pedophilia" content; 33.33% of "Minor Sexual Solicitation" content; 39.13% of "Minor Physical Abuse" content; 30.36% of "Leading minors off platform"; 50% of "Glorification of Minor Sexual Assault"; and 100% of "Fetishizing Minors."[94]

[94] TT-MS-AG-00139327, at 342.

130. TikTok's internal analyses also demonstrated that it had a moderation accuracy of only 38.82% for harassment and bullying, 48.89% for hateful behavior, 46.43% for violent and graphic content overall, and 33.33% for violent deaths or accidents in a real setting and gory content.[95]

c. TikTok misrepresents who and what is subject to its Community Guidelines.

131. TikTok also misrepresents the application of its Community Guidelines. TikTok publicly states that its rules apply to "everyone and everything" on the platform.[96]

132. Yet those prohibitions have not applied in the same way to content sent through direct messages. As a result, content TikTok tells parents and child users is forbidden from the platform can still be sent privately from one user to another.

133. TikTok's representation that its Community Guidelines apply to "everyone and everything" on the platform is also inconsistent with its internal enforcement practices—certain high-value and popular creators received special treatment from TikTok's moderation team.

134. TikTok employees disclosed to reporters that the company advised moderators to be "more lenient" for content posted by important creators despite that

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[95] *Id.* at -328, -330, -334-335.

[96] *Community Guidelines*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Aug. 25, 2026), https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines [https://perma.cc/B53V-BCGS]; *Safety and Civility*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Aug. 25, 2026), https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/safety-civility [https://perma.cc/DQA4-3JDT].

the content might violate the Community Guidelines.[97] Employees also disclosed that TikTok routed content from creators with more than five million followers through a separate, more lenient moderation process, and, according to a TikTok manager, sought to keep decisions from moderators in Kuala Lumpur because those moderators "were very-by-the-book."[98]

135. TikTok misleads consumers by representing harmful content is removed while leaving material of popular creators that violate its Community Guidelines.

d. TikTok misrepresents the use of expert recommendations in Community Guidelines.

136. TikTok also misrepresents the role of outside experts in its Community Guidelines. For example, TikTok tells consumers that its Community Principles are developed with "[i]nput from experts in online safety, public health, and related fields[.]"[99]

137. Experts advising the company warned that eating disorder content could normalize weight loss among minors, trigger people in recovery, and encourage young users to develop disordered eating. One expert concluded that showing such

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[97] Hibaq Farah & Dan Milmo, *TikTok Users Including Russell Brand Given Special Status, Messages Show*, Guardian (Dec. 19, 2023), https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/dec/19/tiktok-users-including-russell-brand-given-special-status-messages-show [https://perma.cc/F4F6-YBRJ].

[98] Emily Baker-White, *How TikTok Has Bent Its Rules for Its Top Creators,* Forbes (Sept. 20, 2022), https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2022/09/20/tiktok-special-treatment-top-creators-bent-rules/.

[99] *Community Principles*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Aug. 25, 2026), https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/community-principles [https://perma.cc/B53V-BCGS].

content caused "more harm than good" and that making it accessible through a teenager's For You feed was "more likely to cause harm."

138. Substantial quantities of weight-loss, dieting, and eating-disorder content remained on TikTok. In one internal review of 1,166 eating-disorder videos, TikTok employees found that 88% had been viewed by minors and that 88% of those views came through the For You feed. TikTok employees later documented that only seven of 56 hashtags identified as hosting pro-anorexia content were removed, while 27 weight-loss and dieting hashtags remained.

139. Contrary to TikTok's public statements, it has not aligned its practice with expert recommendations.

4. Refresh Mode, Restricted Mode, and Family Pairing

140. TikTok represents that it provides safety features and parental controls designed to protect child users and to enable parents to manage their children's experience on the platform. TikTok has repeatedly promoted these tools as part of its efforts to provide "safeguards" for teen accounts, with "content that's age appropriate" and represents that its parental controls "empower" parents and guardians "to customize their safety and content settings" and give them "a better ability to guide their teen's online experience."[100]

[100] *Youth Safety and Well-Being*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement, https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/protecting-teens [https://perma.cc/EF85-VX5A] (last visited Oct. 18, 2025).

141. TikTok promotes Restricted Mode to parents as a means of limiting child users' exposure to mature content. TikTok tells parents and guardians that Restricted Mode lets them "limit their teen's exposure to content that may not be suitable for them"[101] and that users with Restricted Mode enabled "shouldn't see mature or complex themes," including sexually suggestive content, profanity, drugs, realistic violence, and other material intended for older audiences.[102]

142. Contrary to TikTok's representations, independent testing demonstrates that Restricted Mode does not safeguard against mature content. In 2025, Global Witness created seven new TikTok accounts registered as 13-year-old users on factory-reset phones with no search histories and enabled Restricted Mode on every account. The TikTok App nevertheless suggested sexualized searches to the accounts, including to three accounts the first time the user opened the search bar, before the user had typed anything or selected any videos. All seven accounts encountered pornographic content within a small number of clicks, and one account was only two clicks from pornographic content after logging in.[103]

143. Global Witness first identified the problem in an investigation conducted in January 2025 and provided its findings to TikTok. TikTok responded

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[101] *Id.*

[102] *Restricted Mode*, TikTok: Help Center, https://www.tiktok.com/support/faq_detail?id=7543604784121731590&category=web_account [https://perma.cc/UF7B-YJAR] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

[103] *TikTok's Search Algorithm Directs New 13-Year-Old Users to Porn, in Apparent Breach of New UK Law*, Glob. Witness (Oct. 3, 2025), https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/digital-threats/tiktok-directs-13-year-olds-to-porn/ [https://perma.cc/HP6K-JMA5].

that it had "taken action to remove several search recommendations globally." Global Witness then conducted the testing described above in the spring and summer of 2025, showing that after reporting the issue to TikTok, the TikTok App was still suggesting sexualized search terms that led users on child accounts, with Restricted Mode on, to pornographic content.[104]

144. TikTok knew that its representations concerning how Restricted Mode functioned were false or misleading. For example, in sworn testimony in 2023, a TikTok corporate representative testified that she recalled reviewing Restricted Mode and concluding that, if TikTok were to package and present it as a "very family friendly space," it was "not meeting expectations that families would expect."[105]

145. TikTok nevertheless continues to promote Restricted Mode as a youth-safety and parental-control feature and continues to represent that users with Restricted Mode enabled "shouldn't see mature or complex themes,"[106] with no qualifiers about its failure rate.

146. TikTok also promotes Family Pairing as a parental-control tool that allows parents and guardians to link their accounts to their teens' accounts and manage a variety of content, privacy, safety, and well-being settings. TikTok has represented that, through Family Pairing, parents can impose screen-time limits,

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[104] *Id.*

[105] Elizabeth Dep. 208:1–7, *Indiana v. TikTok*, No. 02D02-2212-PL-000400 (Ind. Super. Ct. Allen Cnty. Feb. 24, 2023).

[106] *Restricted Mode*, TikTok: Help Center, https://www.tiktok.com/support/faq_detail?id=7543604784121731590&category=web_account [https://perma.cc/UF7B-YJAR] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

control certain privacy and interaction settings, filter content using keywords, and enable Restricted Mode to limit their teens' exposure to mature content. TikTok has promoted these tools as providing parents with greater control over their teens' TikTok App experience and "peace of mind" that TikTok's safeguards help ensure child users have positive experiences on the platform.[107]

147. In reality, Family Pairing is full of holes and easy to circumvent. For example, it can easily be bypassed by accessing the TikTok platform through a web browser and teens can simply unlink themselves from Family Pairing.

148. Nor does TikTok permit a parent to exercise ultimate control over whether a child between 13 and 17 years old may continue using the platform in most states, including Wisconsin. TikTok's internal guidance provides that it will not delete the account of a user in that age range at the request of the user's parent or guardian. Thus, a teen may unilaterally terminate the Family Pairing connection, but the parent cannot require TikTok to terminate the teen's account.

149. TikTok fails to disclose that the controls have failed to operate as expected in independent testing; that a teen can unlink a paired account without first obtaining the parent's authorization; or that TikTok will not honor a parent's request to delete the account of Wisconsin child between 13 and 17 years old.

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[107] Adam Presser, *New Ways We're Supporting Parents and Helping Teens Build Balanced Digital Habits*, TikTok: Newsroom (Mar. 11, 2025), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/new-ways-we-are-supporting-parents-and-helping-teens-build-balanced-digital-habits?lang=en [https://perma.cc/HD8T-JF2B].

150. Similarly, TikTok touted another feature Refresh to purportedly reset its algorithm to get users out of harmful content loops or rabbit loops that its Recommendation Engine places them in.

151. As explained above, a TikTok user experiences a "rabbit hole" (also known as a "filter bubble") when he or she encounters a high percentage of videos on the same or similar topics on his or her For You feed or other pages as part of the TikTok App's continuous scroll. Filter bubbles can occur for all types of content but are particularly harmful to young users when they concern mature or suggestive themes.

152. In 2023, TikTok implemented a "Algo Refresh" feature to purportedly allow users stuck in rabbit holes—or who are otherwise dissatisfied with the videos TikTok feeds them—to "reset" their For You feed. According to an internal planning document, TikTok employees believed that "[o]ffering users a full reset button would go a long way to addressing policy makers' concerns about our algorithm."

153. TikTok billed the Refresh feature on its website as "[t]he option to start fresh on TikTok." It further explained that: "When enabled, this feature allows someone to view content on their For You feed as if they just signed up for TikTok. Our recommendation system will then begin to surface more content based on new interactions."[108]

[108] Sandeep Grover & Mabel Wang, *Introducing a Way to Refresh Your For You Feed on TikTok*, TikTok: Newsroom (Mar. 16, 2023), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/introducing-a-way-to-refresh-your-for-you-feed-on-tiktok-us.

154. But TikTok misrepresents the effectiveness of the Refresh feature to get a new For You feed. The Refresh feature only resets a user's recommendations temporarily and does not totally delete the user's history. Contrary to TikTok's representations, users may find that they are quickly back in the same rabbit hole again even after using the Refresh feature.

5. Screen Time Measures

155. After being consistently pressured to do so, TikTok adopted a series of so-called safety features to protect young people from the compulsive use that its TikTok App induces. However, TikTok mispresents the efficacy of these features.

156. TikTok has repeatedly said that it automatically sets a 60-minute daily screen limit or that it sets daily screen time to 60-minutes for teens by default.[109]

157. However, this tool does not actually impose a screen time limit. After using the TikTok App for 60 minutes, teens can simply click away the notification. Moreover, users can change the setting to up to 2 hours per day on the TikTok App or disable the tool entirely.

158. These representations give the false impression that the tool imposes limits on teen screen time and that TikTok effectively addressed concerns around excessive use.

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[109] *See Youth Safety and Well-Being*, TikTok: Policies & Engagement (Apr. 17, 2024), https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/policies-and-engagement/protecting-teens [https://perma.cc/EF85-VX5A]; Cormac Kennan, *New Features for Teens and Families on TikTok*, TikTok: Newsroom (Mar. 1, 2023) https://newsroom.tiktok.com/new-features-for-teens-and-families-on-tiktok-us?lang=en [https://perma.cc/XQ8G-5VAU].

159. TikTok touts other screen-time management tools as if they are legitimate interventions designed to prompt healthy usage of the platform, which they are not.

160. For example, in 2023 when TikTok advertised its 60-minute daily screen time limit, it touted that it was "build[ing] on a prompt we rolled out last year to encourage teens to enable screen time management; our tests found this helped increase the use of our screen time tools by 234%."[110]

161. The prompt TikTok referred to notifies a child after they have spent 100 minutes on the TikTok App in a single day, with the option of setting a daily screen limit. Yet internal TikTok documents show that while 2.7 million children received the 100-minute prompt each day, only about 4% enabled a limit through it and 71% just closed the notification and continued using the platform.

162. TikTok also advertised a weekly screen time update that likewise did not restrict how long children could use the platform. This feature automatically enabled a setting that provided children with information about their use and increased the visibility of TikTok's existing screen time management page. Testing of the update revealed that the feature had a demonstrably insignificant impact on daily active users, stay duration, or user retention, with differences of less than 0.5% between test and control groups.

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[110] Cormac Keenan, *New Features for Teens and Families on TikTok*, TikTok: Newsroom (Mar. 1, 2023), https://newsroom.tiktok.com/new-features-for-teens-and-families-on-tiktok-us?lang=en [https://perma.cc/XQ8G-5VAU].

163. TikTok's internal analysis reveals why the company disfavored meaningful screen time limits for child users: effective limits would reduce engagement. TikTok employees estimated that a firm daily cap of 120 minutes would reduce child users' stay duration by 25%, while a 90-minute cap would reduce it by approximately 33%. Employees identified as a "con" that those reductions had the "biggest stay duration impact." Instead, they favored a default setting that child users could disable, which would reduce use by only ten to fifteen minutes, expressly identifying its smaller impact on stay duration as an advantage.

164. As a product manager confirmed in an internal document describing screen time management functions, TikTok's "goal is not to reduce the time spent[.]"

6. TikTok LIVE

165. TikTok also represents that it maintains safeguards designed to protect child users from inappropriate content and interactions on TikTok LIVE. It requires users to be at least 18 years old (previously 16 years old) to broadcast on LIVE. Although users under 18 years old may view LIVE content, TikTok represents that when it identifies a LIVE containing mature or complex themes intended for older audiences, it restricts that LIVE to protect younger viewers. TikTok states that it will not recommend an age-restricted LIVE to users between 13 and 17 years old, will

remove younger users who are already viewing the broadcast, and will prevent them from accessing the LIVE through search or a shared link.[111]

166. LIVE content is transmitted as it occurs, and viewers can communicate with the host and other viewers through comments and other interactive features.[112]

167. The real-time nature of LIVE presents particular risks for child users because they may be exposed immediately to sexual, violent, drug-related, and other mature content as it is broadcast. TikTok's internal documents demonstrate that these risks were not hypothetical.

168. TikTok nevertheless represents that LIVE is subject to its Community Guidelines and that a dedicated safety team reviews and moderates LIVE broadcasts to help ensure community safety.[113]

169. Although TikTok previously represented that users must be at least 16 years old and now represents that users must be at least 18 years old to broadcast on LIVE, its own internal review found that child users were accessing LIVE and were being exposed to serious safety risks.

170. In 2022, Forbes reviewed hundreds of TikTok App livestreams and found viewers regularly encouraging young girls to engage in sexually suggestive

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[111] *Age-Restricted Content on TikTok LIVE*, TikTok, https://www.tiktok.com/en/safety-hc/account-and-user-safety/age-restricted-content-on-tiktok-live [https://perma.cc/B7B6-3Z9Y] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

[112] *What Is TikTok LIVE?*, TikTok: Help Center, https://www.tiktok.com/support/faq_detail?id=7543604790438451768&category=web_account [https://perma.cc/5T9U-XRMJ] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

[113] *LIVE Safety Guide*, TikTok, https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/tools-and-guides/live-safety-guide [https://perma.cc/SV6W-43UB] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

conduct on camera. In one instance, a user who identified herself as 14 years old broadcast to approximately 2,000 viewers while adult viewers requested nudity and other sexualized conduct.[114]

171. TikTok employees then conducted an internal review, "Project Meramec," which found that 112,000 TikTok LIVEs were hosted by users under age 15 in January 2022, and that underage users could "Easily Access Livestream Feed." The review further found that underage hosts received a "significant #" of messages from older users, young hosts were "at risk of grooming," and "Live Interaction Enable[ed] Exploitation of Live Hosts."

172. TikTok knew that its LIVE feed lacked protections designed around the age of the viewer. Internally, TikTok employees acknowledged that it had "[n]o age-related feed strategy." TikTok employees recognized that exposing children to sexualized content places them at risk. Yet sexualized content remained a recognized feature of the LIVE environment.

173. TikTok also knew that its own business incentives and recommendation system had encouraged the proliferation of sexualized content on LIVE. Project Meramec found that transactional sexual content "hits most of business' metrics of success" and is "pushed to TopLives" because TikTok's Recommendation Engine "prioritizes engagement." It further found that transactional Gifting generated

[114] Alexandra S. Levine, *How TikTok Live Became 'A Strip Club Filled With 15-Year-Olds,'* Forbes (Dec. 7, 2022), https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandralevine/2022/04/27/how-tiktok-live-became-a-strip-club-filled-with-15-year-olds/.

"[s]ignificant [r]evenue" and occurred "[p]rimarily in exchange" for sexual content. Sexualized content therefore did not merely persist despite TikTok's design. It performed well under TikTok's measures of success, generated revenue, and was amplified by TikTok's algorithm.

D. TikTok's conduct and design features have harmed Wisconsin children.

174. Wisconsin youth have been, and continue to be, mentally and physically harmed by TikTok's intentionally addictive design features. These harms from TikTok's design features are severe, substantial, and include increased levels of depression and anxiety; reduced sleep; selfharm; suicidal ideation; and eating disorders.

175. The Surgeon General confirmed that "[e]xcessive and problematic use of social media can harm children and adolescents by disrupting important healthy behaviors" and warned that platforms "designed to maximize user engagement . . . [have] the potential to encourage excessive use and behavioral dysregulation."[115] The Surgeon General also reported a survey that "one-third or more" of the youngest users (girls aged 11 to 15) "say they feel 'addicted' to a social media platform."[116]

176. Studies have shown that children who spend excessive time on social media face double the risk of poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety.[117]

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[115] Off. Surgeon Gen., *supra* note 6, at 9.
[116] *Id.*
[117] *Id.* at 6.

177. And in one recent study of over 4,200 U.S. teens, researchers found that almost one-third of them (31.3%) showed increasing signs of addiction to social media. More concerning, the study found that teens who were growing increasingly addicted to social media were associated with 2 to 3 times greater risks of suicidal behaviors and suicidal ideation.[118]

178. And young adolescents use of social media apps like the TikTok App is predictive of a later decrease in life satisfaction.[119] The reverse is also true—a decrease in social media use for younger adolescents is predictive of an overall increase in life satisfaction.[120]

179. The Surgeon General warned that studies "demonstrated a significant relationship between social media use and body image concerns and eating disorders, with social comparison as a potential contributing factor."[121]

180. Heavy or problematic use of social media like the TikTok App use can disrupt activities like sleep and physical activity, which are critical for youth psychological and physical health.[122] Research has found that use of technology,

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[118] Yunyu Xiao et al., *Addictive Screen Use Trajectories and Suicidal Behaviors, Suicidal Ideation, and Mental Health in US Youths*, JAMA (June 18, 2025), https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2835481.

[119] Off. Surgeon Gen., *supra* note 6, at 5.

[120] Amy Orben et al., *Windows of Developmental Sensitivity to Social Media*, 13 Nature Commc'ns 1649 (2022), https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-29296-3.

[121] Off. Surgeon Gen., *supra* note 6, at 8.

[122] *See* Am. Psych. Ass'n, *Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence*, 7 (May 2023), https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use.pdf.

especially social media, within one hour of bedtime is associated with sleep disruptions.[123]

181. As noted by the U.S. Surgeon General, "[s]leep is essential for healthy development of adolescents[,]" and "[a] systematic review of 42 studies on the effects of excessive social media use found a consistent relationship between social media use and poor sleep quality, reduced sleep duration, sleep difficulties, and depression among youth."[124]

182. Adolescents who do not get enough sleep can in turn have impaired neurological development,[125] affecting their emotional functioning and increasing suicidal thoughts.[126]

183. And students who do not get the recommended amount of sleep are more likely to have difficulty completing schoolwork, attention issues, and behavioral problems—all of which impact their ability to succeed academically.[127]

184. Because of sophisticated and manipulative apps like the TikTok App, Wisconsin's children are spending excessive amounts of time online, which is contributing to the youth mental health crisis in Wisconsin. In a 2023 survey, 79.8%

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[123] *Id.*

[124] Off. Surgeon Gen., *supra* note 6, at 10.

[125] Aurore A. Perrault et al., *Reducing the Use of Screen Electronic Devices in the Evening Is Associated with Improved Sleep and Daytime Vigilance in Adolescents*, 42 Sleep 125 (2019), https://academic.oup.com/sleep/article/42/9/zsz125/5513278?login=false.

[126] Jessica Hamilton et al., *Sleep Influences Daily Suicidal Ideation Through Affective Reactivity to Interpersonal Events Among High-Risk Adolescents and Young Adults*, 64 J. Child Psych. & Psychiatry 27 (2023), https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/jcpp.13651.

[127] *Sleep and Health*, U.S. Ctrs. Disease Control & Prevention (Sept. 10, 2026), https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-schools/sleep/index.html [https://perma.cc/BU4R-99UA].

of Wisconsin teens reported using social media, including the TikTok platform, several times per day, and 41% reported using social media hourly.[128] 78.9% of students reported using screens, including social media, three or more hours every day.[129]

185. Excessive use of social media, including the TikTok App, is interfering with Wisconsin teens' sleep. For example, 53.3% of students reported using screens after midnight at least once a week. And 15.5% of students reporting using screens after midnight every school night.[130]

186. That interruption to teen's sleep from screens, including the TikTok App, causes significant harm to teens. Nearly one in five Wisconsin students reported five or fewer hours of sleep per night. And those students were more than three times as likely to report depression and almost two times as likely to report anxiety.[131]

187. Further, over half (59%) of Wisconsin's teens reported experiencing a mental health challenge that year.[132] More than half of teens (51.6%) reported experiencing anxiety, a nearly 30% increase from 2017, and over one-third (35%) of

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[128] Wis. Dep't Pub. Instruction, *2023 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey* 35 (Aug. 2024), https://dpi.wi.gov/media/49263/download?inline [https://perma.cc/98K4-EM7Y].

[129] *Id.* at 14.

[130] *Id.*

[131] *Id.* at 32.

[132] Wis. Dep't Pub. Instruction, *Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Mental Health Data Summary*, https://dpi.wi.gov/media/49265/download?inline [https://perma.cc/H9RQ-25EA] (last visited Oct. 23, 2026).

teens reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row, a 10% increase in the past decade.[133]

188. An increasing number of teens have reported considering suicide or suicide attempts compared to 2019. Similarly, a substantially increasing number of young adults have reported experiencing a mental illness compared to 2018-2019.[134]

189. Public research and data on Wisconsin youth are consistent with TikTok's own internal reports on the harms to youth stemming from the TikTok App design. While TikTok represents the safety and appropriateness of the TikTok App for teens, it in fact designs the TikTok app to put its profits over the well-being of Wisconsin children.

Count One: Violations of Wis. Stat. § 100.18(1)

190. The State of Wisconsin incorporates by reference the allegations in paragraph 1 through 190 of the Complaint.

191. Through the conduct described above, TikTok made untrue, deceptive, or misleading representations in their marketing and promotion of TikTok to the public, including Wisconsin consumers.

192. Through the conduct described above, TikTok, in an effort to distribute and increase the consumption of its App, directly or indirectly, made, published, circulated, and placed before the public advertisements, statements, and

[133] *Id.*
[134] Wis. Off. Child.'s Mental Health, *supra* note 7, at 9.

representations that contained assertions, representations, and statements of fact that were untrue, deceptive, and misleading.

Count Two: Public Nuisance

193. The State of Wisconsin incorporates by reference the allegations in paragraph 1 through 193 of the Complaint.

194. Under Wisconsin law, a public nuisance is defined as a condition or activity that substantially or unduly interferes with the use of a public place, the activities of an entire community, or a public right, common to all members of the public.

195. Through the conduct described above, TikTok created a public nuisance in Wisconsin.

196. TikTok's conduct constitutes a substantial and unreasonable interference with Wisconsin citizens' rights to public health and safety and enjoyment of life, particularly for Wisconsin children.

197. This interference has resulted in significant harm to Wisconsin children, teens, their parents, and others, including but not limited to,

A. addiction or compulsive use, sleep deprivation, depression, anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders, suicide attempts, and other mental health issues and death;

B. a decline in the physical and mental well-being among young people in Wisconsin attributable to social media addiction or overuse, and the attendant societal and economic costs associated therewith;

C. creation and distribution of, and exposure to CSAM by teens and adolescents, and the attendant societal and economic costs associated therewith;

D. other harms from overuse or abuse of TikTok's platforms, such as dissociative behavior, withdrawal symptoms, social isolation, damage to body image and self-worth, increased risky behavior, exposure to predators, sexual exploitation, and other profound mental health issues;

E. public costs associated with efforts in Wisconsin to abate the nuisance and support public health, safety, and welfare.

198. TikTok knew or should have known that the public nuisance is resulting from, or was substantially certain to result from, its conduct described above.

199. TikTok's conduct in causing the public nuisance was unreasonable.

200. The health and safety of Wisconsin's children, teens, and their parents, as well as others impacted or affected by the harms caused by TikTok, is a matter of great public interest and of legitimate concern to the State's citizens and residents.

201. The injury to the Wisconsin public that resulted from this public nuisance continues through the present.

Relief Requested

202. The State of Wisconsin requests the Court enters judgment as follows:

A. Finding that Defendants violated Wis. Stat. § 100.18(1) as alleged herein;

B. Enjoining and restraining Defendants, its successors, assigns, officers, directors, agents, dealers, servants, employees, representatives, solicitors, and all persons acting or claiming to be acting on its behalf, pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 100.18(11)(d) from making further false, deceptive, or misleading representations;

C. Ordering Defendants to pay restitution to affected consumers who suffered pecuniary losses because of their violations, pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 100.18(11)(d);

D. Imposing forfeitures of not less than $50 nor more than $200 for each violation of Wis. Stat. § 100.18(1), pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 100.26(4); consumer surcharges, pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 100.261; plus all applicable penalty assessments and costs;

E. Imposing supplemental forfeitures not to exceed $10,000 for each violation of Wis. Stat. § 100.18(1) against an elderly or disabled person pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 100.264(2);

F. Awarding an amount reasonably necessary to remedy the harmful effects of the violations alleged herein;

G. Awarding the Department of Justice the expenses incurred in their investigation and prosecution of this matter, including reasonable attorney fees, pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 100.263;

H. Ordering the Defendants to abate the nuisance and to reimburse the cost of Wisconsin's abatement efforts; and

I. Awarding all other relief as the court may deem just and equitable.

Dated November 18, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

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Electronically signed by:

s/ Brittany A. Copper
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