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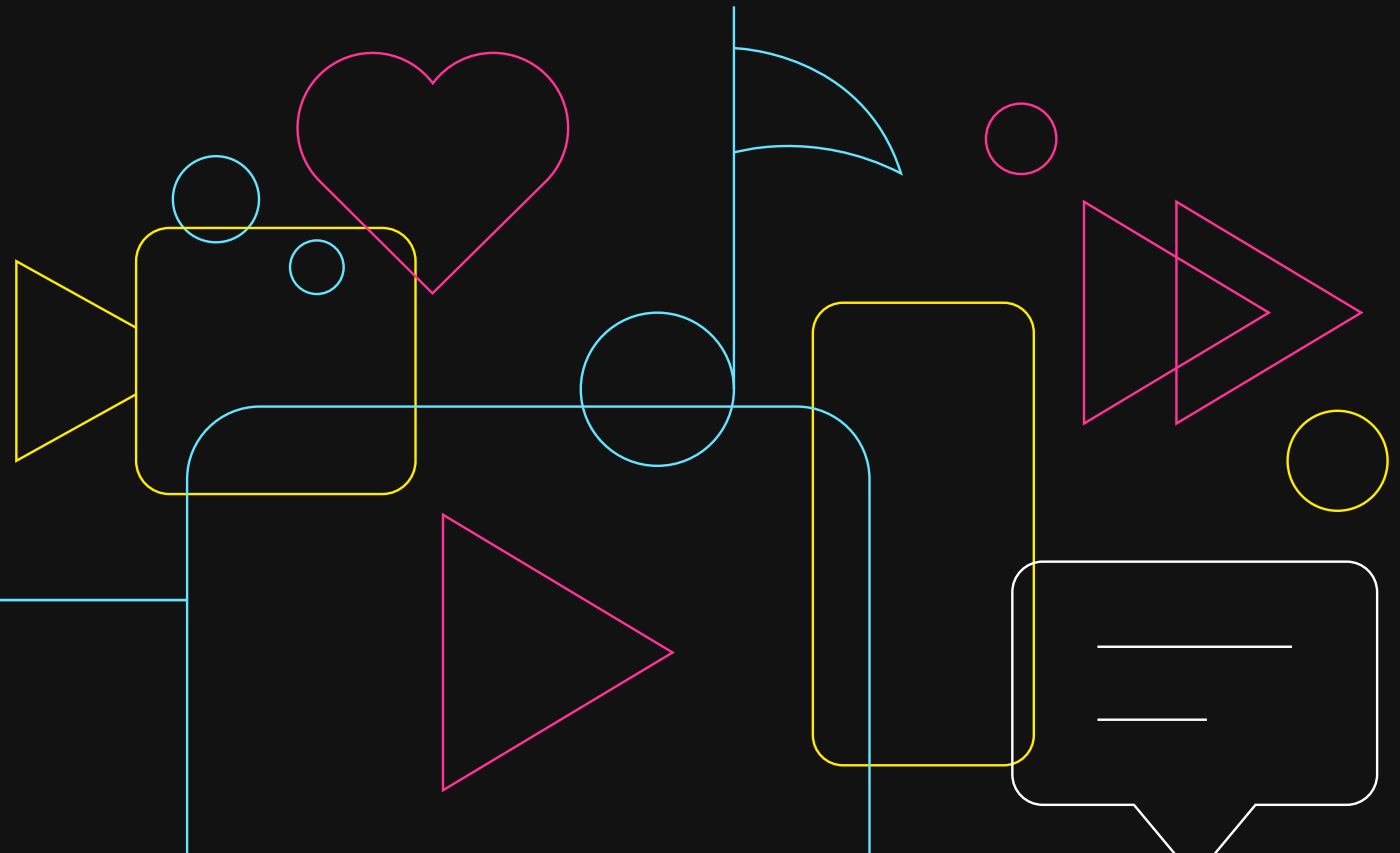


Make It Make Sense

A TikTok Culture Guide

TikTok is its own world.

Learn how to navigate it with confidence
and make your business fearless.



Welcome!

You belong here.

We get it, you may not feel that way yet.

TikTok is where the cool folks hang, after all. How can your business ever fit in? The truth is, TikTok may feel intimidating at first. But with enough guidance (and only a smattering of patience), it can open a fun new world you've never experienced on social media before. So strap in, take a deep breath, and join us on a journey through what-the-heck-this-all-means on TikTok.

TikTok by the numbers

1B

monthly active users

[Source](#)

19.6_{HRS}

average scroll-time per user each month

[Source](#)

47%

TikTok users who say they bought something they saw in the app

[Source](#)

No dancing required

Unless you want to

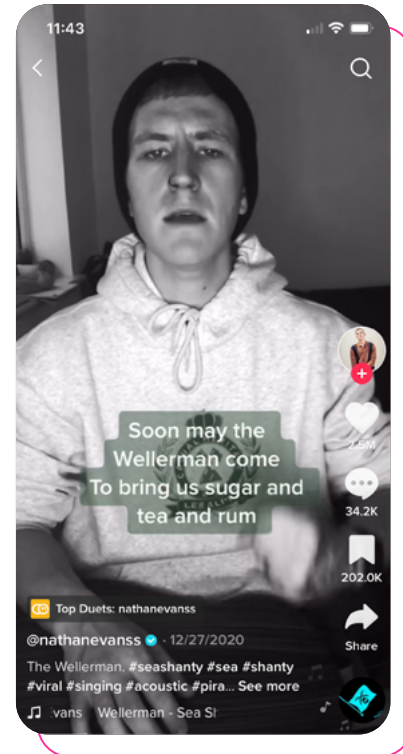
TikTok isn't just an app for dance challenges anymore.

The depth and breadth of TikTok's influence is often lost on many. Like, when you were vibing on sea shanties in 2021, did you know it was thanks to TikTok? Or that you can blame it for those late-night cravings induced by posts of feta pasta across every social network? If your hand experienced cramping from over-whisking coffee back in 2020, that's because of TikTok too. And don't even get us started on the sourdough craze that led to zero instant yeast everywhere. Even OG digital marketer and industry queen Ann Handley used a viral TikTok challenge (of all things!) to demonstrate good copywriting.

With widespread cultural influence, rising user numbers, and massive commerce activity, it's time to get your business on board. The good news is, TikTok's algorithm makes it easier for small businesses to go viral or get discovered regardless of follower count or engagement rate. So whether you think your brand is TikTok-y enough or not, or whether you even feel like you have what it takes to succeed, we can bet you have a fighting chance.

Everything TikTok culture at a glance

This guide covers the many different factors that make TikTok a platform like no other—from sounds and visuals to creators, subcultures, and lingo. Once you get a grasp on these fundamentals, you'll begin to appreciate TikTok for what it really is: a fun new challenge and exciting opportunity for your business.



[Watch Nathan Evans' video on TikTok](#)

TikTok trends move FAST

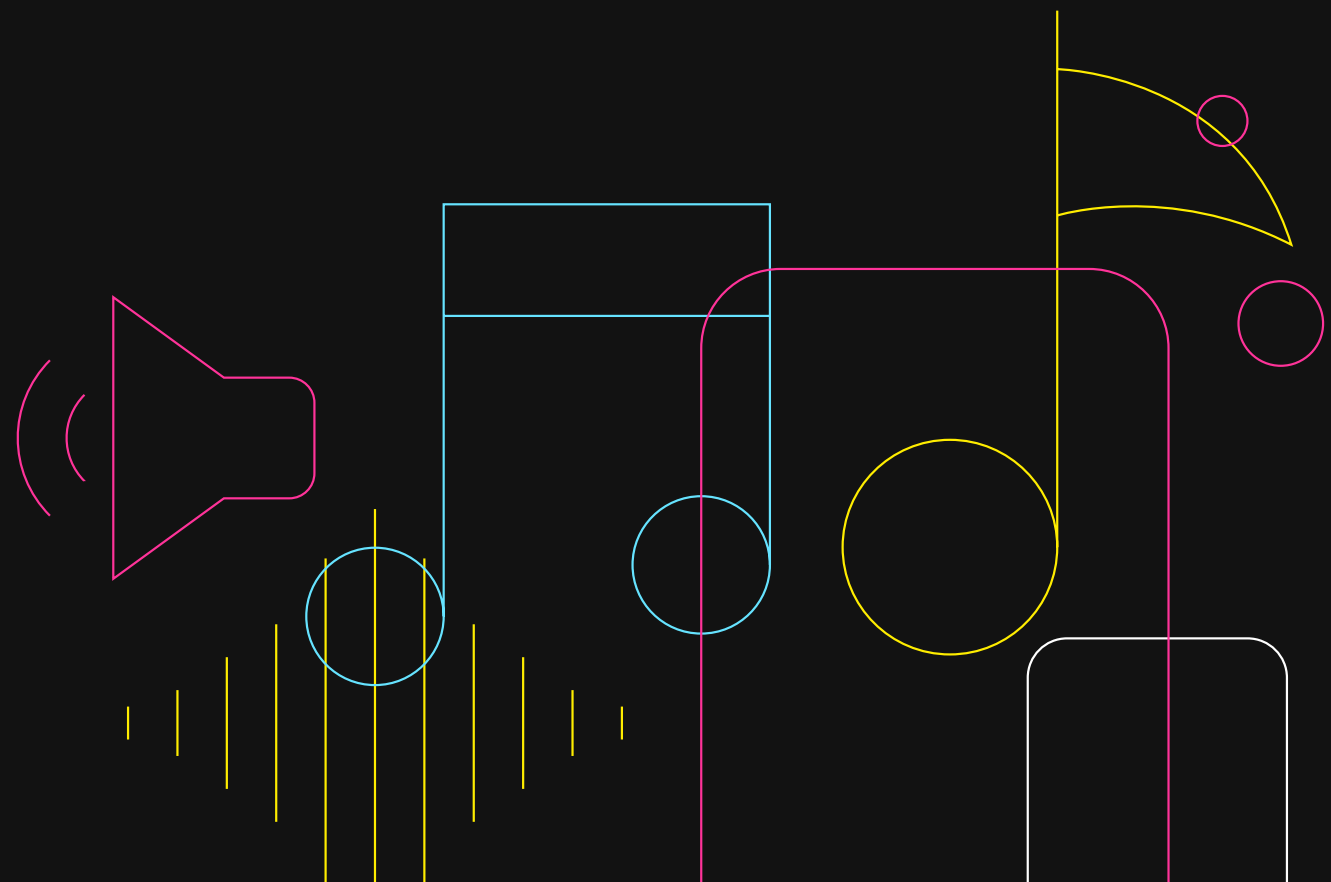
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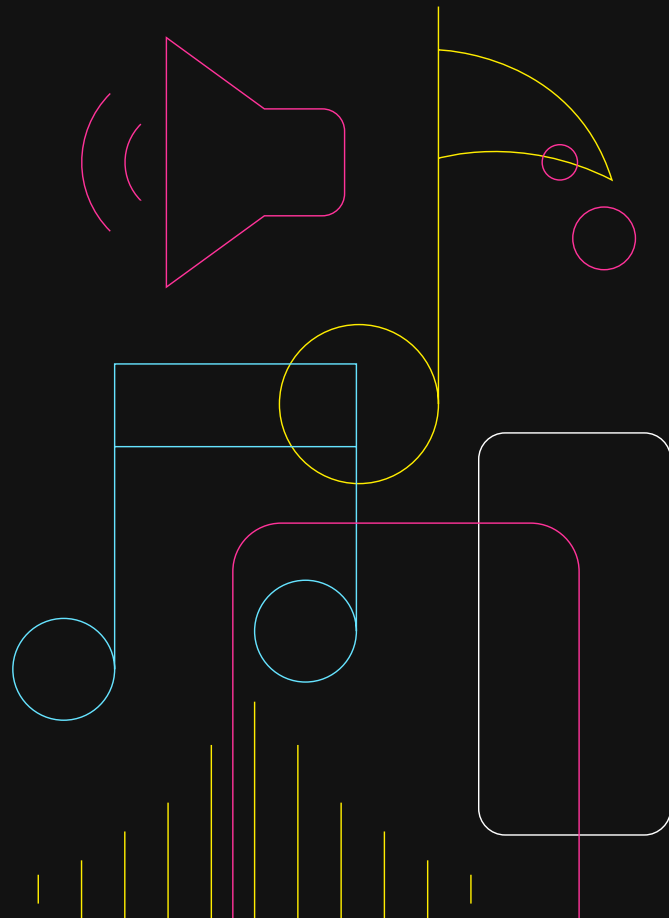
Make It Make Sense: A TikTok Culture Guide

Music and Sounds on TikTok

Explore the TikTok soundscape and why it's a key differentiator among social networks.



Sound on, volume up



Sound and music have always been central to TikTok's allure. Unlike Facebook, Instagram, and even YouTube, watching videos on silent just isn't a thing on TikTok. Sound is integral to the app, and that's what sets it apart.

TikTok gives users the option to pick a track from its massive sound library to use for their own videos. Business accounts get access to a sound library too, but theirs looks a bit different because of commercial use limitations.

Using sounds is a huge boost for potential virality because, from the start, you're already part of the conversation happening around that sound. Others can also pick up your own original audio and reach more people—and still credit it to you. Trends often start this way on the platform.

So what kinds of sounds exist in the app (apart from a video's original audio track)? Here are the four main categories:

- **Popular music and original songs**
- **Snippets of music**
- **Meme sounds**
- **Media clips**

88%

of TikTok users say sound is vital to their experience

[Source](#)

75%

of TikTok users say they discover new artists through TikTok

[Source](#)

65%

of TikTok users say they prefer content from brands that feature original sound

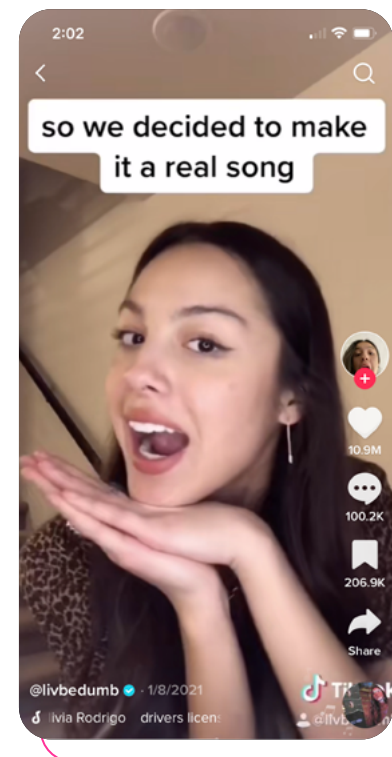
[Source](#)

Popular music and original songs

Songs in TikTok come in many styles and genres. The video creator usually uploads them as original sounds or selects one from the platform's database. Songs are so big on TikTok that it's become a launchpad for many artists. Before Lil Nas X broke Billboard Hot 100 records, his song "Old Town Road" was a viral TikTok hit. And while Olivia Rodrigo already had a budding acting career, it was a TikTok challenge inspired by her song that sent her fame into overdrive. TikTokers are even winning Grammys now, like Abigail Barlow and Emily Bear, who co-created the unofficial Bridgerton musical right in the app. Um, wow?

Snippets of music

Yes, we know, anything can be a snippet of music—including everything we linked above. But for the sake of this guide, we're referring to the more general tracks found on TikTok. Bits from older songs, like Kreepa's "Oh No." Stuff that's been lifted from popular children's shows, like The Backyardigans' "Into The Thick of It!." Or even tracks made by composers especially for TikTok, like "My money don't jiggle jiggle" by Duke & Jones, which revolves around a snippet from an interview with journalist and filmmaker Louis Theroux. In short, they may not be current chart-toppers, but they're just as popular and just as ubiquitous.



[Watch Olivia Rodrigo's video on TikTok](#)

Ready to try making TikTok videos? Let's do it together.

Discover how to make a winning TikTok video and how to pair it with the perfect sound in our step-by-step tutorial webinar.

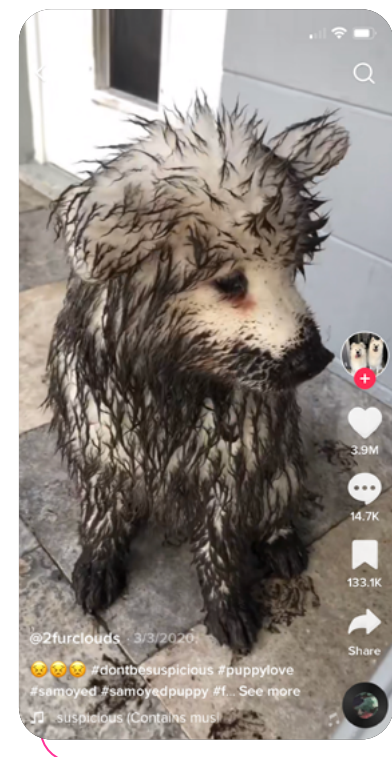
[Watch the Workshop](#)

Meme sounds

Most of us still think of memes as funny pictures with big, blocky captions. But on TikTok, they're something else entirely (that's so TikTok). Meme sounds refer to original sound bites that become so popular, they reach meme status on the platform. Examples are "Masculinity" and "I am a Socialist" (more popularly known as "Am I the drama?"), which sparked a combined total of over 230,000 new videos and tens of millions of views.

Media clips

Movies and TV shows are the perfect source of TikTok sound inspiration. And while some, like this clip from The Devil Wears Prada, are used to show off a creator's performing chops, many take on a life of their own. "Don't be suspicious" from Parks and Recreation is now its very own TikTok trend, with a handful of remixes and over 700,000 videos. Taraji P. Henson's iconic "I gotta put me first" is now also a TikTok classic, while Maddy's Euphoria blow-up is quickly rising to meme status.



[Watch Felix & Finley's video on TikTok](#)

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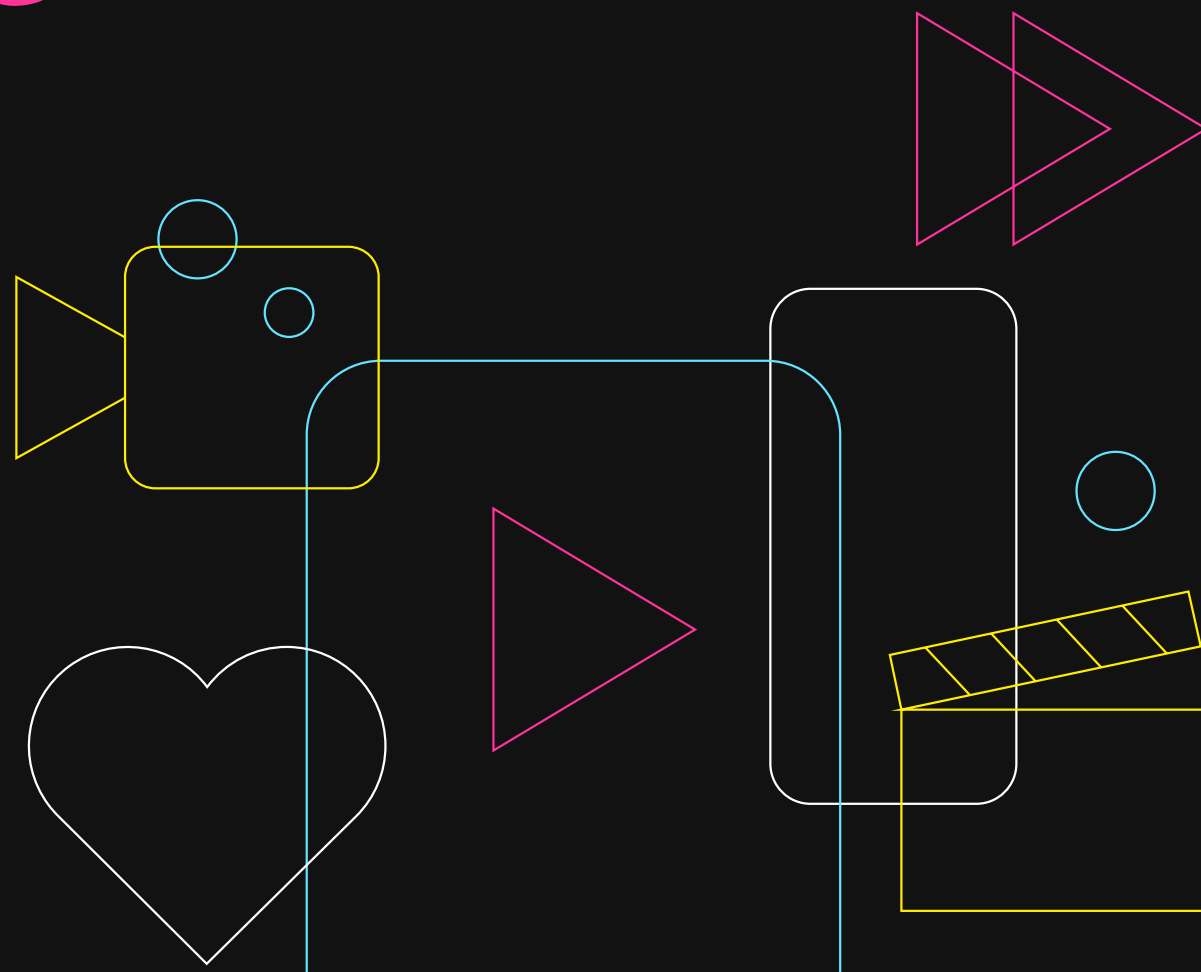
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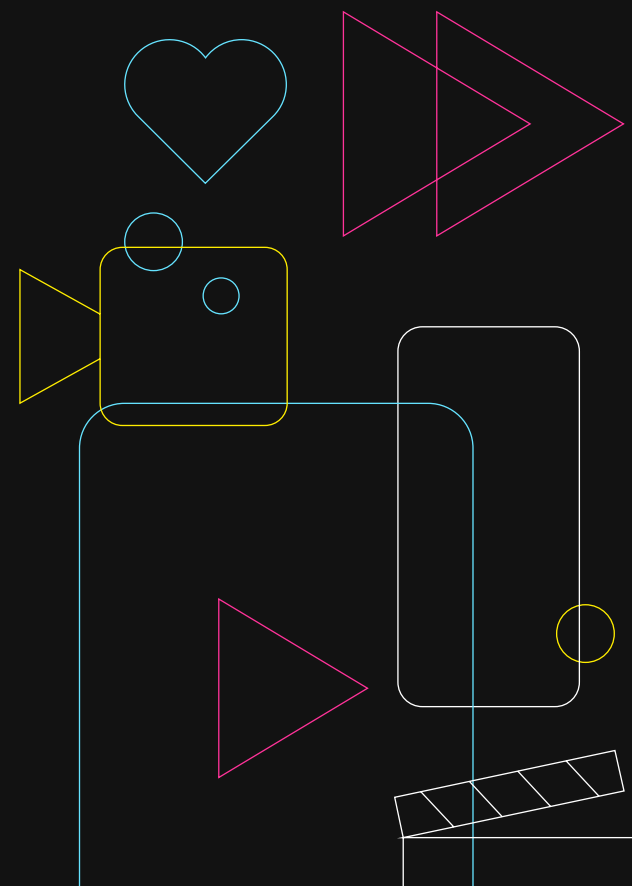
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Popular TikTok Video Styles

What makes TikTok's visual aesthetic so distinct? A combination of things no other social network can replicate.



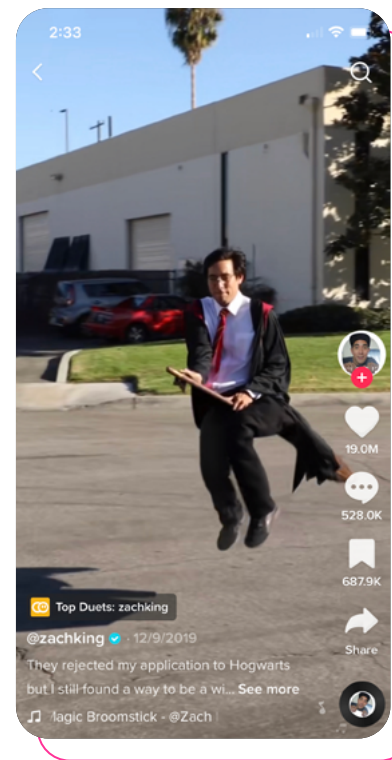
If a social network and an editing tool had a baby



It's not just the sounds of TikTok that make it unique among social networking platforms, the app also has a specific visual quality that no other platform has. That's probably because TikTok isn't just a social network. It's also robust editing software that's simple and sophisticated at the same time.

In other words, it can do a lot, but you don't have to be Spielberg to use it. Collaboration is also currency—and really easy—in TikTok. These two elements pave the way for new approaches to visual storytelling that are impossible elsewhere.

Curious about what gives TikTok its often weird and wondrous visual appeal? Check out our scientific observations below (because we all know social is a mad science).



[Watch Zach King's video on TikTok](#)

947k

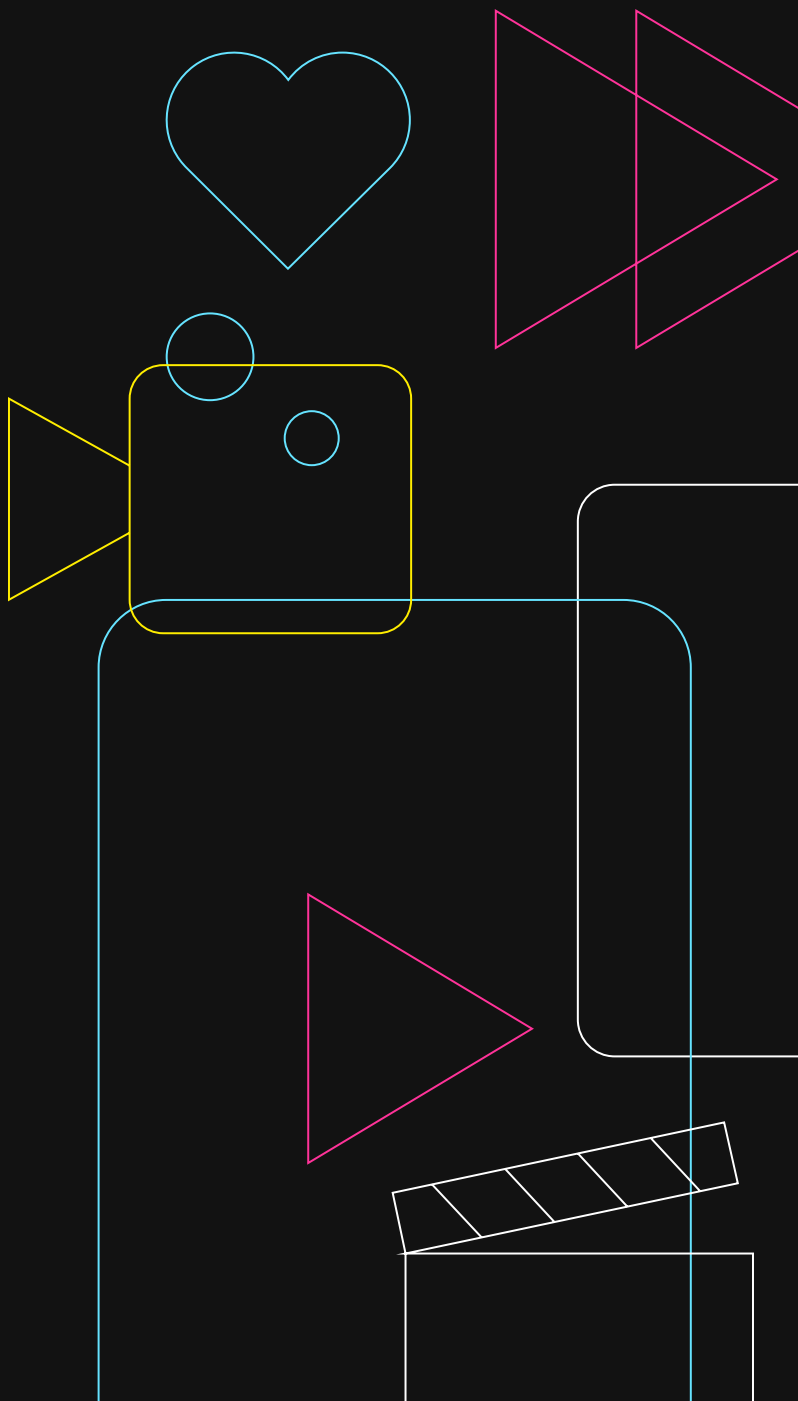
users aged 18 years old and above join the app every day [Source](#)

44%

daily TikTok users who want branded content to be fun and entertaining [Source](#)

2.6T

views of videos using TikTok's wildly popular duet feature [Source](#)



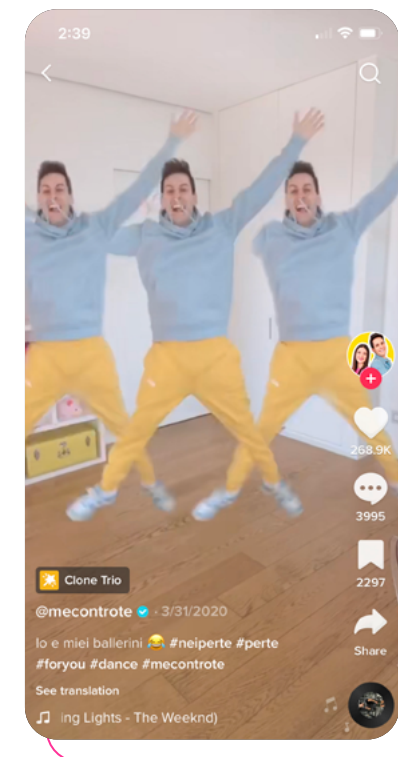
Effects

Effects on TikTok alter details or add pizzazz to your video. It's one of the most overwhelming things about starting on TikTok, and it doesn't help that there are literally hundreds of them to play with. The good news is, once you know what effects are, using them is pretty straightforward.

In the app, effects are divided into categories like Trending, Interactive, Funny, and more. Some popular effects include green screen, clone trio, slow zoom, the spider effect, appearance filters, and animal effects (that let you turn your pet cat into a lion... or your pet lion into a cat).

Filters

While many effects are also called filters, they're not quite the same thing (we know, so confusing). Filters are much more digestible than effects, and not as powerful. Similar to Instagram filters, they function as presets that enhance the overall look of your video. Use filters to adjust tone, saturation, contrast, and the like.

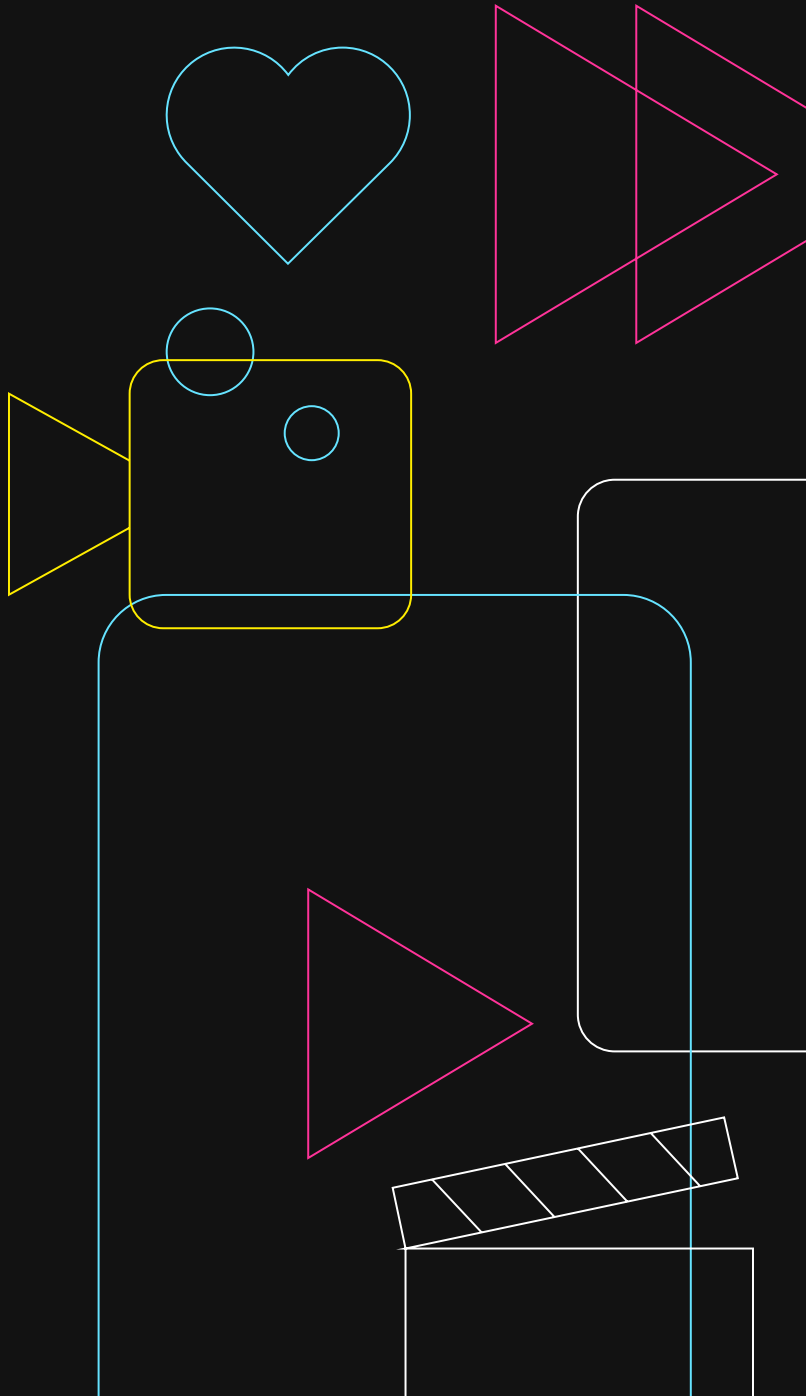


[Watch Me contro Te's video on TikTok](#)

Don't break a sweat making your first TikTok video—do it with us

Discover how to make a winning TikTok video—including getting all the clips you need—in our step-by-step tutorial webinar.

[Watch the Workshop](#)

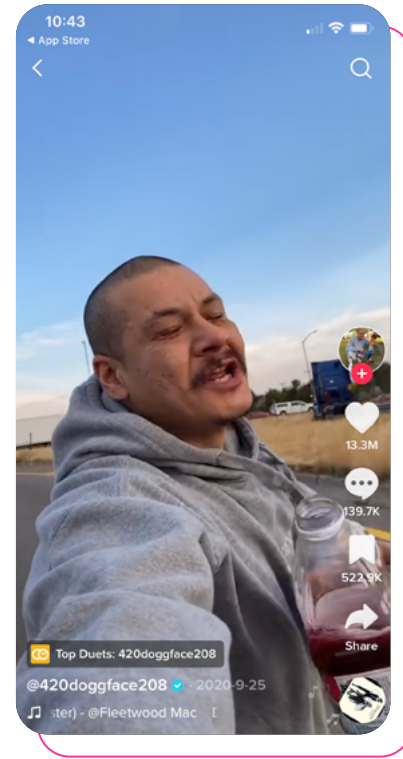


Clever storytelling

Clever storytelling is quintessentially TikTok, which means doing cool things with your video—usually through editing—to tell a story. Perfect loops and videos with multiple characters all played by one person are popular techniques you'll see. It could also mean using collaborative features unique to the app to do something interesting. Duets let you feature someone else's clip side-by-side with yours. Stitch, meanwhile, is where you use a short clip from another video to open or set-up your own TikTok.

Vibes

Are flashy effects and cool editing tricks necessary to do well on TikTok? Hard no. If anything, candid and unpolished videos with little to no production design are just as common—even from the platform's biggest names. These all contribute to TikTok's authenticity, a defining feature of the social network. At the end of the day, it's all about the vibe on TikTok—and you don't need fancy techniques for that.



[Watch 420dogface208's video on TikTok](#)

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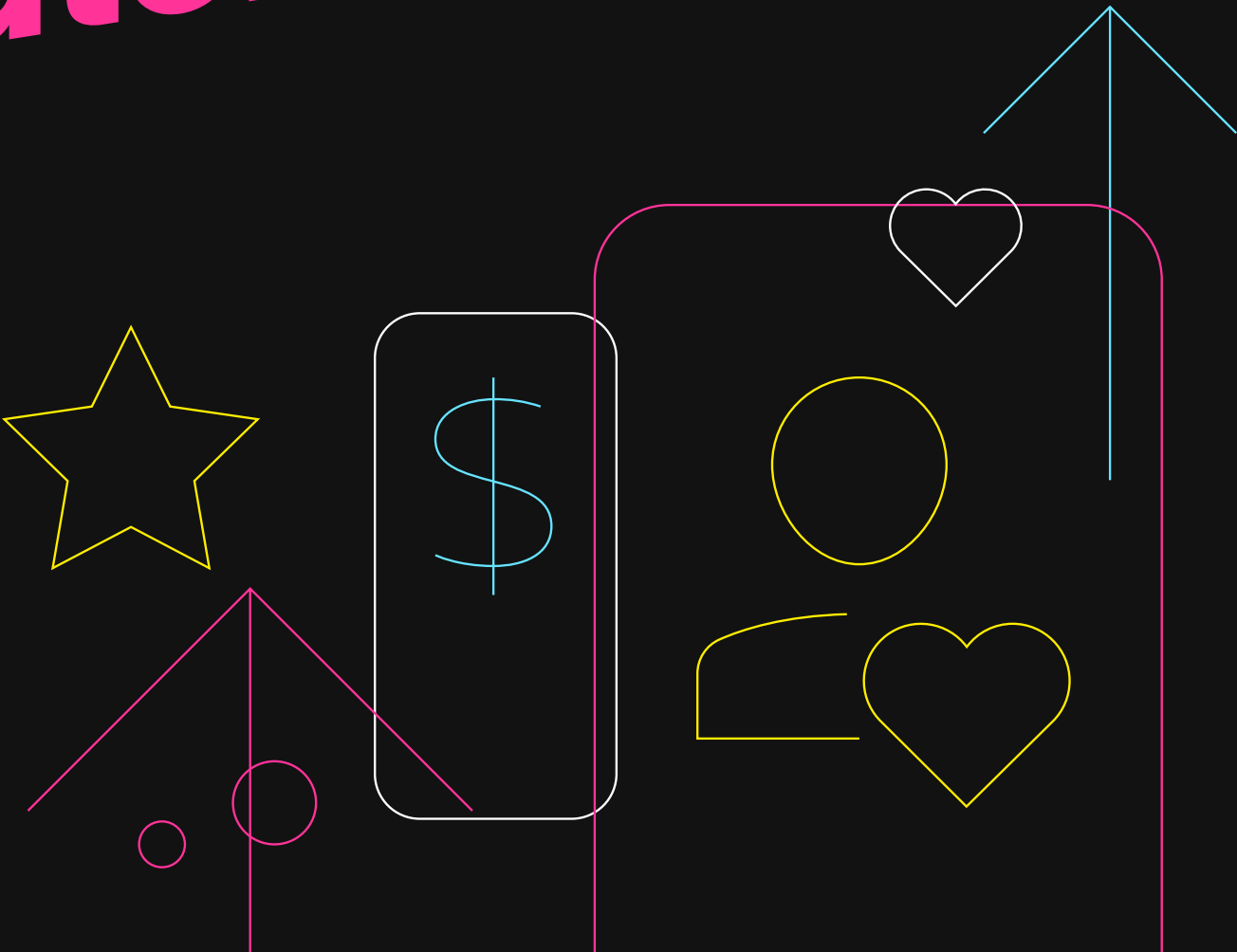
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Make It Make Sense: A TikTok Culture Guide

Influential TikTok Creators



Meet the people leading the charge in the platform's massive creator economy.

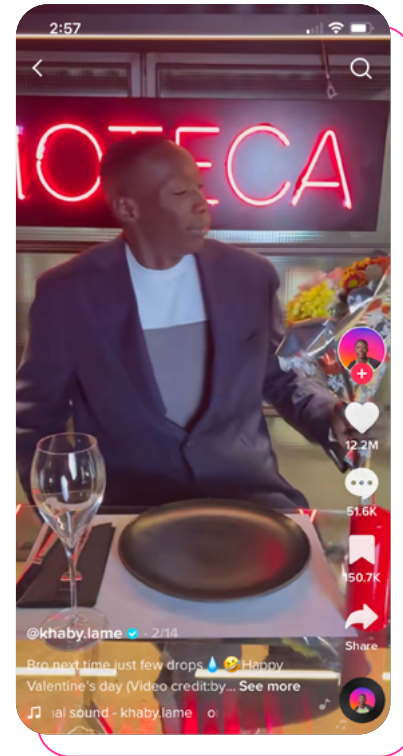


Yet another new brand of celebrity

We've had celebrities, influencers, and creators for a while now, but none of those terms seem to capture the authority of TikTok's elite. Comprised mostly of Gen Zers plucked from obscurity by lip syncs, creative shticks, and TikTok's organic-friendly algorithm, the platform's top content creators are the faces and voices of an entire generation.

Many of TikTok's top names were also groomed by collab houses like The Hype House and The Sway House, where creators live together and create content full time. Thanks to this machinery and vast network, their influence on their hundreds of millions of followers is so big that it's shifting how businesses approach advertising.

So what do these TikTok stars do and why are they so big on the app? Here's a non-exhaustive list of the social network's biggest and most influential creators, and the kind of content they make.



[Watch Khabane Lame's video on TikTok](#)

63%

of TikTok users like it when brands show TikTok creators in their videos

[Source](#)

193%

higher 6-second view rate for ad content created in partnership with creators

[Source](#)

93%

engagement rate for ad content created for TikTok in partnership with creators [Source](#)

Biggest stars and highest earners

Charli D'Amelio

With over 139 million followers, [Charli D'Amelio](#) is still the reigning queen of TikTok with her lip syncs and dance moves. She's also currently the highest paid TikTok star after making \$17.5 million USD in 2021, according to [Forbes](#). Since becoming the biggest name out of The Hype House, D'Amelio has now ventured into lucrative sponsorships, fashion collabs, and even a reality show alongside older sister, Dixie.

Khaby Lame

Thanks to funny videos reacting to popular TikTok trends and content, [Khaby Lame's](#) following shot up to more than 136 million followers in only two years. He currently has the second biggest following on the platform. Unlike most TikTok celebs at this level though, Lame didn't rise with the backing of a collab house and he has yet to go full showbiz with his TikTok career. Lame is Senegalese and based in Italy.

Bella Poarch

[Bella Poarch](#) is currently the third biggest TikTok creator (over 89 million followers) and fourth highest earner (\$5 million USD). She rose to fame when her lip sync video of Millie B's "M to the B" went viral in 2020. It's still one of the most watched videos on TikTok with over half a billion views and more than 2 million comments. Poarch has since expanded her brand to include endorsements and a budding music career.



[Watch Charli D'Amelio's video on TikTok](#)

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Biggest stars and highest earners

Addison Rae

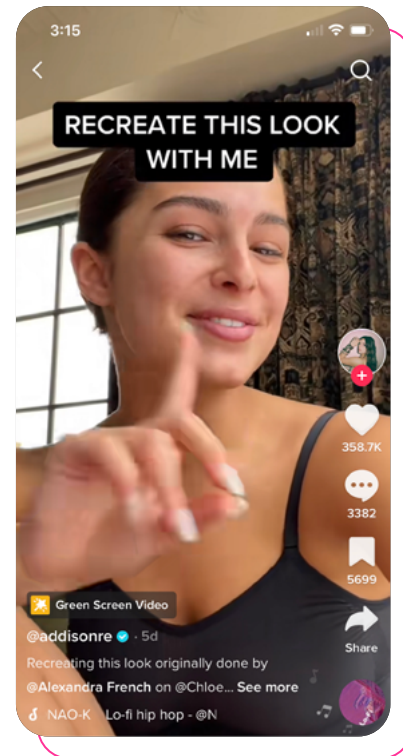
While [Addison Rae](#) tails Bella Poarch when it comes to following (over 87 million), [Forbes](#) did rank her one spot higher in terms of TikTok-related earnings (\$8.5 million USD). Rae is an OG TikToker and member of The Hype House, with her initial success dating back to 2019. She has since leveraged her dances, lip syncs, and comedy skits into sponsorships, a makeup line, and an extensive deal with Netflix, starting with her lead role in romcom remake, *He's All That*.

Zach King

The only certified Millennial in the top five (GASP!), [Zach King](#) was making waves as a content creator on YouTube and Vine long before TikTok. Since joining the platform, though, he's amassed a following of more than 68 million and has one of the [most viewed TikTok videos](#) of all time. (His flying broomstick illusion has over 2 billion views.) King is known for his cool editing tricks and video magic—the very things that established his early success as a YouTube creator.

Kris Collins

[Kris Collins](#), best known by her handle @kallmekris, is one of the top 20 most popular TikTok content creators with over 43 million followers, and in the [top five biggest earners](#) on the platform in 2021. Thanks to comedic sketches with a large and endearing cast of characters—all played by her—Collins rose to TikTok fame and now has a steady stream of sponsorships from major brands that work well with her wholesome, family-centric humor.



[Watch Addison Rae's video on TikTok](#)

Got burning questions about TikTok creators?

Get insights on content creation, brand partnerships, follower building, and more straight from TikTok creators themselves in this exclusive Q&A webinar.

[Watch the Q&A](#)

Influential community leaders

Shina Novalinga

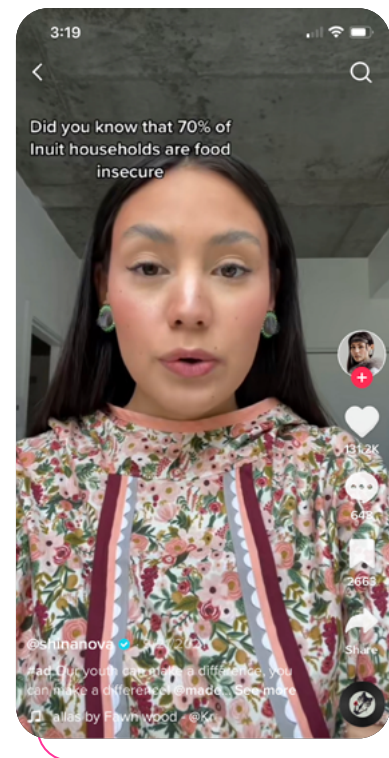
With just over 4 million followers, [Shina Novalinga](#) isn't one of TikTok's biggest names—but her content is still making a big impact. She's an Inuk creator who went viral for her Indigenous throat singing. With the help of her mother, who often makes cameos in her videos, Novalinga proudly showcases Indigenous style and fashion. She's part of a growing TikTok community who are using the platform to celebrate their cultural heritage and share it with the rest of the world.

The Old Gays

Robert Reeves, Michael Patterson, Jessay Martin, and Bill Lyons may be in their 60s and 70s, but they're farthest you can get from Boomer energy (you know what we mean). Collectively known as [The Old Gays](#), the foursome first gained popularity through [promotional videos for Grindr](#). Thanks to their humor, warmth, and plain old fabulousness, they now have over 6 million followers on TikTok, several sponsorships, and a TV show to boot.

Erika Kullberg

If you think law is the least interesting profession to portray in a place like TikTok, you probably haven't met [Erika Kullberg](#). Thanks to her skits, it's easier to understand your rights as a customer and as an employee. Her videos have become so popular that they've inspired endless parodies and the hashtag #ThanksErika has garnered over 61 million views.



[Watch Shina Nova's video on TikTok](#)

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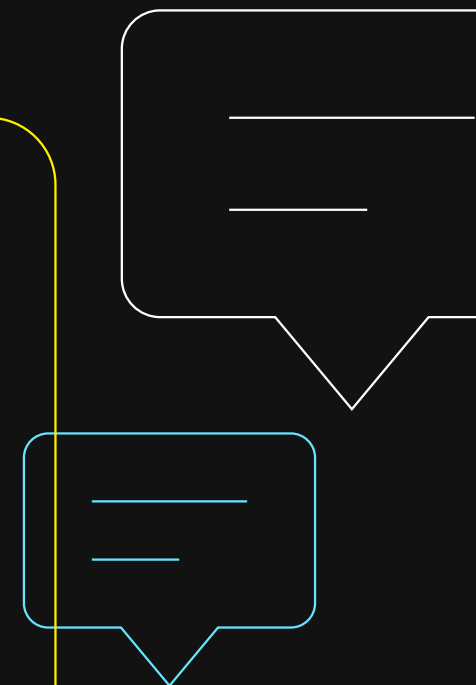
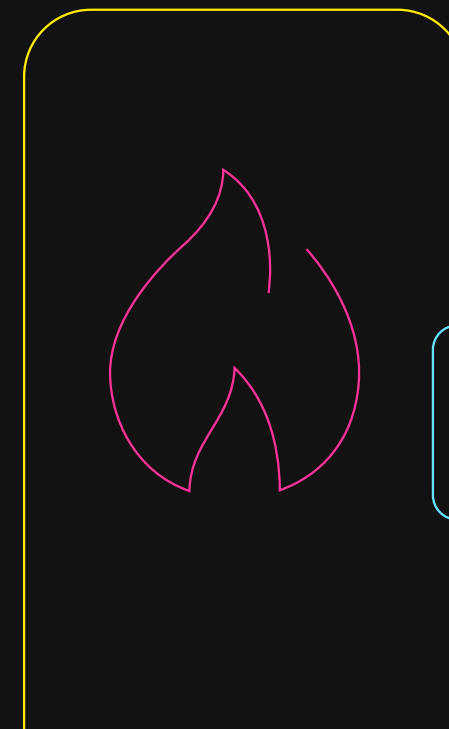
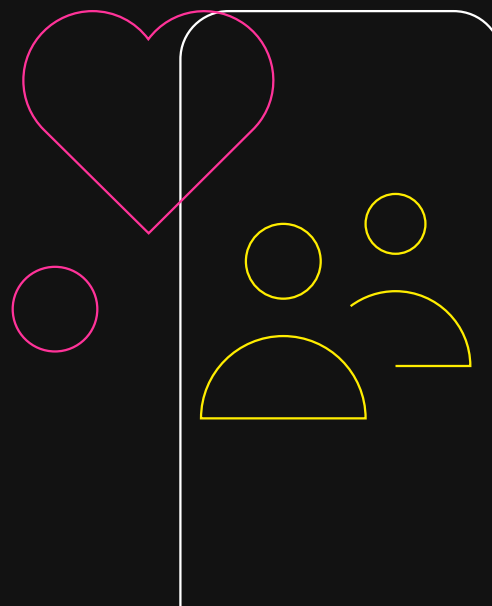
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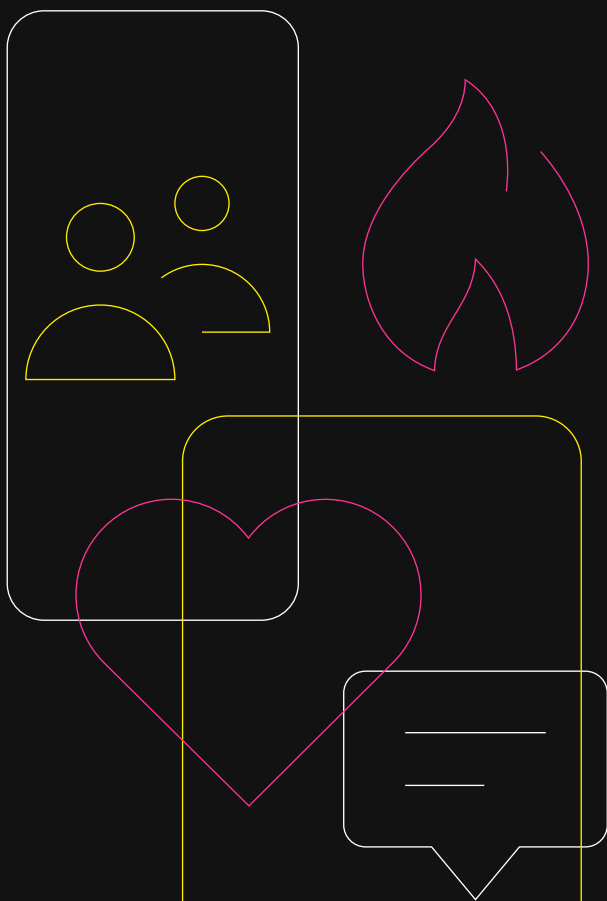
Biggest Subcultures and Communities on TikTok



Discover the tight-knit communities and niche groups where anyone can find their place.



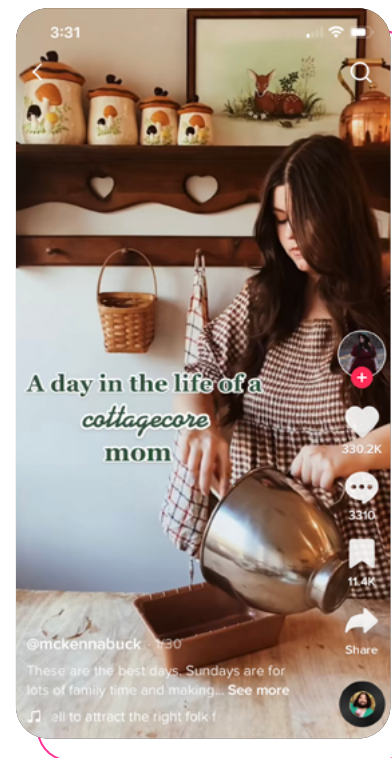
The 'toks' inside TikTok



For a platform that promotes creativity and self-expression, it's no surprise how easily users find their people on TikTok. These communities and subcultures are usually built around shared interests, aesthetics, or lifestyles. More importantly, members of these subcultures also share the same core values and uphold the same causes.

Communities and subcultures are a powerful way for companies to reach their audience on TikTok. TikTok itself even suggests that they are the new demographics, because while their members vary in age, gender, and economic background, they converge around what they're passionate about—and the brands and products that best represent it.

But what do these TikTok communities actually look like? We rounded up some of the biggest on the platform to give you an idea (but don't stop here because there's always more to explore).



[Watch McKenna's video on TikTok](#)

70%

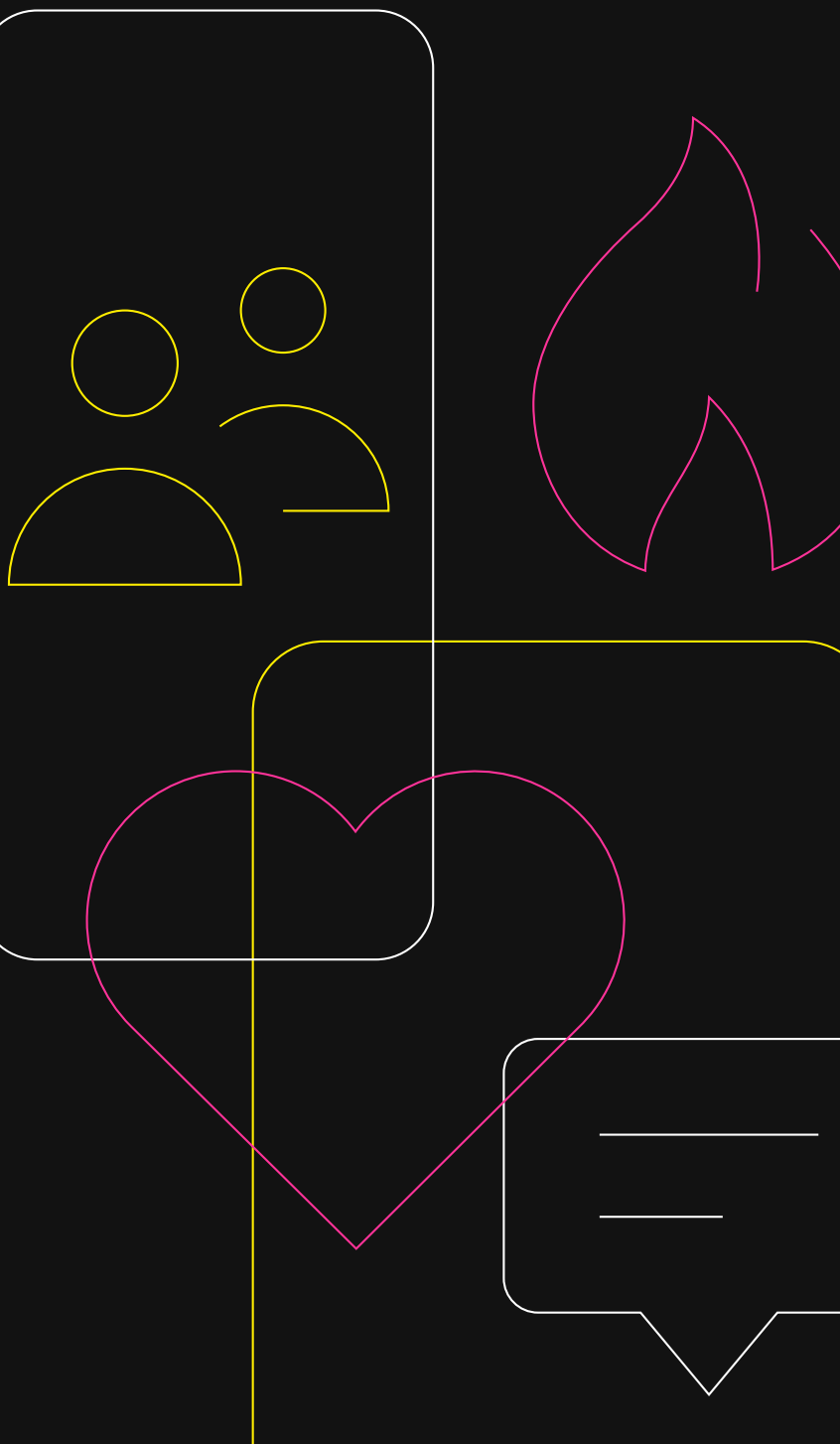
of TikTok users say they feel like they're part of a community [Source](#)

78%

of TikTok users agree that the best brands are ones that share their ideas and work with users [Source](#)

7 IN 10

TikTok users feel communities on the platform can affect change in culture [Source](#)



#BookTok

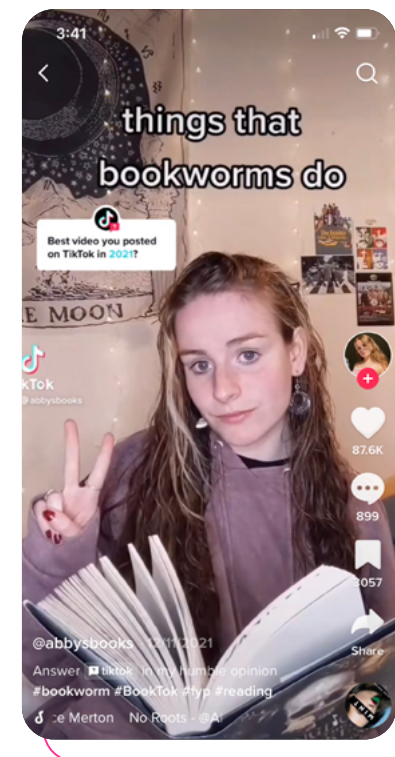
#BookTok is the TikTok gathering place of bookworms and bibliophiles. It pertains to anything book and writing related—book reviews, writing tips, discussions, and even reenactments of novels. And while some top “booktokers” like [@abbysbooks](#) mainly talk about novels, the community embraces all types and genres of books. (Did you publish a self-help book or the ultimate guide to your industry? Welcome to #BookTok!)

#CottageCore

One of the biggest subcultures to ever hit TikTok and beyond, #CottageCore is a lifestyle and aesthetic that romanticizes country life and simple—but visually appealing—living. Just like #CottageCore influencer [@aclotheshorse](#)’s content, it’s filled with flowy dresses, wild gardens, charming houses, and rustic pies. More than these though, it celebrates connectedness to nature, femininity, and sustainability.

#DarkAcademia

As the name implies, this is a subculture and aesthetic that celebrates the academe: literature, learning, tweed coats, plaid, and argyle sweaters. It’s a popular aesthetic for Gen Zers who have yet to get a taste of university life, thanks to the pandemic. Like community influencer [@cosyfaerie](#)’s feed, #DarkAcademia favors darker materials and tends to slant into the more gothic realms (think Edgar Allan Poe). It also has a sister aesthetic, #LightAcademia, which leans towards beiges and light neutrals.

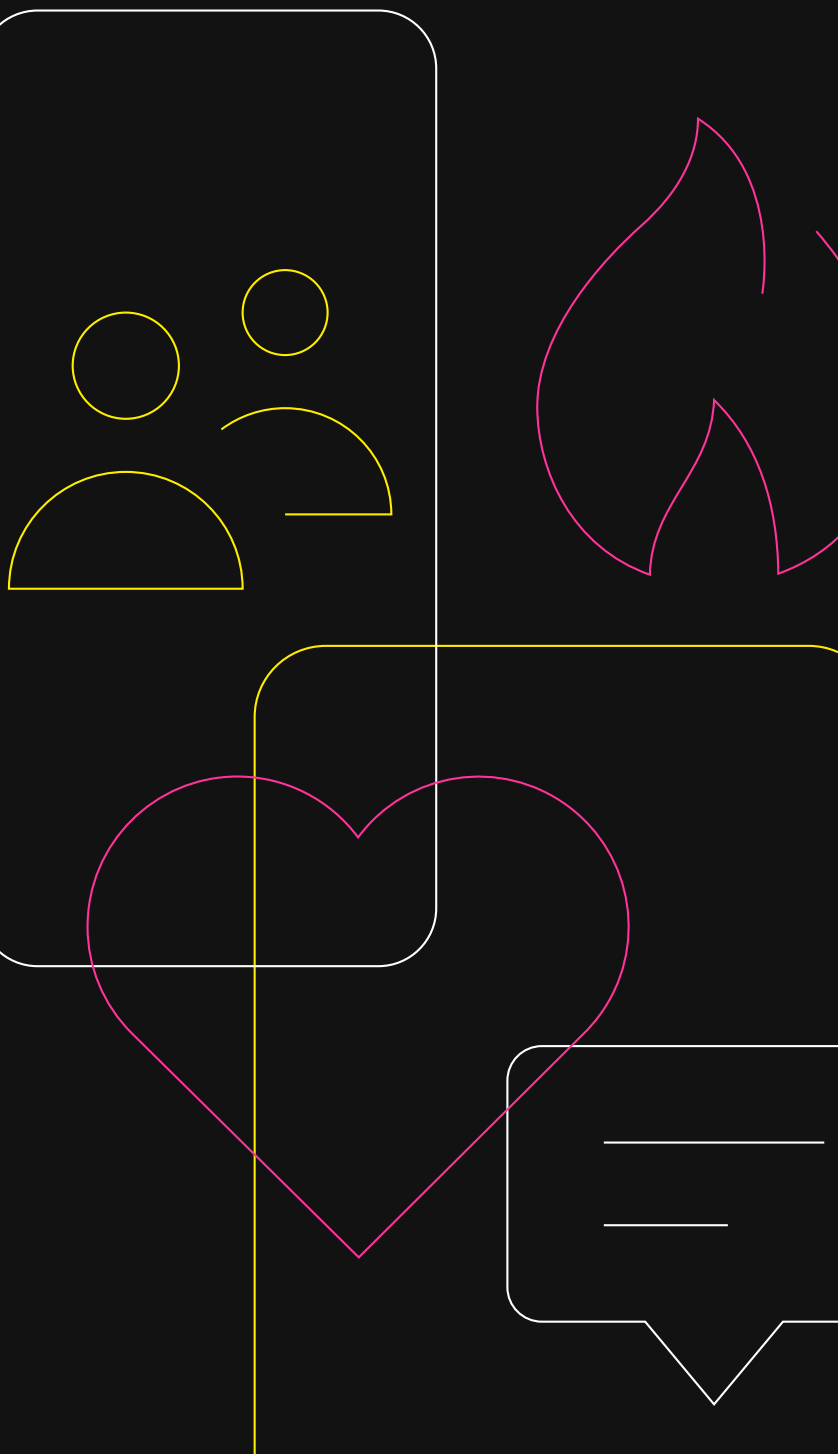


[Watch Abby’s video on TikTok](#)

Wondering if your business should be on TikTok?

Your business may not have #CottageCore vibes, but that doesn’t mean you don’t belong. Find out what TikTok can offer small businesses and whether you should give it a try in our webinar.

[Watch the Session](#)



#EGirl & #EBoy

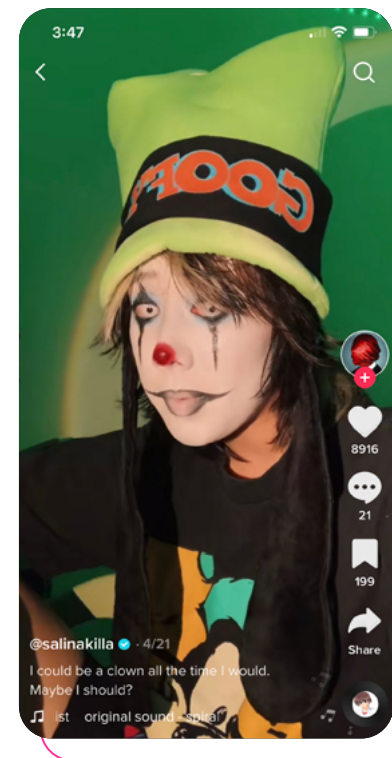
Short for “electronic girl” or “electronic boy,” the [#EGirl](#) and [#EBoy](#) subcultures are known to some as the next iteration of the goth/emo scene of the early 2000s while also being the evolution of cosplay, video game, and anime communities. They’re folks who shun mainstream aesthetics and instead value showing up as yourself—whatever that looks like. Top TikTok [#EGirl](#) [@salinakilla](#) even manages to try it all with her looks that range from funky bubblegum to creepy clown.

#FitTok

Fitness is often intimidating for many, thanks to an image of hyper-perfection cultivated over the years (and idealized across many social platforms). On TikTok though, it’s an approachable and inclusive community. [#FitTok](#) is less about appearance and more about going out there, doing something, and getting all the support you need. Athlete, bodybuilder, and top FitToker [@demibagby](#) even demos workouts on sidewalks using your car door—because why not!

#MomsOfTikTok

The TikTok Millennial takeover comes in the form of [#MomsOfTikTok](#). Unlike its Instagram counterpart, it’s not about perfection or glamor—you’ll rarely see overly made-up, fashionista moms here. Instead, it tackles the realities of parenthood, messy ponytail and all, but always with a funny, self-aware, and supportive approach. [@ongsquad](#), for instance, is a mix of parenting tips, baby trivia, skits, and dancing.

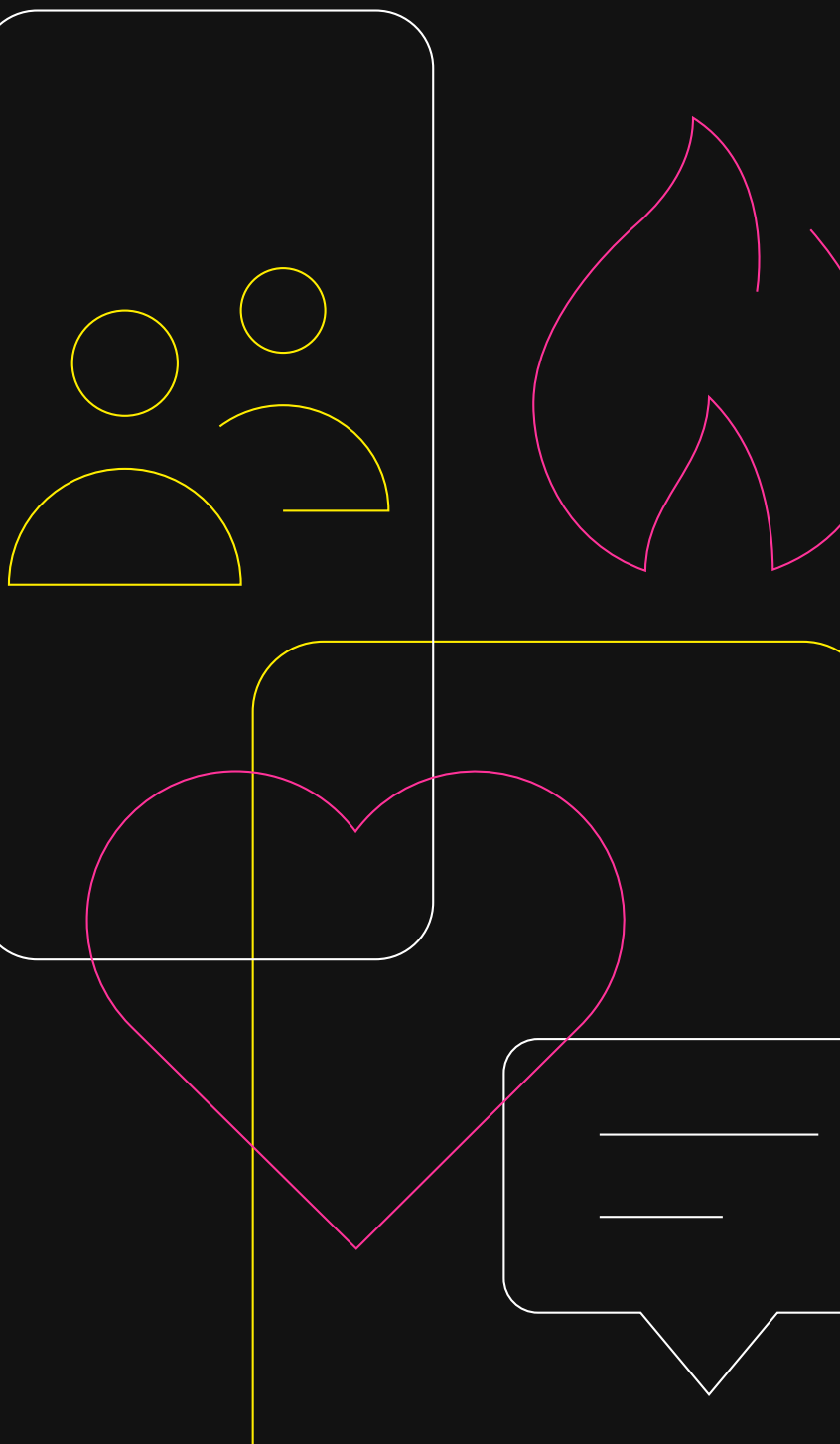


[Watch Salinakilla’s video on TikTok](#)

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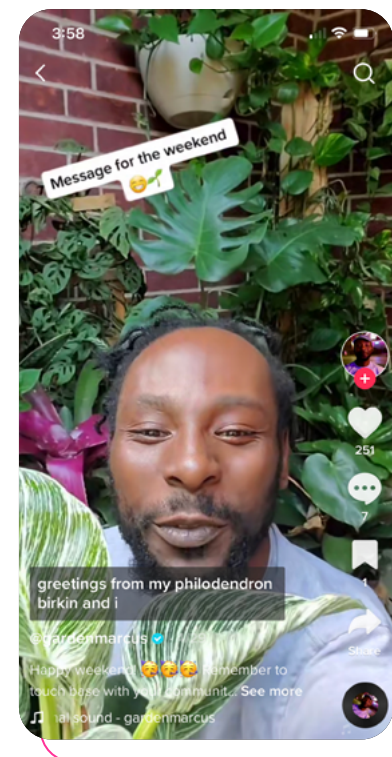


#PlantTok

The [#PlantTok](#) community sprouted (get it, sprouted? *badum tss*) over the pandemic, and is now a refuge for panicked plant parents, budding indoor plant enthusiasts, and seasoned hobbyists. Followers of the hashtag can get tips and advice on anything plant-related. And the community's top creators, like [@theplantprodigy](#) and [@gardenmarcus](#), provide guidance on the basics of plantcare (like potting and repotting) all the way to whether you can save your dying plant.

#WitchTok

We've been enamored by magic and witchcraft long before Harry Potter made us dream of attending Hogwarts, and the [#WitchTok](#) community is the perfect 21st century adaptation. Overflowing with mysticism (astrology, tarot cards) and a dash of Mother Earth (ritual cleanses, moon phases), this subculture focuses on empowerment and positive energy. Creators like [@officialmadamadam](#) even manages to blend the mystical with fun TikTok trends to give [#WitchTok](#) content a whole other dimension.



[Watch Garden Marcus's video on TikTok](#)

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Your business may not have [#CottageCore](#) vibes, but that doesn't mean you don't belong. Find out what TikTok can offer small businesses and whether you should give it a try in our webinar.

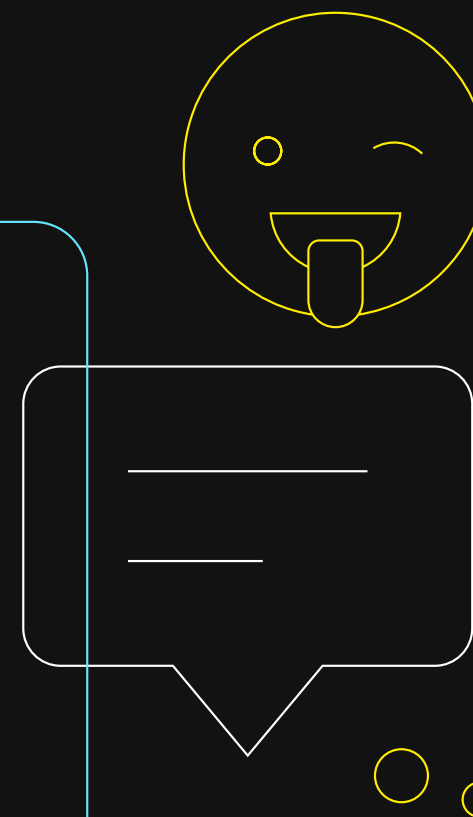
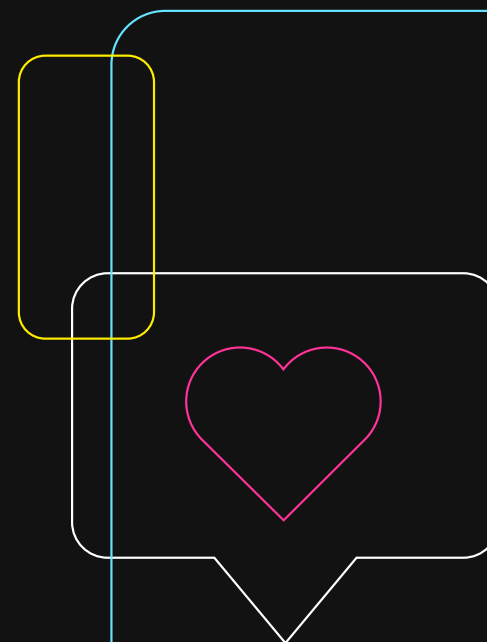
[Watch the Session](#)

Make It Make Sense: A TikTok Culture Guide

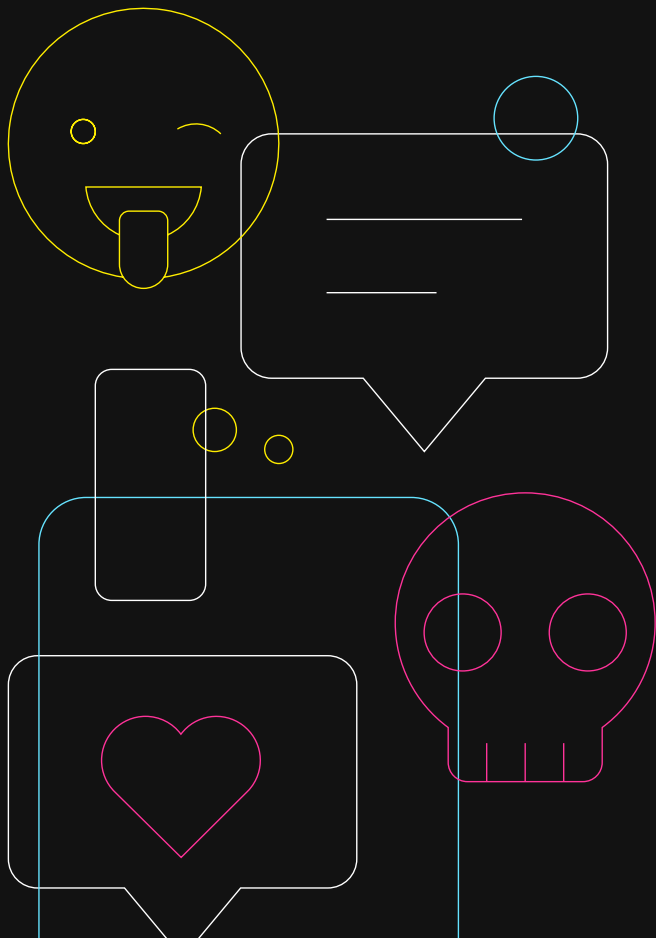
TikTok Vocabulary, Lingo and Emoji Meanings



Don't get caught using brain emojis for your business. Learn what words and terms really mean on TikTok.



Talk like a TikToker



Bestie

A term of endearment. Can be applied to your actual best friend or strangers on the internet, as long as you legitimately care about them.

CEO

Refers to someone who's the best at what they do.

Cheugy

Something that's off-trend or dated.
Pronounced chew-gee.

#FYP

Stands for "for you page," which refers to the main feed you see when you log in to the TikTok app. Users add this hashtag in the hopes of getting more views..

Heather

From a Conan Gray song that became popular on TikTok. Refers to a girl who is attractive and well-liked, someone who others wish they could be.

Mutuals/Moots

A user that you follow who also follows you back.

OOMF

Stands for "one of my followers."

Periodt

Used at the end of a sentence to add extra emphasis. Similar to saying "end of discussion."

POV

Stands for "point of view." A popular in-video caption that tells the viewer whose perspective is being depicted in the video.

Ratio

When your comment doesn't go down well and receives more (usually negative) replies instead of likes.

Shifting

Originated from Reddit and blew up on TikTok. The act of lying down and imagining your desired reality as a way to meditate and manifest your goals.

Valid

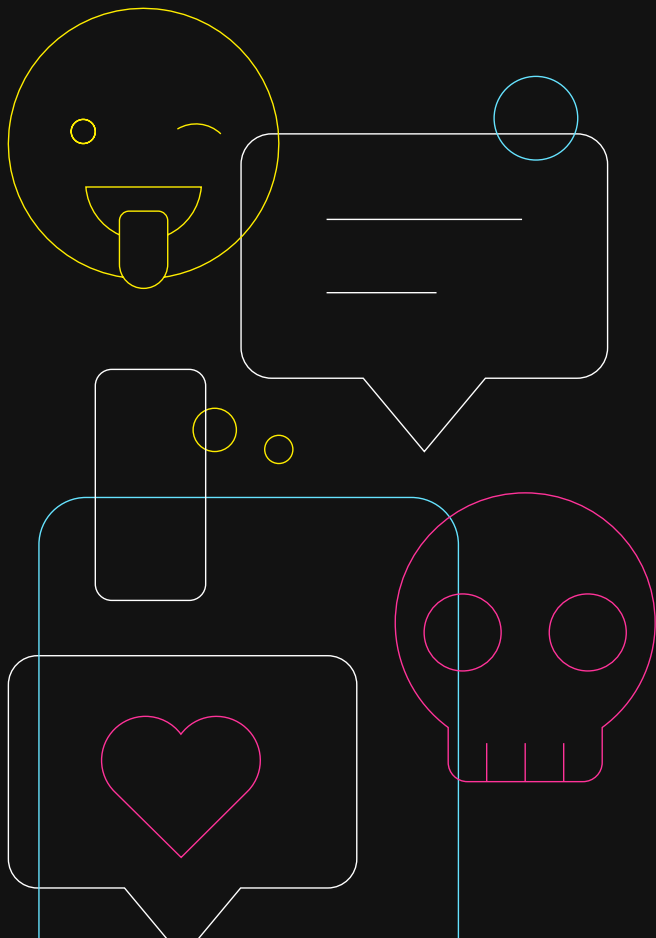
Something that looks good, is really well made, or of exceptional standards.

Discover the secrets to TikTok follower growth

Get an exclusive look at how one TikTok creator grew her following from zero to an astonishing 1.6 million. Find out what she did and get her insider tips so you can do the same for your business.

[Give Me the Tips](#)

The secret meanings of emojis on TikTok



🧠 Brain emoji

The brain emoji refers to what's traditionally been represented with the 🗨️ mouth emoji + 🍆 eggplant emoji / 🐱 cat emoji —if you catch our drift. ([Here's an explanation](#), if you need it.)

🪑 Chair emoji

The chair emoji is a trend that started as an inside joke among followers of TikToker [@blank.antho](#). Used as a replacement for the 😂 cry laughing emoji and refers to something that's really funny.

🤡 Clown face emoji

The clown face emoji is used to indicate that something is stupid, foolish, or silly.

💀 Skull emoji

The skull emoji figuratively conveys “I’m dead,” usually because of extreme laughter. Also used as a 😂 cry laughing emoji replacement.

👉👈 Two index finger emojis pointing at each other

Two index finger emojis pointing at each other are used to indicate that you're feeling shy.

💛 Yellow heart emoji

A yellow heart emoji indicates friendship.

❤️ Red heart emoji

A red heart emoji represents true love.

💜 Purple heart emoji

A purple heart emoji signals physical attraction.

💙 Blue heart emoji

A blue heart emoji expresses support, admiration, and excitement.

💚 Green heart emoji

A green heart emoji shows love of nature.

TikTok trends move FAST

Stay up-to-date with our biweekly newsletter.

[Send Me the Trends](#)



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Not only will you save time, you'll also strengthen your TikTok strategy and prove ROI (and maaaybe tell your boss "I told you so"—politely of course).

