

**PUBLIC - REDACTED**

STATE OF MINNESOTA

DISTRICT COURT

COUNTY OF HENNEPIN

FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

Case Type: Other Civil

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STATE OF MINNESOTA, by its Attorney  
General, Keith Ellison,

Court File No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Plaintiff,

COMPLAINT

vs.

TIKTOK INC.

Defendant.

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## INTRODUCTION

1. Driven by an out-of-control pursuit of profit above all else, Defendant TikTok Inc. (“TikTok”) has engineered a dangerously addictive social media app (the “App”) that TikTok’s own employees describe as a [REDACTED] that targets its users’ [REDACTED] making it [REDACTED]. By exploiting children’s unfinished neurological reward systems that drive desire and motivation, TikTok creates widespread habitual dependence on its App among young people.<sup>1</sup> As former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy warned, unchecked use of apps like TikTok pose “a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.”<sup>2</sup>

2. Despite knowing that [REDACTED] on its App and that children are developmentally vulnerable to [REDACTED] TikTok misleads the public about the App’s safety. It buries important information about the complexities of its features and the risks they face, knowing that the only way users will understand them is by [REDACTED]. The company publicizes safety features that are supposed to mitigate those harms, but these protection systems are flawed, under-resourced, and inadequate—and TikTok knows it. Children’s developing brains are no match for TikTok’s sophisticated mix of “digital nicotine” and deception. As the former Surgeon General put it:

You have some of the best designers and product developers in the world who have designed these products to make sure people are maximizing the amount of time they spend on these platforms. And if we tell a child, use the force of your willpower

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<sup>1</sup> “Children,” “kids,” “young users,” or “minors” when used in this Complaint mean a user of TikTok’s App who is under eighteen years old. “Teenagers” is a subgroup of children defined in this Complaint as children aged 13–17. “Adolescence” is also a subgroup of children and defined in this Complaint as a period of development in children where they transition from child to adult, which can range between 10–19 years of age.

<sup>2</sup> *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory*, U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUM. SVCS., 4 (2023), available at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>.

to control how much time you're spending, you're pitting a child against the world's greatest product designers.<sup>3</sup>

The Attorney General brings this lawsuit to halt TikTok's exploitative practices and prevent further harm to young Minnesotans.

3. Few companies have captured children's time and converted it to profit as quickly and effectively as TikTok. Today, TikTok has penetrated 95% of the market among U.S. smartphone users aged 13–17, including having [REDACTED] Minnesota children as users by 2022, some of whom are as young as around five years old, and many of whom spend [REDACTED] daily on the App.

4. TikTok users share and collectively view millions of personalized, "short-form" videos, each about one minute long. TikTok's algorithms (here, collectively called TikTok's "Recommendation Engine" or the "Engine") and manipulative design features hook young Minnesotans into using the App around the clock, making it highly difficult for them to break away. When users try to disengage, the App vigorously lures them back with a constant stream of notifications.

5. Like other social media companies, TikTok runs a high-tech advertising and e-commerce business. As users spend time on its App, TikTok collects highly personal data about them—like their location, interests, beliefs, and viewing or purchasing habits. TikTok uses this data to sell highly targeted advertising space to businesses, ensuring that those businesses' ads will attract interested consumers among TikTok's billions of users, including its many users in Minnesota.

6. TikTok works much like a slot machine. It exploits young users' behavioral and

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<sup>3</sup> Allison Gordon & Pamela Brown, *Surgeon General says 13 is 'too early' to join social media*, CNN (Jan. 29, 2023), <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/29/health/surgeon-general-social-media/index.html>.

neurobiological vulnerabilities to keep them mindlessly and impulsively using the App for longer. The App's design features confuse and control young users, driving them to make choices on the App that benefit TikTok's bottom line, at the expense of their emotional, behavioral, and physical health. These addictive features include: (1) the Recommendation Engine that leverages user data to serve personalized content recommendations; (2) an infinite scroll that keeps users engaged in an endless state of swiping through the App; (3) push notifications with "buzzes" and sounds that encourage repetitive checking of the App; (4) filters and effects that create idealized and unattainable images of users; and (5) TikTok LIVE, which includes an unlicensed virtual currency system that encourages excessive and exploitative spending and conduct.

7. TikTok's internal documents credit the company's immense financial success [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

And as the company well knows, from a June 2021 product strategy document on "Digital Wellbeing," ad-based business models that use manipulative design features without guardrails "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."

8. TikTok's tactics have worked. Its own data shows that 13- to 17-year-olds check the App an average of 17 times a day and spend an average of almost two hours a day on the App, more than any other age group. Many children are spending four or more hours on the App every day. TikTok knows that a significant percentage of children (more than 20%) use the App in the middle of the night (between 12:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m.), when they should be sleeping. The

company's internal data also show that Minnesota children aged 13–17 spend [REDACTED] every day on the App on average, with average session time peaking between [REDACTED] As one TikTok employee described it, users [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

9. Studies have found the detrimental effects of compulsive use of apps like TikTok. A 2023 study from the University of Minnesota described TikTok as a “runaway train” that users cannot control, which leads to “harmful consequences to their well-being.”<sup>4</sup> Compulsive social media users often exhibit symptoms similar to other kinds of addicts, including excessive preoccupation with the addiction and psychological symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, and more frequent interpersonal problems.<sup>5</sup> Excessive social media use also negatively impact a user's work or academic performance and their personal relationships.<sup>6</sup> Prolonged use of TikTok has been found to induce body dissatisfaction, disordered eating behaviors, low self-esteem, self-harm, suicidal thoughts or actions, and other mental health outcomes.<sup>7</sup> The company's

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<sup>4</sup> Ashlee Milton, et al., “I See Me Here”: Mental Health Content, Community, and Algorithmic Curation on TikTok 11 (Apr. 23–28, 2023), available at <https://steviechancellor.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ISeeMeHere.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Bernardo Dell’Osso, et al., *Learning to deal with Problematic Usage of the Internet/Revised Edition*, EUR. COOP. IN SCI. AND TECH. 18–19 (Oct. 17, 2021), <https://www.internetandme.eu/download-learning-to-deal-with-problematic-usage-of-the-internet/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> See Danielle Bissonette Mink & Dawn M. Szymanski, *TikTok Use and Body Dissatisfaction: Examining direct, indirect, and moderated relations*, 43 Body Image 205, 205–08 (2022).; *Deadly by Design: TikTok pushes harmful content promoting eating disorders and self-harm into users’ feeds.*, Ctr. for Countering Digit. Hate (Dec. 15, 2022), <https://counterhate.com/research/deadly-by-design/>; Ronald C. Kessler et al., *Age of onset of mental disorders: A review of recent literature*, 20 Current Op. Psychiatry 359 (2007), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1925038/pdf/nihms25081.pdf>; Daniel Romer, *Adolescent Risk Taking, Impulsivity, and Brain Development: Implications for Prevention*, 52 Dev. Psychobiology 263 (2010), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3445337/pdf/nihms-404113.pdf>; Nat’l Academies Scis., Eng’g & Med., *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* (Emily P. Backes, Richard J. Bonnie, eds., 2019); *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory*, U.S. Dep’t of Health & Hum. Svcs. At 4 (2023).

Recommendation Engine actively delivers content to vulnerable children through its algorithmic designs and other manipulative design features described herein that causes or exacerbates these mental health outcomes.

10. In Minnesota, the impact of TikTok and similar social media apps is profound, with screen time usage at all-time highs and record levels of children suffering mental health issues. In 2022, children ages 8 to 12 spent an average of 4–6 hours per day on screens, including TikTok, and teenagers spent up to 9 hours per day.<sup>8</sup> That same year, over half (54%) of Minnesota’s eleventh graders reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless at least several days a week, and nearly 70% reported feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge.<sup>9</sup> For the State’s middle schoolers, more than 44% of eighth graders reported regular feelings of depression and hopelessness, and over 61% reported feeling nervous or anxious.<sup>10</sup> The problem is even more pronounced for teen girls, where nearly two-thirds (65%) of Minnesota’s eleventh-grade girls (and 57% of eighth-grade girls) reported feelings of depression or hopelessness.<sup>11</sup>

11. Minnesota teens are also growing increasingly lonely and disconnected. In 2013, fewer than 27% of Minnesota’s eleventh graders reported that they build friendships with other people rarely or only sometimes. By 2022, nearly 40% of the State’s eleventh graders reported the same (a 47% increase).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Alexandra Erritt, *Navigating screen time with kids and teens*, CHILD.’S MINN. (Sept. 9, 2022), <https://www.childrensmn.org/blog/navigating-screen-time-kids-teens/#:~:text=On%20average%2C%20kids%20ages,Minnesota%2C%20about%20screen%20time%20recommendations>.

<sup>9</sup> *Minnesota Student Survey Reports 2013-2022*, MINN. DEP’T. OF EDUC. <https://public.education.mn.gov/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=242> (last accessed July 11, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*



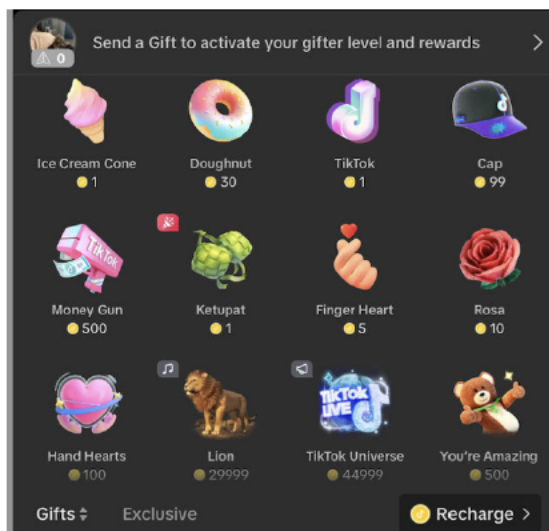
12. Behind these devastating public health statistics are real Minnesota children and their parents, struggling to protect their mental health from the harms caused by social media apps like TikTok. As one parent reported to the Office of the Attorney General, their daughter started using TikTok at 13 years old and almost immediately began falling down “rabbit holes” of use for hours on end, causing her to lose friendships, develop feelings of anxiety, and to constantly seek out online validation. Another Minnesota parent reported that when their daughter started using TikTok at 12-years old, she began endlessly scrolling through the App late into the night—sometimes until 4:00 a.m.—causing her to become socially isolated and anxious, and that the App replaced other hobbies and interests like riding bikes, going to the movies, and playing baseball. And several parents reported that when they try to take TikTok away, their children lose control and physically fight them to get back to using the App.

13. Yet even as parents, schools, and public health officials have tried to reduce children’s social media use, TikTok continues to innovate addiction and find new ways to hook children on its App. In 2019, TikTok launched two dangerous new features to its users: live streaming, called TikTok LIVE (“LIVE”), and a virtual currency system, called TikTok “Coins.” Like other social media apps that allow livestreaming, LIVE allows real-time interaction between users and streamers. What sets TikTok apart from the rest is Coins—the company’s unlicensed virtual currency. Users can buy Coins from TikTok to send as virtual “Gifts” to streamers during LIVE sessions, which streamers can then cash out for real money. TikTok encourages users to go LIVE by promising more monetary rewards “the more popular [their] content becomes.”<sup>13</sup>

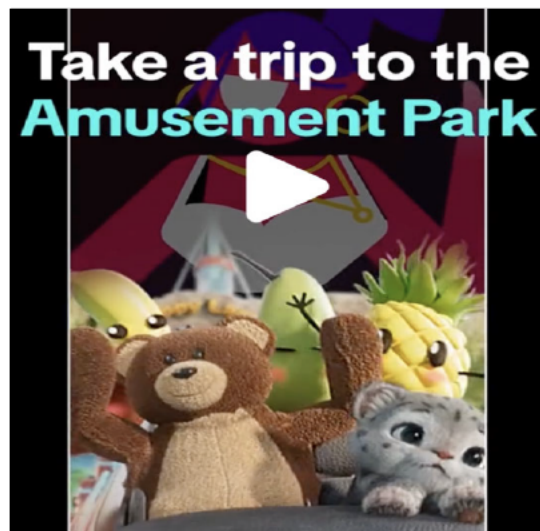
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<sup>13</sup> *Turning Passion to Profit: WAYS TO MAKE MONEY ON TIKTOK LIVE*, TIKTOK (Dec. 15, 2022), available via the WayBack Machine at [https://web.archive.org/web/20250611182307/https://www.tiktok.com/live/creators/en-US/article/turning-passion-to-profit-ways-to-make-money-on-tiktok-live\\_en-US](https://web.archive.org/web/20250611182307/https://www.tiktok.com/live/creators/en-US/article/turning-passion-to-profit-ways-to-make-money-on-tiktok-live_en-US) (archived June 11, 2025).

14. TikTok has taken its virtual monetization scheme to the extreme. While LIVE and its monetization is restricted to 18+ users, TikTok’s age-gating—a feature that is supposed to filter out minors—is lax and ineffective, allowing children easy access to mature content and age-restricted features. Even though it advertises an 18+ age requirement to send and receive Gifts, TikTok designs its virtual currency to look like cute, colorful animated emojis, reminiscent of cartoons and Disney characters. TikTok further encourages extreme usage and spending by adding features designed to entice, exploit, and addict kids, including routinely introducing new Gifts and pushing flashy “reward” incentives like the ability to “level up” and unlock “exclusive” Gifts with more use. *See, e.g.*, Figures 1 and 2 below.



**Figure 1.** Examples of TikTok Gifts



**Figure 2.** The Lili and Friends Gift

15. In addition to its advertising revenues, TikTok also takes a largely undisclosed 50% commission from these virtual transactions.<sup>14</sup> In early 2023, LIVE netted \$1.7 billion globally *in a single quarter* from the use of Coins; in the fourth quarter of 2023, LIVE’s total revenues exceeded [REDACTED]. In Minnesota, the amount of money consumers spend on TikTok

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* (“To recognize your efforts in helping the LIVE platform succeed, TikTok currently shares with creators 50% of its net revenue from virtual items, after deducting the required payments to app stores, payment processors and any other adjustment required under our terms and policies.”)

in-App purchases, including through Coins, has skyrocketed. For example, between 2018 and 2023, Apple iPhone users in Minnesota spent [REDACTED] on in-App purchases.

16. The revenue TikTok generates from its virtual “Coins” comes at a significant cost to young users. TikTok induces children to spend excessive amounts of time and money on its App, profiting from children who do not understand its complex virtual monetary system—a deceptive pattern commonly known as “currency confusion.” This confusion, along with the research-backed fact that people addicted to social media spend more than those who are not, makes children particularly vulnerable to TikTok’s LIVE environment.

17. TikTok deceives its users into believing that its App, including its LIVE feature, is far safer for children than it is. In truth, TikTok has serious flaws in its moderation systems, including failures to detect harmful content, disorganization, lack of resources, and policy grey areas. Worse, the company knows that the coercive designs it uses to keep children spending time on the platform work to help facilitate the harms on the App.

18. For example, TikTok knows that live streaming poses significant and “cruel[]” risks of harm to children, including encouraging “addiction and impulsive purchasing of virtual items,” leading to “financial harm,” and putting minors at “developmental risk.” In 2022, just three years after LIVE’s launch, internal investigations revealed that hundreds of thousands of children aged 13–15 years old were bypassing TikTok’s minimum age restrictions and lax age-gate, that LIVE “enable[d the] exploitation of live hosts,” and that TikTok profited significantly from “transactional gifting” involving nudity and sexual activity, all facilitated by TikTok’s virtual currency system.

19. TikTok’s internal investigations [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] finding that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And yet, TikTok has never warned users about the many dangers of its App. Instead, it falsely portrays the App as a safe place where users and parents can easily control their engagement, their spending, and their data. None of this is true. Children entering the App are pitted against some of the most powerful and manipulative design features in the world—which, in addition to causing behavioral, emotional and physical harm, collect and exploit children’s personal data for financial gain.

20. TikTok’s actions are deceptive, unfair, and unconscionable, in violation of Minnesota Statutes sections 325D.43, *et seq.* and 325F.68, *et seq.* The Attorney General brings this action to hold TikTok accountable for its illegal conduct and to prevent further harm to its residents, especially its children, and seeks declaratory and injunctive relief, civil penalties, disgorgement, fees and costs, and other appropriate relief.

## PARTIES

21. Keith Ellison, Attorney General of the State of Minnesota (hereinafter, the “Attorney General”) is authorized under Minnesota Statutes chapter 8 and has common law authority, including *parens patriae* authority to bring this action to enforce Minnesota’s laws, to vindicate the State’s sovereign and quasi-sovereign interests, and to remediate all harm arising out of—and provide full relief for—TikTok’s violations of Minnesota’s laws. The law enforcement and *parens patriae* capacity in which the Attorney General brings this action is separate and distinct from his statutory duty to represent state agencies, officers, boards, or commissions. For avoidance of doubt, the Attorney General does not represent any other state agency, officer, board, or commission in bringing this action, and the Attorney General does not seek relief for any other state agency, officer, board, or commission.

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22. TikTok Inc. is incorporated in California with its principal place of business located at 5800 Bristol Parkway, Culver City, Los Angeles, California 90230. TikTok is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Chinese company, ByteDance Ltd. TikTok transacts or has transacted business in Minnesota, including, among other things, by entering into contracts with Minnesota consumers.

23. TikTok advertises, markets, distributes, and sells the TikTok social media App and its social media services to consumers in Minnesota and throughout the United States. At all relevant times to this Complaint, TikTok's actions were taken in the course of its business, vocation, or occupation and in connection with the sale of merchandise.

### **JURISDICTION**

24. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to Minnesota Statutes sections 8.01, 8.31, 8.32, 325D.45, 325F.70, and the common law.

25. This Court has personal jurisdiction over TikTok because TikTok entered (and continues to enter) into contracts with Minnesota consumers; obtained personal data from Minnesota consumers to power its Recommendation Engine and to sell businesses advertising targeted to Minnesota consumers; in fact sold businesses—including Minnesota businesses—advertising targeted to Minnesota consumers; offered a social media product and social media services to Minnesota consumers; profited substantially off Minnesota consumers through in-App purchases; and engaged in deceptive and unfair or unconscionable acts or practices in Minnesota and against Minnesota consumers.

### **VENUE**

26. Venue in Hennepin County is proper under Minnesota Statutes section 542.09 because the cause of action arose, in part, in Hennepin County. TikTok has done business in

Hennepin County, and TikTok's unlawful acts have affected Hennepin County residents, among many others.

## **FACTS**

### **A. TikTok's Contacts with Minnesota**

27. At all times material to this Complaint, acting alone or in concert with affiliated companies, TikTok has designed, advertised, marketed, and distributed its social media application to consumers throughout Minnesota, earns substantial revenue by selling Minnesota consumers' user data and time to advertisers, and profits from the sale of its virtual currency to Minnesota consumers.

28. TikTok has significant contacts with Minnesota, examples of which are included below.

29. TikTok has entered (and continues to enter) into contracts with [REDACTED] of Minnesota residents, many of whom are children, to provide them with access to the App and TikTok's social media services in exchange for their valuable data and viewing of ads.

30. When Minnesota users sign up for TikTok, and in exchange for access to the App, users must agree to TikTok's Terms of Service, including TikTok's Privacy Policy. The Privacy Policy identifies information TikTok collects—which includes, among other things, name, age, email, phone number, location data, device information, and image and audio information.<sup>15</sup> The Privacy Policy also identifies what TikTok does with collected information from Minnesota consumers, including “among other things, show you suggestions, promote the Platform, and

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<sup>15</sup> *Privacy Policy*, TIKTOK (July 1, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250710025208/https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/us/privacy-policy/en> (archived July 10, 2025).

customize your ad experience.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, consumers agree to exchange their data for access to the App and TikTok’s services.

31. Since launching in the U.S., TikTok has greatly expanded its reach in Minnesota. In 2019—two years after TikTok launched in the U.S.—there were approximately [REDACTED] daily active users in Minnesota. Over a three-month period, from November 1, 2019 to January 31, 2020, Minnesota users accounted for nearly [REDACTED] views on the App. By 2022, there were approximately [REDACTED] daily active users ages 13–24 alone. As of December 2023, [REDACTED] Minnesotans ages 13–23 had a TikTok account, including [REDACTED] Minnesota teenagers ages 13–17. Due to TikTok’s ineffective age-gating, the number of accounts belonging to Minnesota consumers under the age of 18 and especially young Minnesota consumers under 13 is likely far greater.

32. TikTok’s services are not free: TikTok charges Minnesota consumers by converting their time into ad views and by collecting their data, including their locations, interests, and behaviors (for example, video views, likes, comments, live streams, and posts). TikTok then converts this data into advertising revenue: it sells significant advertising space and data to marketers and enables them to tailor messages and offers to specific locations and users throughout Minnesota.<sup>17</sup> For example, Betr, a fantasy sports and betting company, ran ads on TikTok targeting Minnesota consumers. TikTok also ran ads promoting its App on [REDACTED] in Minnesota. The 2019 ad campaign was viewed [REDACTED] times by Minnesota consumers, resulting in [REDACTED] clicks on the ad and [REDACTED] downloads of the App.

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<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *About Location Targeting*, TIKTOK (July 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250318074507/https://ads.tiktok.com/help/article/location-targeting?lang=en> (archived Mar. 18, 2025).

33. TikTok also profits directly from Minnesota consumers by taking significant commission on transactions within the App, called “In-App Purchases.” TikTok charges service fees on every transaction, including on transactions involving Minnesota users and businesses.

34. TikTok also profits from this by taking a 50% commission of the cash-to-Coin-to-Gift transaction on its App. As explained further below, TikTok sells users TikTok Coins—a virtual currency—directly through TikTok’s website or mobile App or through the Apple or Google app stores. TikTok allows users, including Minnesota users, to purchase an in-App token called a “Gift” with the virtual Coins, with TikTok making money on each transaction.

35. These service fees directly relate to the Complaint’s allegations: TikTok’s addictive design and deceptive practices push more Minnesota children to spend more time on the App, leading to increased ad views, e-commerce activity, larger trends, and more service fees.

36. TikTok’s virtual currency operation is highly lucrative in Minnesota, in the United States, and globally. In 2021, LIVE’s total revenues were [REDACTED], and by 2024, TikTok forecasted that it would be making [REDACTED] from LIVE—[REDACTED] per day. In a single quarter in early 2023, TikTok’s U.S. revenue from live streaming transactions was \$402 million, and its global revenue was \$1.7 billion. In Minnesota, TikTok’s revenue from In-App Purchases, including from Coins, has grown substantially since it started facilitating virtual transactions. In 2018, Apple iPhone users in Minnesota spent [REDACTED] on In-App Purchases through TikTok. By 2022, Minnesota consumers were spending [REDACTED] on In-App Purchases through TikTok. Between 2018 and 2023, Apple iPhone users in Minnesota spent a combined [REDACTED] on in-App TikTok purchases, including purchases of Coins.

37. Minnesota is also a hub for content creators—users who share and post content on



TikTok.<sup>18</sup> Content creators throughout the State also use LIVE and are compensated with Gifts through TikTok’s virtual currency and/or directly from TikTok’s “Creator Rewards Program”<sup>19</sup> (formerly known as the “Creator Fund”).<sup>20</sup>

**B. How TikTok Works**

38. TikTok is a leading social media app that was launched on the global market in September 2017 by Chinese tech company, ByteDance Ltd. (“ByteDance”).

39. TikTok is best known for its App of the same name, where users create, upload, and view 15- to 60-second short-form videos.

40. TikTok was first introduced in China under the name “Douyin” (pronounced “doe-yin”) in 2016 and was later launched internationally as TikTok in 2017. Douyin was loosely modeled on the popular music app Musical.ly, which had significant popularity among U.S. teenagers and allowed users to create 15-second lip-syncing and dancing videos of popular songs.

41. TikTok gained significant popularity in the U.S. after merging with Musical.ly in August 2018, which by then had amassed a user base of nearly 60 million.

42. TikTok is now available in over 150 markets and in 75 languages, with over 1.5 billion active users worldwide. In the U.S., TikTok has over 170 million users—over half the country’s population. A large portion of TikTok’s U.S. user base is children. In July 2020,

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<sup>18</sup> Katie Swartzter, *The TikTokers of Minnesota*, MPLS ST.PAUL MAG. (Dec. 30, 2020), <https://mspmag.com/arts-and-culture/famous-tiktok-accounts-mn/>.

<sup>19</sup> *TikTok’s monetization features*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240924074259/https://www.tiktok.com/creator-academy/en/article/monetization-offerings-overview> (archived Sept. 24, 2024).

<sup>20</sup> *Creator Rewards Program*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240411083348/https://www.tiktok.com/creator-academy/en/article/creator-rewards-program> (archived Apr. 11, 2024).

TikTok reported that more than one-third of its 49 million daily users in the United States were 14 or younger.<sup>21</sup> More recently, a 2024 Pew Research Center Survey reported that the majority (63%) of teenagers (age 13–17) use TikTok, with most (57%) of teens using TikTok daily.<sup>22</sup> Almost a fifth (16%) of American teens describe their TikTok use as “almost constant.”<sup>23</sup> Internal documents reveal that TikTok’s reach among U.S. users under the age of 17 has been incredibly successful—reaching a market penetration of 95%.

43. TikTok’s explosive growth was no accident. Early on, Alex Zhu, TikTok’s former CEO, recognized that U.S. teenagers represented a “golden audience” for emerging social media products.<sup>24</sup>

44. To capitalize on that golden audience—which includes Minnesota children—TikTok combined its ad-based business model with highly addictive features to keep children engaged. The company primarily sells targeted advertisements but also runs a lucrative e-commerce platform. These elements work together to keep users engaged and spending money. Young users are especially critical to TikTok’s business. Indeed, a report commissioned by TikTok to assess the value of its App for businesses found that TikTok is “undeniably powerful at reaching younger audiences.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 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>.

<sup>22</sup> 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/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> Paul Mozur, *Chinese Tech Firms Forced to Choose Market: Home or Everywhere Else*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 9, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/10/technology/china-homegrown-internet-companies-rest-of-the-world.html>.

<sup>25</sup> *The Power of TikTok: Achieving breakthrough brand building with TikTok*, KANTAR | TIKTOK, available at <https://www.tiktok.com/business/library/the-power-of-tiktok.pdf>.

45. This strategy has made TikTok very valuable. In 2022, the company made \$9.9 billion in ad revenue, a 155% increase from the prior year.<sup>26</sup> In 2023, TikTok had the highest in-App earnings from in-App purchases in the world—beating YouTube and Disney by a longshot.<sup>27</sup> These profits have also included millions of dollars from in-App purchases from Minnesota consumers.

46. To maximize engagement, TikTok uses a combination of manipulative features making it difficult—if not at times impossible—for children to stop using the App. Unfortunately, as a result, TikTok’s youngest, most vulnerable users become trapped, spending excessive and unhealthy amounts of time on the App.

47. As outlined below, TikTok knows that using design features such as (1) highly personalized content recommendations; (2) infinite scroll; (3) push notifications; (4) filters; and (5) LIVE are dangerous and substantially harm children.

**1. TikTok knows prolonged and compulsive use of its App is dangerous for Minnesota’s children.**

48. Children are a crucial market for TikTok. They are highly connected to the Internet through smartphones, more likely to have social media accounts, and more likely to spend their free time on social media swiping through an app. Additionally, children often influence the behavior of their parents and younger siblings, opening potential markets for other age groups. In a 2023 “Strategy Kickoff” document for its business partner Abercrombie Kids,

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<sup>26</sup> Dayna Winter, *TikTok Ad Revenue: How Much Are Brands Spending on TikTok?* (2024), SHOPIFY (July 14, 2023), <https://www.shopify.com/blog/tiktok-ad-spending>.

<sup>27</sup> John Koetsier, *TikTok Has The Highest In-App Earnings In The World (Again), Beating YouTube, Disney, Tinder*, FORBES (Mar. 30, 2024), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkoetsier/2024/03/30/tiktok-is-the-highest-earning-app-in-the-world-again-beating-youtube-disney-tinder/>.

TikTok admitted the App not only “drives [p]arent purchases” but that 82% of Gen Z users (then-aged 11 to 26) have “influenced parents to buy something seen on TikTok.”

49. TikTok is well aware of (and exploits) how valuable kids are to its business.

50. However, because children’s developing minds are prone to impulsivity and social media overuse, they are especially vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation. TikTok knows—indeed, has carefully studied—this, as explained below.

51. Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, marked by specific developmental and behavioral changes. Brains go through major alterations during adolescence, including both structural remodeling and neurochemical maturation. Brain regions associated with desires for risk-taking,<sup>28</sup> attention, peer feedback, and reinforcement—like the dopamine system—become particularly sensitive in adolescence, while regions like the prefrontal cortex—associated with higher-order decision making and impulse control—are not fully developed until adulthood.<sup>29</sup>

52. The dopamine system helps the brain reward and motivate behavior—the precise area that reward patterns (like those deployed by TikTok) stimulate. The heightened sensitivity of the dopamine system during adolescence, coupled with the underdeveloped prefrontal cortex, makes 13- to 17-year-olds on TikTok highly susceptible to risky behaviors, temptations, and manipulations of their reward systems. In short, they are on average much more impressionable

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<sup>28</sup> *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory*, U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUM. SERVS. 5 (2023), available at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Leah Somerville & BJ Casey, *Developmental neurobiology of cognitive control and motivational systems*, 20 CURRENT OP. IN NEUROBIOLOGY 236 (2010), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959438810000073?via%3Dihub>.

than adults and lack impulse control.<sup>30</sup>

53. TikTok’s design choices exploit users’ dopamine systems through the effective delivery of variable rewards. Dopamine rewards can lead to addictive behaviors, particularly when the reward is delivered unpredictably, like in slot-machines, which encourage people to continue gambling in the hopes that the next lever pull will result in a big “win.”

54. A report about persuasive design called *Disrupted Childhood* (a copy of which TikTok had in its records, and which was co-authored by Alexadra Evans, who subsequently became a lead executive at TikTok on child safety) explained exactly how variable rewards produce dopamine rushes:

Variable rewards ... hold a special thrill, as the user anticipates a reward that they know could come but is tantalisingly [sic] just out of reach. A gambler waiting to see where the roulette wheel will stop or a viewer watching a presenter’s dramatic pause before they announce a winner; in both cases, the individuals experience a dopamine rush as they anticipate the unknown outcome.<sup>31</sup>

55. At the same time, mental well-being is at its most vulnerable during adolescence. Because adolescents’ identities and sense of self are still being constructed, they are more susceptible than adults to being manipulated by social media companies like TikTok into excessive use of their apps.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kathryn Mills et al., *The Developmental Mismatch in Structural Brain Maturation during Adolescence*, 36 DEV. NEUROSCI. 147 (2014), <https://karger.com/dne/article/36/3-4/147/107931/The-Developmental-Mismatch-in-Structural-Brain/>.

<sup>31</sup> Baroness Kidron, et al., *Disrupted Childhood: The Cost of Persuasive Design* at 24 (April 2023), available at <https://respect.international/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/DISRUPTED-CHILDHOOD—The-Cost-of-Persuasive-Design.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald C. Kessler et al., *Age of onset of mental disorders: A review of recent literature*, 20 CURRENT OP. PSYCHIATRY 359 (2007), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1925038/pdf/nihms25081.pdf>; Daniel Romer, *Adolescent Risk Taking, Impulsivity, and Brain Development: Implications for Prevention*, 52 DEV. PSYCHOBIOLOGY 263 (2010), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3445337/pdf/nihms-404113.pdf>; NAT’L ACADEMIES SCIS., ENG’G & MED., *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* (Emily P. Backes, Richard J. Bonnie, eds., 2019).

56. TikTok has proven especially adept at exploiting these dynamics to gain young users. Of the nearly 70 million minors (aged 13 to 17) who use TikTok daily, almost 30 million of them are spending two or more hours on the App every day, with nearly 17 million averaging three or more hours. In Minnesota, children aged 13–17 average [REDACTED] per day on the App—with many thousands of children likely spending many more hours on the App every day.

57. This compulsive, prolonged use is harmful to the user’s health. Even TikTok’s Chinese counterpart, Duoyin, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

58. Studies have shown that children who spend that amount of time per day on social media face double the risk of poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety and elevated risks of suicidal behaviors or ideation.<sup>33</sup> 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 are growing increasingly addicted to social media are at 2- or 3-times greater risk of suicidal behaviors and suicidal ideation.<sup>34</sup>

59. Excessive use of TikTok may also result in structural changes to the brain itself,<sup>35</sup> including in the amygdala (important for emotional learning and behavior) and the prefrontal

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<sup>33</sup> Kira Riehm et al., *Associations Between Time Spent Using Social Media and Internalizing and Externalizing Problems Among US Youth*, 76 JAMA PSYCHIATRY 1266 (2019), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6739732/>.

<sup>34</sup> Yunyu Xiao, et al., *Addictive Screen Use Trajectory and Suicidal Behaviors, Suicidal Ideation, and Mental Health in US Youths*, JAMA (June 18, 2025), [https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2835481?guestAccessKey=1e247dd1-cadf-430c-baad-bc5c5543ad29&utm\\_source=for\\_the\\_media&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_campaign=ftm\\_links&utm\\_content=tf1&utm\\_term=061825](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2835481?guestAccessKey=1e247dd1-cadf-430c-baad-bc5c5543ad29&utm_source=for_the_media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_content=tf1&utm_term=061825).

<sup>35</sup> Quinghua He, Ofir Turel, & Antoine Bechara, *Brain anatomy alterations associated with Social Networking Site (SNS) addiction*, 7 SCI. REP. 45064 (2017), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5362930/>.

cortex (important for impulse control and emotional regulation).<sup>36</sup> Children who spend excessive time on social media can emerge from this critical period of adolescence developmentally damaged.<sup>37</sup> Scientists report that younger adolescents can experience higher levels of developmental sensitivity to apps like TikTok and rate lower on the life satisfaction scale than older adolescents.<sup>38</sup> The reverse is also true—a decrease in social media use for younger adolescents is predictive of an overall increase in life satisfaction.<sup>39</sup>

60. Heavy TikTok use disrupts activities like sleep and physical activity,<sup>40</sup> which are critical for youth psychological and physical health.<sup>41</sup> Research has found that use of technology, especially social media, within one hour of bedtime is associated with sleep disruptions.<sup>42</sup> Adolescents who do not get enough sleep can in turn have impaired neurological development,<sup>43</sup> affecting their emotional functioning and increasing suicidal thoughts.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory*, U.S. DEP'T OF HEALTH & HUM. SERVS. 5 (2023), available at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Amy Orben et al., *Windows of developmental sensitivity to social media*, 13 NATURE COMM'NS 1649 (2022), available at [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8960761/pdf/41467\\_2022\\_Article\\_29296.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8960761/pdf/41467_2022_Article_29296.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence*, AM. PSYCH. ASS'N (May 2023), available at <https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Eduardo Bustamante et al., *Unlocking the Promise of Physical Activity for Mental Health Promotion*, 177 JAMA PEDIATRICS 111 (Jan. 3, 2023), <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2799813>; Rea Alonzo et al., *Interplay between social media use, sleep quality, and mental health in youth: A systematic review*, 56 SLEEP MED. REVS. 101414 (Apr. 2021), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S108707922030157X?via%3Dihub>.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> Aurore 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 zsz125 (June 8, 2019), <https://academic.oup.com/sleep/article/42/9/zsz125/5513278?login=false>.

61. Beyond harming users' mental and physical health, overuse of social media causes financial harm. Studies show that people who are addicted to social media spend more money online than those who are not.<sup>45</sup> The constant barrage of highly personalized advertising combined with TikTok's virtual currency system can lead to overconsumption and financial stress.<sup>46</sup>

62. Children are particularly vulnerable to online financial exploitation. They struggle to understand the impact money can have on their lives because most have never had to financially support themselves, manage a bank account, or balance monthly expenses.

63. The U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau notes that teenagers are categorically still learning financial literacy: "Teens may act as 'financial apprentices' to the adults in their lives, [and] engage in experiential learning."<sup>47</sup> Further, for teenagers (many of whom are on TikTok) "executive function skills, like self-regulation and the ability to stay focused, seem to develop at a slower pace and do not reach maturity until early adulthood. Therefore, teens may display adult-level cognition in some settings but may **have difficulty**

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<sup>44</sup> Jessica Hamilton et al., *Sleep influences daily suicidal ideation through affective reactivity to interpersonal events among high-risk adolescents and young adults*, 64 J. OF CHILD PSYCH. AND PSYCHIATRY 27 (July 2, 2022), <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.13651>.

<sup>45</sup> Saeed Pahlevan Sharif & Ken Kyid Yeoh, *Excessive social networking sites use and online compulsive buying in young adults: the mediating role of money attitude*, 19 YOUNG CONSUMERS 310 (Jun. 22, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-10-2017-00743>.

<sup>46</sup> *Smartphones, Social Media, and Their Impact on Mental Health*, COLUMBIA PSYCHIATRY, <https://www.columbiapsychiatry.org/research/research-areas/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry/sultan-lab-mental-health-informatics/research-areas/smartphones-social-media-and-their-impact-mental-health> (last visited July 11, 2025); WALL ST. J., *How Online Currency Is Changing the Way Kids Spend Money* (Nov. 15, 2023), <https://www.wsj.com/video/series/your-money-briefing/how-online-currency-is-changing-the-way-kids-spend-money/F386D7D8-71AB-4A8E-A661-97342CBA1F2E>.

<sup>47</sup> *Building blocks to help youth achieve financial capability: A new model and recommendations*, CONSUMER FIN. PROT. BUREAU 13 (Sept. 2016), available at [https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/092016\\_cfpb\\_BuildingBlocksReport\\_ModelAndRecommendations\\_web.pdf](https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/092016_cfpb_BuildingBlocksReport_ModelAndRecommendations_web.pdf).



**controlling impulses, particularly during highly tempting situations.”<sup>48</sup>**

64. TikTok knows that the App’s design “drives purchase behavior” and “encourages impulse purchases.” According to TikTok, 83% of users say that the App played a role in their purchase decisions. Because children are more susceptible to influence and manipulation than adults, that figure is likely to be even higher for children.

65. Because of sophisticated and manipulative apps like TikTok, Minnesota’s children are spending excessive amounts of time online. As several Minnesota parents have reported to the Attorney General, their teenagers have abandoned all their pre-TikTok interests and obligations and are now “bed rotting” or “doomscrolling” on the App, often until 2, 3, or 4 a.m. TikTok’s internal data confirms these parents’ experiences are not the exception—they are the rule. Minnesota children with TikTok accounts are using the App more than [REDACTED] per day on average and, more concerning, teenagers are increasingly using the App very late at night instead of getting their necessary sleep. In October 2022, [REDACTED] of TikTok’s Minnesota teenage users were using the App between [REDACTED] By October 2023, that number increased to [REDACTED] Between October 2022 and October 2023, Minnesota users aged 13–17 were averaging most of their daily minutes on the App between [REDACTED] peaking at [REDACTED] See Figure 3 below.

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<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 26 (emphasis added).



**Figure 3.** Aggregated TikTok data showing average daily session time on TikTok for Minnesota users aged 13–17 from October 2022–October 2023.

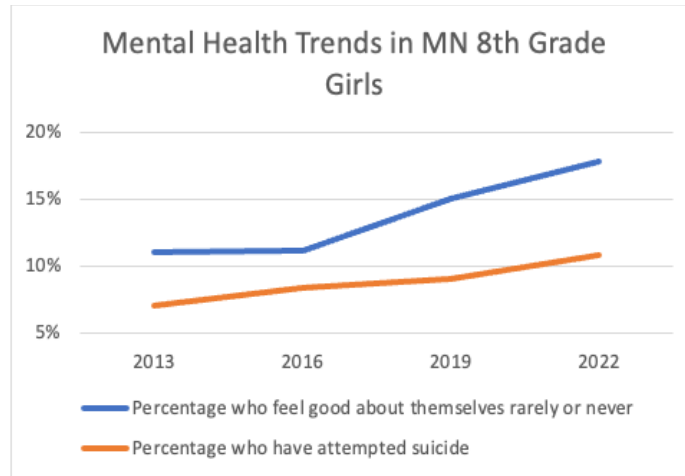
66. This excessive App use is contributing to a growing mental health crisis for Minnesota.

67. From 2013 to 2022, there was a 61% increase in the number of Minnesota eighth graders who reported that they rarely or never felt good about themselves.<sup>49</sup> In 2022, almost one quarter of Minnesota’s eighth graders (24.9%) had purposely harmed themselves in the past year (34% of eighth-grade girls), an almost 61% increase since 2013. The percentage of Minnesota’s eighth-grade students who seriously considered attempting suicide increased 48% (a 50% increase for eighth-grade girls) during that same time period, and most alarming, the number of Minnesota’s eighth graders who actually attempted suicide increased 51% (a 54% increase for eighth-grade girls).<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Figures 4 and 5 showing mental health trends for the State’s eighth-grade girls.

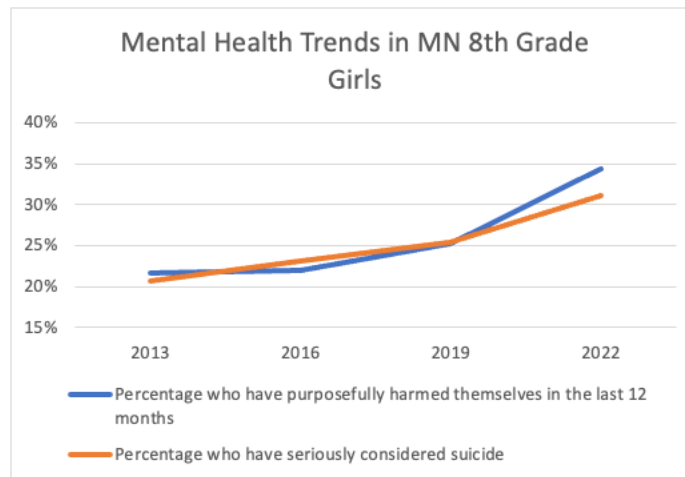
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<sup>49</sup> *Minnesota Student Survey Reports 2013-2022*, MINN. DEP’T. OF EDUC. <https://public.education.mn.gov/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=242> (last accessed July 11, 2025).

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*



**Figure 4.** Survey results from the Minnesota Department of Education’s Minnesota Student Survey Reports 2013–2022.



**Figure 5.** Survey results from the Minnesota Department of Education’s Minnesota Student Survey Reports 2013–2022.

68. TikTok is fully aware of the risks its App poses for adolescents. The company partnered with the Digital Wellness Lab, a nonprofit research laboratory at Boston Children’s Hospital, which reported to TikTok in October 2021 that children are “more easily persuaded” and “likely don’t understand risks of unhealthy usage” in comparison to adult users.

69. TikTok’s [REDACTED] has also acknowledged that “13-18 [year old] [TikTok] users are severely struggling with mental health, including thoughts of suicide and self-harm.” In June 2021, in an internal product strategy report on “Digital Wellbeing,” TikTok

also admitted that the design of its App can trigger habit-forming behaviors that harm mental health:

An internal study indicates that 50% of inactive TikTok users cited time management as an issue, 24% reported too many notifications, and 23% reported too much time spent on TikTok ... This compulsive usage correlates with a slew of negative mental effects like loss of analytical skills, memory formation, contextual thinking, conversational depth, empathy, and increased anxiety. Various similar studies ... also conclude that compulsive usage interferes with essential personal responsibilities like sufficient sleep, work/school responsibilities, and connecting with loved ones.

70. A year later, in June 2022, TikTok acknowledged in a research report that “people commonly lose track of time while using TikTok, which takes away time from other important activities they planned to do during the day.” In the same report, TikTok also admitted that late-night usage of the App “cuts into planned bedtime” and “can even stimulate the brain to a point where it is more difficult to fall asleep.”

71. In short, TikTok knows the design of its App is harmful to children.

**2. TikTok’s core design features are coercive and induce overuse that harms children.**

72. 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, as excessive use profits this business model. Indeed, in a June 2021 internal “Digital Wellbeing” product strategy document, TikTok acknowledges:

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.

73. Earlier that year, in an employee book club, some of TikTok’s top growth employees discussed [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] TikTok’s employees acknowledged that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] which, according to the employees, is [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] TikTok's employees also wondered  
whether [REDACTED] noting that  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

74. Yet, as its business model predicts, TikTok builds and ships these exact coercive design features—its Recommendation Engine, infinite scroll, push notifications, and filters—that employ the very same neurobiological reward tactics that TikTok's own employees found [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]” As the company admits in a 2022 product strategy document on “Digital Wellbeing” from its Trust and Safety team: “The TikTok product experience utilizes many coercive design tactics that detract from user agency such as infinite scroll, constant notifications, and the ‘slot machine’ effect.”

75. TikTok also employs a tactic called “currency confusion,”<sup>51</sup> requiring users who want to send Gifts on the App to convert real money into virtual currency with an arbitrary valuation. This system obscures important financial information from users and creators alike, like how much TikTok makes in commissions. Virtual currencies add another layer of confusion, making the true cost of purchases abstract and unclear, especially for children, who typically are still developing basic financial literacy.<sup>52</sup>

76. These features, described in detail below, amplify and incentivize compulsive use.

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<sup>51</sup> Scott Goodstein, *When The Cat's Away: Techlash, Loot Boxes, And Regulating “Dark Patterns” In The Video Game Industry's Monetization Strategies*, 92 U. COLO. L. REV. 285 (Feb. 1, 2021), <https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1057&context=lawreview>.

<sup>52</sup> *Building Blocks to help youth achieve financial capability: A new model and recommendations*, CONSUMER FIN. PROT. BUREAU 9 (Sept. 2016), available at [https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/092016\\_cfpb\\_BuildingBlocksReport\\_ModelAndRecommendations\\_web.pdf](https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/092016_cfpb_BuildingBlocksReport_ModelAndRecommendations_web.pdf).

77. TikTok provides users detailed instructions on how to use each feature but does not explain the significant harms TikTok knows these features can cause by driving compulsive use of the App.<sup>53</sup>

**i. Recommendation Engine**

78. TikTok collects massive amounts of data on its users' activity, such as their likes, comments, and the amount of time they spend watching each video. TikTok then uses this data to power an algorithm that is designed to rank content based on how likely a user is to engage with it and then gives them more of it.<sup>54</sup> Using each user's personal activity data, the Recommendation Engine curates a personalized stream of videos and other content with the intention of keeping users scrolling endlessly. This feedback loop between use, data, and the Recommendation Engine is the core of TikTok's platform and can repeatedly tap into each user's brain reward systems by identifying what will keep them actively engaged on the App, moment-to-moment.

79. The Recommendation Engine pervades almost every aspect of a user's experience with the App, including following friends and creators, shopping, and going "LIVE."<sup>55</sup> TikTok's flagship feature is the "For You" feed, which delivers a stream of personalized videos powered by the Recommendation Engine that begin playing automatically when users open the App.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Using TikTok*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250701161426/https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok> (archived July 1, 2025).

<sup>54</sup> Arvind Narayanan, *Understanding Social Media Recommendation Algorithms*, KNIGHT FIRST AMEND. INST. (Mar. 9, 2023), <https://knightcolumbia.org/content/understanding-social-media-recommendation-algorithms>.

<sup>55</sup> *How TikTok recommends content*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250607094546/https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/exploring-videos/how-tiktok-recommends-content> (archived June 7, 2025).

<sup>56</sup> *For You*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250704145937/https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/exploring-videos/for-you> (archived July 4, 2025).

80. When a new video is posted on the App, the App automatically sends that video, along with user activity data (such as watch time, likes, and comments), through its Recommendation Engine. The Engine then calculates a score predicting how each user will respond to each new video. Based on the score for each video for each user, the Recommendation Engine narrows millions of videos down to just eight per user, called a “load.” After a unique load is presented to the user, the Engine uses the user’s actions as feedback to measure the accuracy of its predictions, allowing it to “learn” by trial-and-error and improve future recommendations to keep that user engaged. Essentially, the Recommendation Engine, built with advanced math and computer science, “learns” from “training data”—here, massive amounts of information about videos and user reactions to those videos.

81. TikTok’s Recommendation Engine is a carefully designed machine 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 App—in other words, to addict users. In June 2021, TikTok acknowledged in research findings on “New User Retention” that habit formation is a core “mission” of the company:

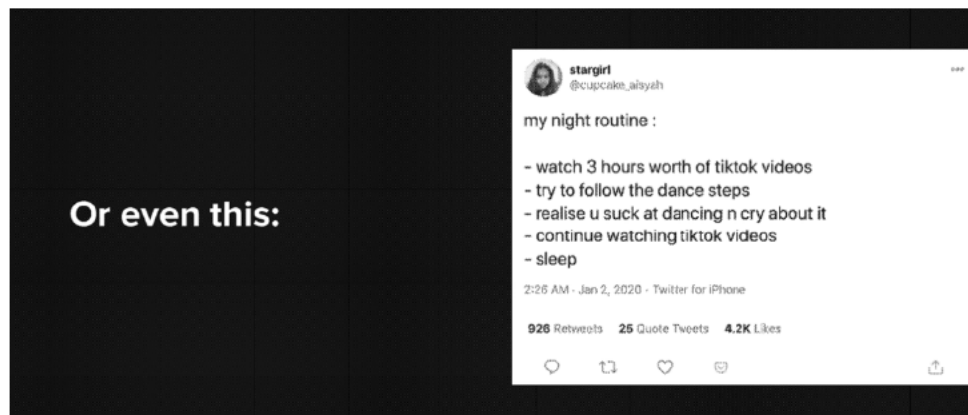
Pulling in and retaining new-users is difficult because it is causing these users to make behavioral changes to their current habits. The Habit Loop (neurological loop that governs habits) is broken down into 3 stages; the Cue; the Routine, the Reward. Prior to downloading TikTok, new-users [have] already established “Routines” for cues (ex[ample] boredom, free-time, bed-time routine) that we may want as [a] cue to bring people onto TikTok. However, changing someone’s routine is not as simple as asking them to. It’s about the reward; the positive reinforcement and benefit that the person feels from doing that routine. **TikTok[’]s mission to increase retention is to discover what “rewards” our users are seeking during the cues we want to associate ourselves with.**

82. The Engine is designed to give young users immediate gratification and boost rewards, encouraging excessive, “routine” use of the App. TikTok knows this captures users’

attention, thus achieving the intended effect. See Figures 6 and 7 below, showing images from an internal PowerPoint titled “TikTok Strategy: 2021 Positioning.”



(Figure 6.)



(Figure 7.)

83. The Engine encourages App use with no regard to whether it is healthy or safe. Given TikTok’s business model of gathering data and selling targeted ad views, engagement itself is the only goal.

84. As a 2023 University of Minnesota study learned, TikTok’s Engine “act[s] like a runaway train, a technological system that users cannot control but feel that they cannot leave or disengage from.”<sup>57</sup> TikTok’s Engine is so powerful and complex that the study’s participants “felt like they had no control over what was being shown to them on their [For You Page].”<sup>58</sup> One participant in that study described their experience with TikTok’s Engine:

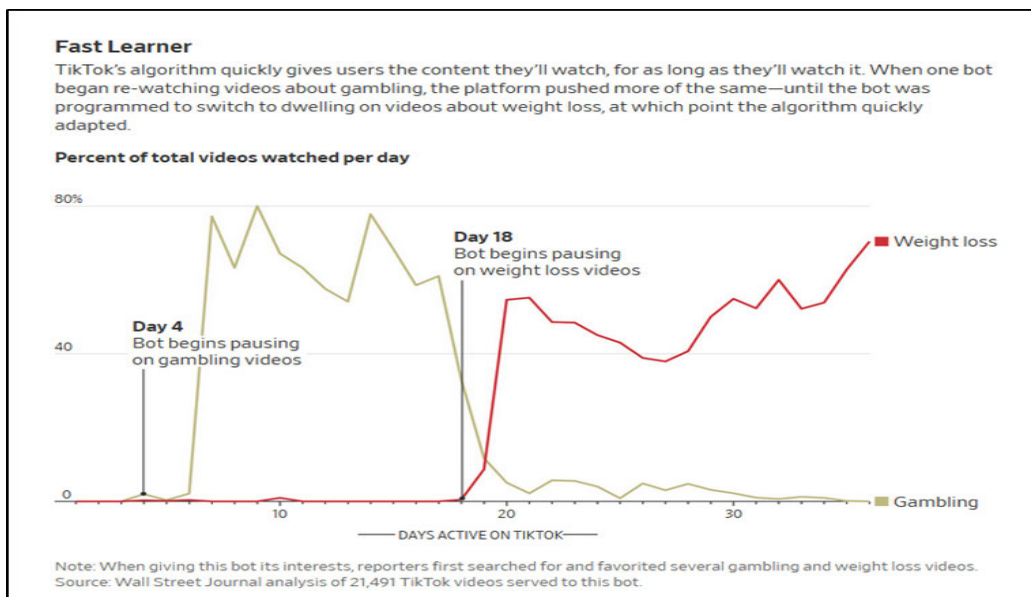
<sup>57</sup> Ashlee Milton, et al., “I See Me Here”: Mental Health Content, Community, and Algorithmic Curation on TikTok 11 (Apr. 23–28, 2023), available at <https://steviechancellor.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ISeeMeHere.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*



I've also tried methods of clicking on 'not interested' but the thing is I don't know if that button actually works or if it actually does anything. Every time I've clicked on 'not interested' on domestic abuse videos, true crime, or [videos about] pedophiles or something like that ... I don't like seeing that stuff because it's upsetting. I'll try to click on not interested, but then [TikTok] still pushes those videos.<sup>59</sup>

85. As the 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 Engine learns that a user is more likely to engage with a specific type of video and then reinforces them by recommending even more (and often increasingly extreme) 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 8 below, from the *Wall Street Journal*, showing how quickly a user can become trapped into compulsively using the App by a filter bubble.<sup>60</sup>



(Figure 8.)

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> Tawnell D. Hobbs et al., 'The Corpse Bride Diet': How TikTok Inundates Teens With Eating-Disorder Videos, WALL STREET J. (Dec. 17, 2021), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-tiktok-inundates-teens-with-eating-disorder-videos-11639754848>.

86. TikTok acknowledges that its “[a]lgo[rithm] prioritizes engagement” and filter bubbles are “inevitably caused by [the] recommendation algorithm: Due to the nature of [the] algorithm as the core mechanism of content distribution.” TikTok knows that eliminating filter bubbles entirely would require it to change its core Recommendation Engine to decrease the time and attention users give to the platform—so it does not.

87. Once users are trapped in a filter bubble, it is extremely difficult to escape. For example, if TikTok recommends dieting content to a teenage girl, the Recommendation Engine will use the girl’s engagement with that content to flood her feed with similar content glorifying eating disorders and body dysmorphia, taking over the girl’s entire For You page and forcing her to figure out how to counter the Engine’s algorithm all on her own.

**ii. Infinite Scroll**

88. Infinite scroll is a particularly pernicious design tactic through which TikTok automatically and constantly loads new videos in an endless stream each time a user swipes to watch a new video or the previous video ends. Like the Recommendation Engine, infinite scroll is an essential component of the App that induces users’ compulsive use of the App.

89. Infinite scroll is designed to subvert a user’s desire to disengage at a given moment, and the feature thereby maximizes a user’s time spent in the App. In an internal 2022 research report on “Digital Wellbeing,” TikTok acknowledged this very feature makes it harder for users to disengage from the App:

Participants’ challenges with effectively managing their time on TikTok were the same as why they enjoyed and used TikTok. Namely, TikTok reliably delivered highly engaging, quick, and continuous content. Other aspects of TikTok that contributed to participants’ challenges with managing their time included the continuous scroll, few or no breaks between content, short videos, and not knowing what the next video will be.

90. The anticipation of discovering something new and a user’s feeling that they

might miss out on the next interesting or exciting piece of content keeps users scrolling. Children are particularly susceptible to the effects of infinite scroll because their brains are more vulnerable to the dopamine hits delivered by the variable and unexpected 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—like school, family, and sleep—or causes mental health harms like anxiety or depression.

**iii. Push Notifications**

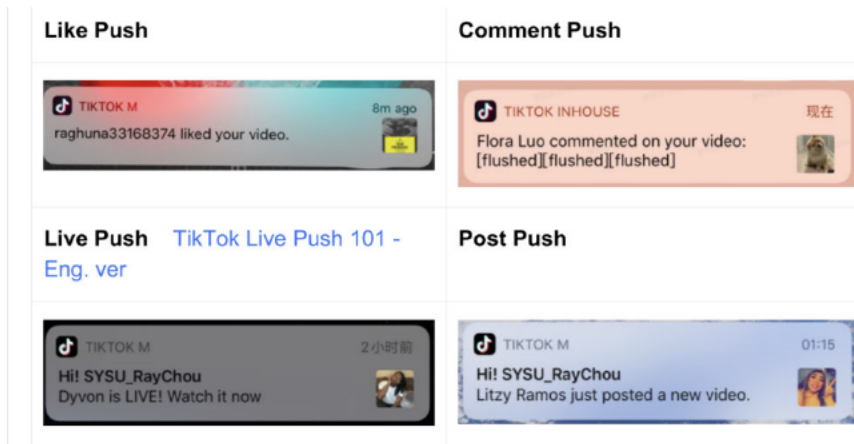
91. Like a salesman constantly knocking on your door for your business, push notifications—descriptions of actions happening on the App (such as newly posted videos) pushed to a user’s smartphone when they’re not using the App, or even when they’re not using their phone at all—are meant to entice users to re-open the App. Push notifications are essentially personalized advertisements for the App driven by the Recommendation Engine.<sup>61</sup>

92. TikTok uses push notifications to manipulate children into returning to the App—distracting them at school, disrupting their sleep, and provoking their well-known and studied fear of missing out (commonly referred to as “FOMO”).<sup>62</sup> The company admitted internally that it wants to “create FOMO” for users because that generates “acquisition” and is therefore good for business, and that these notifications are intended to “encourage users to open the App an[d] stay longer.” See Figure 9 below for examples of TikTok’s push notifications.

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<sup>61</sup> *How TikTok recommends content*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250607094546/https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/exploring-videos/how-tiktok-recommends-content> (archived June 7, 2025).

<sup>62</sup> *4 Things to Know About Your Teen’s Brain*, NORTHWESTERN MED. (July 2018), <https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/healthy-tips/four-things-about-your-teens-developing-brain>.



(Figure 9.)

93. These push notifications use “haptics”—the vibrations, buzzes, and attention-grabbing sound features built into users’ smartphones—to draw users’ attention back to the App. TikTok has described push notifications as “an effective marketing tool as it helps to recall users.”

94. TikTok has taken advantage of well-understood neurobiological mechanisms to increase user engagement on its App. When users receive a push notification, the brain releases dopamine, part of a feel-good feedback loop that encourages users to keep coming back to the App for more. These notifications help condition users—especially children—to keep checking their phones, which can harm cognition by decreasing concentration and increasing distraction.

95. TikTok’s push notifications prompt users, especially children, to check the App at all hours. TikTok admits: “we send notifications to users during the school day and in some cases, up until midnight, which could interfere with sleep.” After the Attorney General publicly announced he was investigating TikTok for its use of, among other things, “techniques TikTok utilize[s] to boost engagement among young users,”<sup>63</sup> TikTok began automatically muting notifications between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m. for users who actively identify themselves aged 13–17.

<sup>63</sup> *Attorney General Ellison joins nationwide investigation into TikTok’s impact on young people*, MINNESOTA ATTORNEY GENERAL (Mar. 2, 2022), [https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Communications/2022/03/02\\_TikTok.asp](https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Communications/2022/03/02_TikTok.asp).

However, TikTok knows that many of its minor users lie about their age and evade its lax age-gate. For users 18 and older—and for the millions of users who circumvent the age-gate that TikTok suspects are minors—TikTok continues to send notifications at all hours of the night, admitting that it relies on the users themselves to overcome their coercive push notifications, “manage [their] screen time at night,” and “promote healthier sleep habits.”<sup>64</sup>

96. These late-night notifications significantly impact App usage among Minnesota’s children. TikTok’s data shows that Minnesota teens are most active between [REDACTED], which TikTok acknowledges is a “strong indicator” that teens are not getting the recommended eight hours of sleep for their health and well-being.

**iv. Filters**

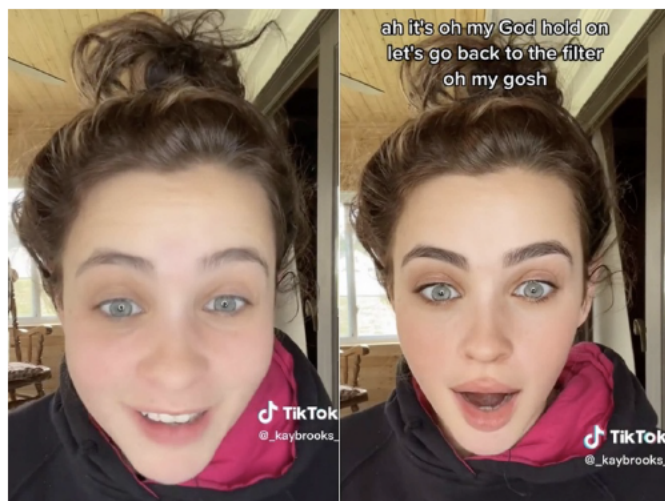
97. TikTok’s “filters” and “effects” are the primary tools users can use to edit their content before or after they post it to the App.<sup>65</sup> “Filters” and “effects” alter a user’s appearance by artificially lightening and smoothing skin, whitening teeth, enlarging lips, and modifying facial features to create a skinnier face or smaller nose. These filters cosmetically reshape a user’s face in a hyper-realistic way. They are sophisticated and track faces seamlessly, avoiding glitches that could reveal the use of a filter, thus blurring the line between what is real and what is fake.

98. TikTok’s most popular filters, like “Bold Glamour,” have been used hundreds of millions of times by users. *See* Figures 10 and 11 showing the Bold Glamour filter below.

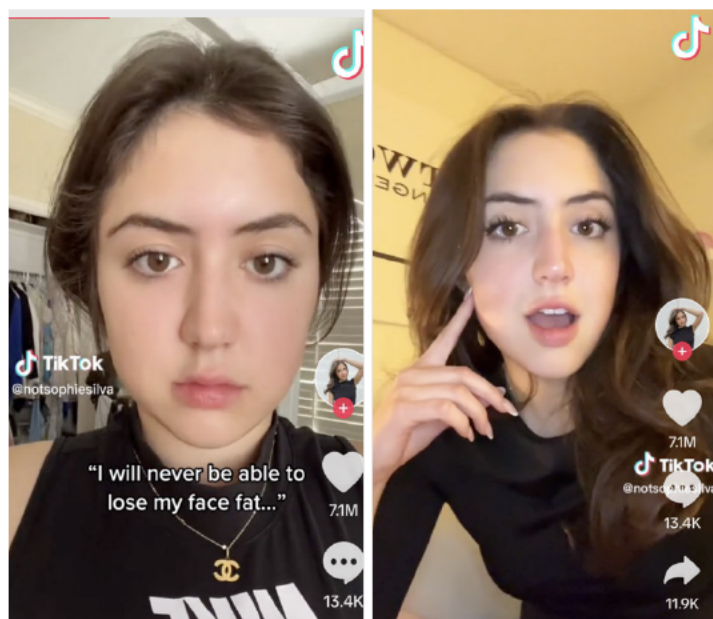
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<sup>64</sup> *Screen Time*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250628161052/https://support.tiktok.com/en/account-and-privacy/account-information/screen-time> (archived June 28, 2025).

<sup>65</sup> *Effects*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250426080948/https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/creating-videos/effects> (archived Apr. 26, 2025).



(Figure 10.)



(Figure 11.)

99. These filters warp young users' self-image and sense of self and are unsafe for their mental health.

100. TikTok knows that beauty filters inflict significant harm on young users. TikTok's Trust and Safety team acknowledged in an internal 2023 recommendations report on "Mental Health" that beauty filters are "causing severe psychological harm" to minors. The company also admitted that TikTok filters have a "high risk of harming U18 users."

101. Teenagers often seek out attention, peer feedback, and social validation through comparison. Unsurprisingly, they compare the filtered images of themselves on TikTok to their real-life appearances, often leading to a negative perception of their real self-image. TikTok acknowledged in that report that teens are “more susceptible to harm when it comes to the usage and consumption of beauty filters as they are developing their self-image[,] are at a critical period for developing body dysmorphia [and] eating disorders, and are more easily pressured by the opinions of others.” TikTok has also studied neuro-biological research on this issue, and their own evidence shows that “adolescents are significantly more influenced by peer pressure and peer comparison than either adults or children.”

102. Despite knowing this, TikTok has deployed hundreds (if not thousands) of these filters over the years—including even going so far as turning on filters for users and minors *by default*, without getting their consent first. TikTok uses filters, in large part, because the company knows they encourage users to post and use the App more frequently as they begin to identify more with the filter and less with their real appearance.

103. Internal documents from May 2023 show that one of TikTok’s filters, called “retouching,” was turned “ON by default for all users (including minors)” across most regions, including in Minnesota—apparently to experiment. In other words, TikTok automatically applied “[p]re-set, default filter settings” to users’ faces when they opened the in-App camera *without ever notifying users or seeking their consent*. The retouching filter includes makeup effects (e.g., foundation, contour, and lipstick), structural reshaping of the face (like face and nose slimming), and cosmetic procedure effects (like skin smoothing and retexturing and teeth whitening).

104. TikTok knows using this default setting without user consent is dangerous. In 2023, TikTok’s [REDACTED]

expressed extreme concerns about this feature in an internal company chat:

From a user safety perspective, I'm extremely concerned at this launch -in summary, it goes against what I think of as best practices, with core concerns primarily being that: **Users have no indication that they are viewing a retouched/alterd image; we are non-consensually editing users faces in the name of 'beauty'; we are adding numeric values to how much we are altering their faces to meet beauty standards; we are doing this for users of all ages, including minor[s]. This has high potential from a research perspective to lead to negative body image and body dysmorphia symptoms, especially among teenage girls.**

105. The harms from default filters affect both content creators (i.e., people who post videos on the App) and viewers. Indeed, as TikTok's Trust and Safety team acknowledged, this default filter "[s]ends implicit message to users that they are not 'beautiful enough' to post to TikTok with unaltered features" and "[r]educes user agency and autonomy."

106. TikTok's filters cause emotional and psychological harm, especially to young female users. These effects increase the risk for eating disorders, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and negative body image.<sup>66</sup> The American Society of Plastic Surgeons ("ASPS") has documented notable increases in body modification requests from children, noting: "Digital platforms like TikTok serve as catalysts for trending treatments."<sup>67</sup> The rise in teenagers seeking medical intervention to alter their appearance prompted the ASPS to release new guidance for cosmetic procedures on teenagers,<sup>68</sup> and the ASPS has specifically noted that "platforms like

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<sup>66</sup> Tara Well, *The Hidden Danger of Online Beauty Filters*, PSYCH. TODAY (Mar. 25, 2023), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-clarity/202303/can-beauty-filters-damage-your-self-esteem>.

<sup>67</sup> Kayla Peterson, *Circle of influence: How social media influencers are shaping plastic surgery trends*, AM. SOC'Y OF PLASTIC SURGEONS (Sept. 19, 2023), <https://www.plasticsurgery.org/news/articles/circle-of-influence-how-social-media-influencers-are-shaping-plastic-surgery-trends>.

<sup>68</sup> *American Society of Plastic Surgeons Weighs in On Growing Popularity of Teen Plastic Surgery*, AM. SOC'Y OF PLASTIC SURGEONS (Aug. 22, 2018), <https://www.plasticsurgery.org/news/press-releases/american-society-of-plastic-surgeons-weighs-in-on-growing-popularity-of-teen-plastic-surgery>.



TikTok are driving the popularity of plastic surgery overall.”<sup>69</sup>

107. Though the company knows of the various dangers of using filters, as of May 2023, TikTok did not have “any well-defined approach for minors and beauty filters” and continues to push distorting filters on children without warning users about the damage to their mental health and well-being.

**v. TikTok LIVE**

108. With each new feature, TikTok further entrenches its business model by which it profits from increased engagement. LIVE is the newest tool in this model.

109. In 2019, the company launched “TikTok LIVE,” allowing users to live stream videos, and spend and receive money through an in-App virtual currency system called “TikTok Coins.” TikTok incorporated its tried-and-true Recommendation Engine into LIVE’s design<sup>70</sup> to bring “longer stay time and more content consumption,” and to provide yet another “new trigger” that prompts users to open the App. And like other App features, TikTok has admitted that creating direct, monetary incentives “introduces a variable reward (which is effective in driving sustained changes in user behavior).”

110. TikTok knows that combining its Engine, live streaming, and monetization is reckless and dangerous—especially for children. The harmful and unsafe environment on LIVE stems from TikTok’s choice to couple (1) live streaming without proper age-gating with (2) an unlicensed (and thus unregulated) virtual monetary system. This combination has turned LIVE

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<sup>69</sup> Ariel Frankeny, *The prevalence of TikTok and its impact on plastic surgery procedures*, AM. SOC’Y OF PLASTIC SURGEONS (Mar. 11, 2024), <https://www.plasticsurgery.org/news/articles/the-prevalence-of-tiktok-and-its-impact-on-plastic-surgery-procedures>.

<sup>70</sup> *How TikTok recommends content*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250607094546/https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/exploring-videos/how-tiktok-recommends-content> (archived June 7, 2025).

into a dangerous space where the company knowingly profits from sexual exploitation and other illegal activity.

111. The LIVE feature offers the ultimate ephemeral experience that lures children in by promising real-time access to live streaming content. Since LIVE videos are not typically saved for later viewing, they create a sense of urgency in children, tapping into their fear of missing out (FOMO) and driving them to use the App even more.

112. Once children are hooked and using LIVE, TikTok exploits them financially. The App allows users to send and receive money through its virtual currency. Similar to a casino's poker chips, TikTok lets users buy virtual "Coins" to purchase virtual "Gifts" designed to look like plush toys. Users can send Gifts during a live stream, which accumulate into another form of virtual currency called "Diamonds," that streamers can cash out for real money.<sup>71</sup>

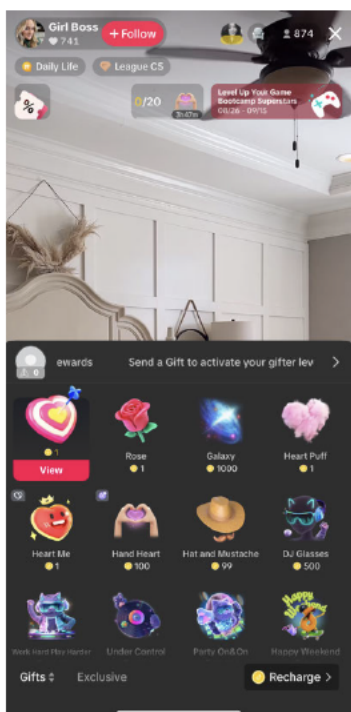
113. These Gifts function like social recognition reward signals, similar to "Likes" on other apps, but with the added weight of costing money. TikTok promises to reward users with money the more "popular [their] content becomes."<sup>72</sup> To get Gifts and receive TikTok's rewards, users need to go LIVE as much as possible—which deepens children's use of the App as both users and streamers. Because Gifts are visible to others during a LIVE session, this feature taps into children's deeply-felt desire for social validation. By exploiting this desire, TikTok drives engagement on the App, leading users to solicit as many Gifts as possible in the hopes that *more* Gifts will result in *more* popularity and *more* payouts from TikTok. See Figures 12–14, showing

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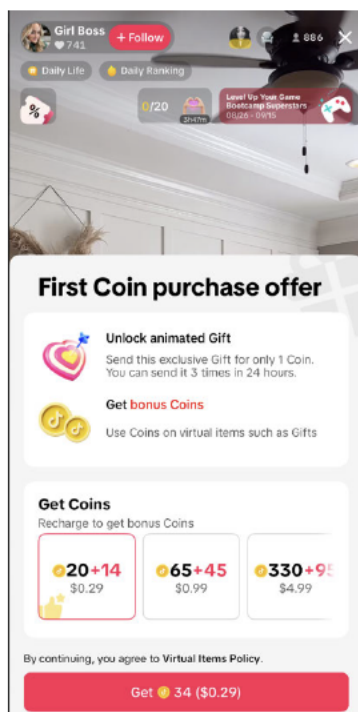
<sup>71</sup> *Diamonds*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250529163938/https://support.tiktok.com/en/business-and-creator/video-gifts-on-tiktok/diamonds> (archived May 29, 2025).

<sup>72</sup> *Turning Passion to Profit: WAYS TO MAKE MONEY ON TIKTOK LIVE*, TIKTOK (Dec. 15, 2022), available via the WayBack Machine at [https://web.archive.org/web/20250611182307/https://www.tiktok.com/live/creators/en-US/article/turning-passion-to-profit-ways-to-make-money-on-tiktok-live\\_en-US](https://web.archive.org/web/20250611182307/https://www.tiktok.com/live/creators/en-US/article/turning-passion-to-profit-ways-to-make-money-on-tiktok-live_en-US) (archived June 11, 2025).

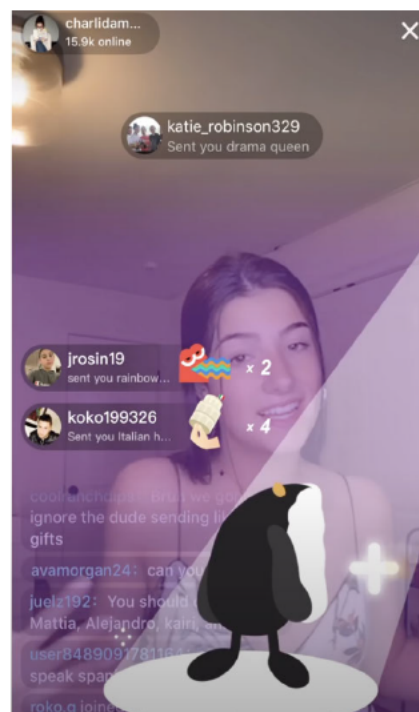
a step-by-step guide to how Gift giving works on LIVE.



**Figure 12. Gifts**



**Figure 13. Coin Purchase**



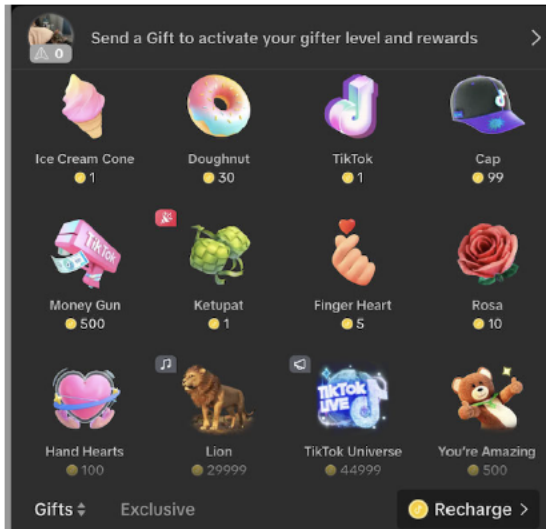
**Figure 14. Gifts on LIVE**

114. Although LIVE, including both live streaming and Gifts, has a current minimum age requirement of 18 and older, TikTok knows its lax age verification measures allow kids to enter a fake age to gain access. Failures to adequately age-gate have held true since the early days of LIVE. For example, in June 2021, a senior TikTok employee admitted:

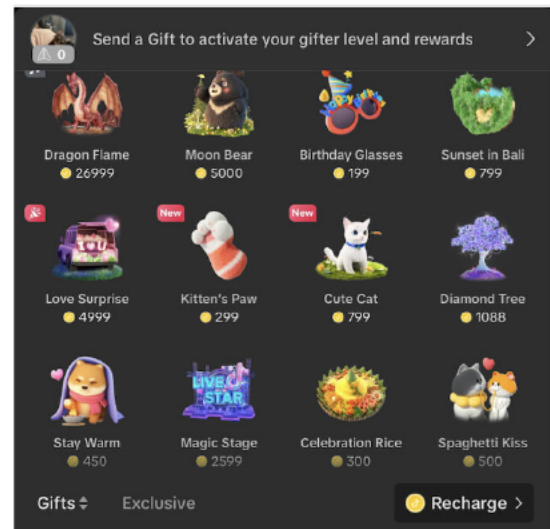
[a]t this point we have very limited options to protect minors from live content ... Currently we are NOT able to age gate livestreams because we do not have the functional capability to do so. We also do not have the ability to show warning screens ... Until we establish reliable content filtering strategies, we need to consider BLOCKING all L1s [13–15 year olds] from viewing (or interacting in any capacity) with Live.

115. TikTok also designs the Gifts that users purchase with Coins to be specifically attractive to children. Most Gifts look like cute, colorful animated emojis reminiscent of cartoons and Disney characters, which TikTok's former CEO has acknowledged are "appealing to young users." See Figures 15–18 below. Each Gift costs a different number of Coins—for example, an

“Ice Cream Cone” costs one Coin, while the coveted “Lion” costs 29,999 Coins (\$299.99). See Figure 15 below.



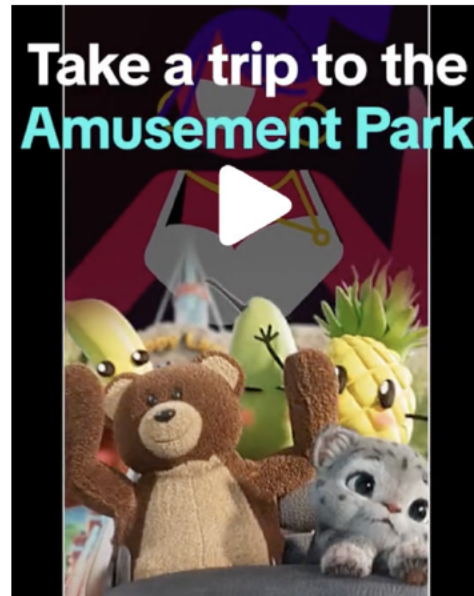
(Figure 15.)



(Figure 16.)



**Figure 17.** The Rosa Gift.



**Figure 18.** The Lili and Friends Gift.

116. The big eyes, cutesy playful themes, and bright color schemes, reminiscent of children’s movies and toys, entice children to spend time and money on LIVE. And this has proven to be a highly successful part of TikTok’s business. By 2022, of the 83 million daily U.S. TikTok users, 20% (nearly 17 million people) watched LIVE every day. TikTok has described

LIVE viewers as a “committed” user base, with 62% of them watching it daily.<sup>73</sup> The company estimates that by 2027 it could generate up to \$77 *billion* a year from LIVE alone.

117. Beyond designing LIVE to be intentionally enticing to children, TikTok has made its live streaming virtual economy intentionally complex to keep developmentally vulnerable young users from understanding how much money they are actually spending through the App. Buying into TikTok’s virtual economy involves five different steps and four different conversions between real currency and three different forms of virtual currency. At each step, TikTok obscures both the value of the money and the amount it pockets for itself. A typical transaction between a user and LIVE host involves the following five steps:

1. A TikTok user spends real currency (e.g., U.S. dollars) to purchase Coins through either TikTok’s App (using a credit or debit card associated with the Apple or Google app store) or directly through TikTok’s website. On TikTok’s website, the current exchange rate is roughly one Coin per penny (\$0.01), but fluctuates based on the quantity of Coins purchased so that one Coin is not actually equal to one penny.
2. That user joins a LIVE session.
3. In the LIVE session, the user spends their Coins to purchase a virtual Gift on the TikTok App and sends the virtual Gift to the LIVE host.
4. TikTok credits the LIVE host’s account with a certain number of Diamonds for receiving virtual Gifts, based on TikTok’s undisclosed formula. TikTok also holds discretionary power to send additional Diamonds to users based on the popularity of their content.
5. After the LIVE session ends, the host can convert the Diamonds they received back into real currency (e.g., U.S. dollars), which TikTok deposits into the host’s PayPal account.

118. Throughout this process, TikTok takes up to *half* of the cash value of the Coins

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<sup>73</sup> *Growing Your Community with TikTok LIVE*, TIKTOK (July 19, 2022), <https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/growing-community-tiktok-live>.

purchased by users.<sup>74</sup> But nowhere during the five-step process or in its user-facing policies or Terms of Service does TikTok disclose to consumers the true value of their Coins, including that the Gifts bought with their Coins are worth as little as 50% of their original cash value (with TikTok pocketing the rest). Instead, TikTok disclosed its 50% commission in a short article published on their website, where most users are highly unlikely to seek it out.<sup>75</sup>

119. TikTok is also well aware that LIVE, coupled with its monetization features, harms children. The company has admitted that it “drives purchase behavior,” and “encourages impulse purchases.” The company has further acknowledged that children more easily fall prey to predatory practices on LIVE and are vulnerable to online enticements that lure children into spending what limited money they may have.<sup>76</sup>

120. In May 2022, TikTok also conducted a formal investigation into LIVE called “Project Meramec.” The results confirmed that (1) users well under the minimum age requirement could host LIVE sessions on TikTok; (2) TikTok was receiving “significant revenue” from “transactional gifting,” in large part generated through transactions for sexual content; and (3) TikTok’s Recommendation Engine is optimized to amplify Gift giving for sexual content: “[t]ransactional sexual content hits most of business’ metrics of success and is pushed to TopLives ....”

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<sup>74</sup> *Turning Passion to Profit: WAYS TO MAKE MONEY ON TIKTOK LIVE*, TIKTOK (Dec. 15, 2022), available via the WayBack Machine at [https://web.archive.org/web/20250611182307/https://www.tiktok.com/live/creators/en-US/article/turning-passion-to-profit-ways-to-make-money-on-tiktok-live\\_en-US](https://web.archive.org/web/20250611182307/https://www.tiktok.com/live/creators/en-US/article/turning-passion-to-profit-ways-to-make-money-on-tiktok-live_en-US) (archived June 11, 2025).

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> Judy Tidy, *TikTok’s young fans ‘exploited’ for digital gifts*, BBC (July 2, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-48725515>.

121. TikTok has acknowledged that the predatory practices it financially incentivizes with LIVE lead to “financial harm,” expose “minors to a misleading environment that encourages addiction and impulsive purchasing of virtual items,” and expose “minors to repeated sexualized content [that] puts them at development risk.”

122. Payment systems on digital platforms that facilitate the storage and exchange of money, like TikTok’s, are generally regulated by states and the federal government. Many state jurisdictions, including Minnesota, require businesses that engage in the business of virtual money transmission to obtain a license.<sup>77</sup> The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (“FinCEN”), a part of the U.S. Treasury Department, similarly requires those who administer and exchange “convertible virtual currency” or payments with an “equivalent value in real currency, or acts as a substitute for real currency”—to register as a money transmitter.<sup>78</sup>

123. Minnesota’s regulation of virtual money transmission businesses is complimentary of and aided by federal regulations of those same businesses to ensure they have adequate oversight, reporting, and consumer protection systems in place.<sup>79</sup> While most of the virtual currency exchange that occurs on TikTok occurs on LIVE, the feature has no auditing, documentation, or effective caps on the amount a user can spend or receive.

124. TikTok is not registered as a virtual money transmitter with the Minnesota Department of Commerce, as required by Minnesota Statutes sections 53B.36(a) and 53B.71(a), nor is it registered with FinCEN, as required by the federal Money Services Business Registration Rule, 31. C.F.R. § 1022.380. FinCEN has advised the public that convertible virtual

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<sup>77</sup> *Money Services Businesses*, MINN. COM. DEP’T. LICENSING, <https://mn.gov/commerce/licensing/list/financial-institutions/money-transmission/#1> (last accessed July 11, 2025); *see also* Minn. Stat. §§ 53B.36(a), 53B.71(a).

<sup>78</sup> *Application of FinCEN’s Regulations to Persons Administering, Exchanging, or Using Virtual Currencies*, FINCEN (Mar. 18, 2013), available at <https://www.fincen.gov/sites/default/files/guidance/FIN-2013-G001.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> *See e.g.*, Minn. Stat. §§ 53B.35, 53B.49.

currencies are being increasingly used for illicit activities including “human trafficking, child exploitation, fraud, extortion, cybercrime, drug trafficking, [and] money laundering ... ”<sup>80</sup>

125. For these reasons, Minnesota law and FinCEN require money transmitters to police their platforms for sex trafficking, money laundering, and other illegal acts, and to take other steps designed to catch and curtail illegal activity that harms the public and their customers.

126. TikTok knows it has failed to obtain proper licenses to transmit its virtual currency, thereby avoiding the state and federal policing requirements of its platform that would follow. An internal “PRD” (product requirements document) on LIVE from 2021 concedes: “TikTok does not have a Money Transmission License in US, we cannot provide service which involves money transactions from a user to a creator.” TikTok employees likewise acknowledge that “LIVE Gift and Income+ are not compliant to support revenue receiving and withdrawal” and note that TikTok’s payment flow and fund flow faced three significant compliance issues in the United States—“Money laundering risk, Handling user-to-user transaction without MTL (Money Transmitter License), and Stored value (synonymous with Prepaid access).”

127. By actively encouraging children to engage with LIVE and Gifts even as they ostensibly claim to prohibit them from using either, exploiting them financially while taking advantage of their need for social validation, failing to enforce its lax age restrictions, declining to implement reasonable safeguards on the money transmissions it profits from, and then actively promoting transactional sexual LIVE sessions with its Recommendation Engine, TikTok engages in unfair or unconscionable acts or practices that endanger Minnesota’s children.

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<sup>80</sup> *Advisory on Illicit Activity Involving Convertible Virtual Currency*, FINCEN (May 9, 2019), available at <https://www.fincen.gov/sites/default/files/advisory/2019-05-10/FinCEN%20Advisory%20CVC%20FINAL%20508.pdf>.



**C. TikTok misleads Minnesotans about the safety of its App.**

128. TikTok creates a false and misleading impression of safety for users through statements made in its “Community Guidelines,”<sup>81</sup> published “Newsroom” posts announcing new safety features,<sup>82</sup> and public statements made through its officers and CEO. TikTok also promotes several features as effective ways to control usage on the App, despite knowing they are ineffective.

129. TikTok actively creates an impression of safety for its users that is untrue, and as TikTok’s own records show—on an App where “[REDACTED]”—consumers’ only option for clarity and transparency is “[REDACTED]”

130. First, TikTok routinely misrepresents its commitment to safety over profit and the efficacy of its content moderation systems. The company knows the App’s design is inherently dangerous and that its safety measures are flawed, including detection failures, policy grey areas, disorganization, lack of adequate training, and under-resourced content moderation teams. These moderation failures and misrepresentations are particularly striking for the App’s most harmful material, Child Sexual Abuse Material (“CSAM”).

131. Second, TikTok has also failed to disclose (and has deceptively downplayed) the serious risks and harms caused by “filter bubbles” on the App. Contrary to its statements, TikTok has not addressed the harms caused by its sophisticated Recommendation Engine because doing so would undercut its entire business model.

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<sup>81</sup> *Community Guidelines, Overview*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), <https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/available> via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240417075432/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/> (archived July 6, 2025).

<sup>82</sup> *Newsroom*, TIKTOK, <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/> (last accessed July 11, 2025).

132. Third, TikTok falsely claims it effectively age restricts access to the App despite knowing that, in practice, its age-gating does not prevent young children from using it.

133. Fourth, TikTok misleads children and their parents about the safety of LIVE, knowing full well that live streaming and Gifting are unsafe and flooded with sexual exploitation.

134. Finally, TikTok misrepresents the effectiveness of its user and parental controls.

135. The truth behind TikTok's misleading statements about the operation and safety of its App, and the harms it causes to consumers, is hidden from the public behind the company's complex—and highly guarded—technical algorithms, research, and corporate structure. As described herein, only TikTok has access to information about how the App and its features works, the App's addictive qualities, the harms the App's features are causing consumers, and the financial and physical safety risks the App poses to consumers—especially to children—that it does not disclose to the public. TikTok's unique knowledge in this regard creates special circumstances that triggered a duty on the part of the Defendant to disclose material facts to its consumers about how the App and its features works, the App's addictive qualities, the harms the App's features are causing consumers, and the financial and physical safety risks the App poses to consumers—especially to children.

136. TikTok's misleading statements about its App are extensive in scope and substance, relating to the most foundational aspects of the App's operations and consumers' engagement with the App. As described herein, TikTok knows its App's features cause consumers to compulsively use the App and cause mental health harms, and that consumers are put at risk of financial and sexual exploitation on the App, yet TikTok does not disclose this important information. The nature and quality of TikTok's representations were so incomplete

that by failing to disclose fully and accurately how the App and its features works, the App’s addictive qualities, the harms the App’s features are causing consumers, and the financial and physical safety risks the App poses to consumers, TikTok did not say enough to prevent the representations made to Minnesota consumers from being deceptive and misleading.

**1. TikTok misrepresents its commitment to safety and the effectiveness of its content moderation systems.**

137. TikTok’s Community Guidelines, which are published on their website—including on their support page<sup>83</sup>—and incorporated into their Terms of Services with Minnesota consumers, assures young users and their parents that TikTok is “deeply committed to TikTok being a safe and positive experience for people under the age of 18 ....”<sup>84</sup>

138. To help ensure a “safe” and “trustworthy” experience for children, the Community Guidelines expressly represent that TikTok “remove[s] any content—including video, audio, livestream, images, comments, links, or other text that violates [its] Community Guidelines.”<sup>85</sup> TikTok also states that its policies are strict and its “guidelines apply to everyone and everything on our platform.”<sup>86</sup>

139. Since 2020, and at all times relevant to this Complaint, TikTok’s Community

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<sup>83</sup> *How TikTok recommends content*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250607094546/https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/exploring-videos/how-tiktok-recommends-content> (archived June 7, 2025).

<sup>84</sup> *Community Guidelines, Youth Safety and Well-Being*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250630110118/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/youth-safety/> (archived June 30, 2025).

<sup>85</sup> *Community Guidelines, Overview* TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240417075432/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/> (archived July 6, 2025); *Community Guidelines*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20221126040737/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines?lang=en> (archived Nov. 26, 2022).

<sup>86</sup> *Id.*

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.”<sup>87</sup>
- 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.”<sup>88</sup>
- 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.”<sup>89</sup>
- 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.”<sup>90</sup>
- e. “We do not allow the trade of alcohol, tobacco products, and or drugs. We also do not allow showing, possessing, or using drugs.”<sup>91</sup>

140. For certain content, like online sexual exploitation and CSAM material, TikTok promises a “zero tolerance polic[y].”<sup>92</sup>

141. To further its deception that it effectively removes violative content, TikTok

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<sup>87</sup> *Community Guidelines, Safety and Civility*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250622080804/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/safety-civility/> (archived June 22, 2025).

<sup>88</sup> *Community Guidelines, Mental and Behavioral Health*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250611182417/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/mental-behavioral-health> (archived June 11, 2025).

<sup>89</sup> *Id.*

<sup>90</sup> *Id.*

<sup>91</sup> *Community Guidelines, Regulated Goods and Commercial Activities*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250614050228/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/regulated-commercial-activities> (archived June 14, 2025).

<sup>92</sup> Eric Han, *Protecting against exploitative content*, TIKTOK (Mar. 5, 2020), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/protecting-against-exploitative-content>.

routinely publishes Quarterly Enforcement Reports on its website, which tout the volume and nature of content removed from the App. The reports state:

“We prioritize safety, well-being ... More than 40,000 trust and safety professionals work alongside innovative technology to maintain and enforce our robust Community Guidelines ... which apply to all content on our platform. This latest report provides insight into these efforts, showing how we continue to uphold trust, authenticity, and accountability.”<sup>93</sup>

The reports show what percentage of the videos TikTok removed from its App were removed “proactively.”

142. TikTok’s CEO, Shou Chew, has also publicly claimed that TikTok has “clear community guidelines” and that executives do not “make any ad-hoc decisions” when dealing with “bad actors” who post offending content on the App.<sup>94</sup>

143. None of these claims about TikTok’s commitment to safety or the effectiveness of the company’s safety systems are true.

144. In reality, neither TikTok’s automated tools nor its human moderators are effective at removing or preventing harmful videos from being published. This puts TikTok’s youngest users at significant risk.

145. First, internal reports from 2022 reveal that TikTok knows violative content bypasses its moderation tools and “leaks” on to the App due to “existing policy gaps and under-moderation.” TikTok knows this failure “results in exposing users to harm and/or discomfort,”

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<sup>93</sup> *Community Guidelines Enforcement Report*, TIKTOK, (June 26, 2024), <https://www.tiktok.com/transparency/en/community-guidelines-enforcement-2024-1/>.

<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Vanian, *TikTok has tens of thousands of moderators led by group in Ireland looking for offensive content, CEO says*, CNBC (Apr. 21, 2023), <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/04/20/tiktok-has-tens-of-thousands-of-content-moderators-in-ireland-ceo.html#:~:text=Tech-,TikTok%20has%20tens%20of%20thousands%20of%20moderators%20led%20by%20group,for%20offensive%20content%2C%20CEO%20says&text=Tens%20of%20thousands%20of%20TikTok,a%20TED%20conference%20on%20Thursday.>

including children.

146. TikTok’s own Trust and Safety team has acknowledged that the moderation enforcement metrics it publicly touts as effective are “misleading” because they “do not account for the content that we miss.” In other words, TikTok knows that it is only “good at moderating the content [TikTok actually] capture[s].” Parents might find reassurance in TikTok’s reported moderation success rates, such as “proactive removal” data, but these metrics are flawed. They compare violations caught quickly with those caught slowly and do not consider (and therefore, actively hide from consumers) the violative content that goes completely undetected and remains a danger to children.

147. TikTok’s misrepresentations are material and impact Minnesota consumers’ understanding of the App. Unlike the proactive “zero tolerance” system it describes to the public,<sup>95</sup> TikTok’s actual moderation system does not accurately identify policy violations. Internal analyses from August 2022—which TikTok never shared with its users—demonstrate that its moderation quality is low across several policy categories:

- a. Harassment and bullying had moderation accuracy of only 38.89%;
- b. Hateful behavior had moderation accuracy of 48.89%; and
- c. Violent and graphic content had moderation accuracy of 46.43% overall—but violent deaths or accidents in a real setting and gory content both had a moderation accuracy of only 33.33%.

148. The same analysis found that for certain categories of children’s safety, leakage percentages (i.e., content that slips past TikTok’s moderation mechanisms) were much higher. For example, for “Normalization of Pedophilia,” leakage was at 35.71%; “Minor Sexual

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<sup>95</sup> Eric Han, *Protecting against exploitative content*, TIKTOK (Mar. 5, 2020), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/protecting-against-exploitative-content>.

Solicitation” was at 33.33%; “Minor physical Abuse” was at 39.13%; “Leading minors off platform” was at a 30.36%; and the “Glorification of Minor Sexual Assault” was at 50.0%. Moderation completely failed to catch the sampled instances of “Fetishizing Minors,” giving it a 100% leakage rate on the App.

149. Moderation gaps exist for TikTok’s prohibitions on “dangerous challenges,” which TikTok’s CEO has said “are not allowed on our platform” and that TikTok “actively, proactively remove[s] from the platform.”<sup>96</sup>

150. These dangerous challenges operate much like peer pressure, taunting teenagers into perilous, destructive, and criminal actions. They encourage teens to engage in reckless, and sometimes illegal, conduct in exchange for more dopamine-rewarding “Likes” on the App, and they spread horrific hoaxes about topics including sexual assault and vandalism, all of which deepen anxieties and spread fear.

151. For example, the “Chromebook challenge” encouraged Minnesota students to vandalize school computers,<sup>97</sup> the “smack a staff member” encouraged them to assault their teachers,<sup>98</sup> and another promoted sexual assault.<sup>99</sup> These TikTok challenges have become so widespread and dangerous that Minnesota’s teacher’s union (Education Minnesota) had to issue guidance to teachers on how to protect their students, their classrooms, and themselves from the

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<sup>96</sup> *Testimony Before the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce*, Testimony of Shou Chew, 118th Cong. (Mar. 23, 2023), <https://www.c-span.org/video/?526609-1/tiktok-ceo-testifies-house-energy-commerce-committee-hearing>.

<sup>97</sup> Marielle Mohs, *Viral TikTok “Chromebook challenge” can cause serious damages, Osseo school district warns parents*, CBS MINN. (May 12, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/viral-tiktok-chromebook-challenge-osseo-warning-parents/>

<sup>98</sup> Paul Blume, *‘Zero Tolerance’: Minnesota school cracks down on TikTok challenges*, MINN.FOX 9 (Oct. 5, 2021), <https://www.fox9.com/news/zero-tolerance-minnesota-schools-crack-down-on-latest-tiktok-challenge>

<sup>99</sup> Jeffrey McClure, *Duluth Public Schools Warn Against Dangerous TikTok trend*, N. NEWS NOW (Apr. 24, 2024), <https://www.northernnewsnow.com/2024/04/25/duluth-public-schools-warn-against-dangerous-tiktok-trend/>.

harmful effects.<sup>100</sup>

152. The Kia Boyz challenge, which was also widely disseminated on TikTok, spawned a nationwide crime spree that goads teenagers into stealing and dangerously joyriding Hyundai and Kia vehicles and gives them step-by-step instructions on how to exploit a lack of anti-theft technology in the cars to make the heists.<sup>101</sup> Subsequently, Hyundai and Kia thefts increased exponentially in Minnesota. For example, in 2022 (as compared to 2021) the Twin Cities experienced a 750% increase in Hyundai and Kia thefts, with stolen vehicles tied to at least 5 homicides; 13 shootings; 36 robberies; and 265 collisions. This challenge and the resulting spike in crime prompted the Attorney General to open a civil investigation and issue a letter urging the car manufacturers for a safety recall.<sup>102</sup>

153. Dangerous challenges have also killed children. The blackout challenge, which went viral on TikTok in early 2021, encourages the viewer to try to hold their breath or asphyxiate (either manually or by having someone else choke them) until they pass out. In just 18 months, the blackout challenge was linked to the deaths of at least 20 kids under the age of 15, at least 15 of whom were 12 or younger when they died.

154. Despite their prevalence, dangerous challenges are nominally prohibited on the App, but TikTok struggles to identify dangerous acts and challenges, resulting in significant

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<sup>100</sup> *Guidance: 'Slaps a teacher' and other monthly TikTok challenges*, EDUC. MINN. (Oct. 5, 2021), available at <https://educationminnesota.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/TikTok-challenges-guidance.pdf>.

<sup>101</sup> Chris DiLelle & Andrea Day, *TikTok challenge spurs rise in thefts of Kia, Hyundai cars*, CNBC (Sept. 9, 2022), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/08/tiktok-challenge-spurs-rise-in-thefts-of-kia-hyundai-cars.html>.

<sup>102</sup> *Attorney General Ellison Launches Civil Investigation of Kia and Hyundai's Sale of Vehicles that Lack Industry-Standard, Anti-Theft Technology*, OFF. OF MINN. ATTORNEY GENERAL KEITH ELLISON (Mar. 7, 2023), [https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Communications/2023/03/07\\_KiaHyundai.asp](https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Communications/2023/03/07_KiaHyundai.asp); Dave Orrick, *Kia and Hyundai thefts skyrocket 836% in Minneapolis; attorney general and Twin Cities mayors urge recalls*, THE MINNESOTA STAR TRIBUNE (March 2, 2023), <https://www.startribune.com/kia-hyundai-thefts-tiktok-ellison-minneapolis-frey-st-paul-carter-mayor-urge-recall/600255806>.



under-moderation and leakage.

155. Moderation gaps also exist for prohibited content such as drugs and controlled substances, which TikTok promises to enforce against. As of December 2021, TikTok’s Trust and Safety team knew that its policies for drugs and controlled substances did “not adequately encapsulate the wide range of content that exists on the platform ... caus[ing] significant levels of leakage, confusion, and mismoderation due to policy gaps.” TikTok did not even have a policy for how to enforce its ban on drug content, relying instead on “ad hoc, reactive policy guidance,” which it admits “is unsustainable in the long-term.”

156. TikTok even fails to adequately enforce its drug content policies from a reactive posture as well. For years, TikTok has received external, public reports that drug-glamorizing content and drug sales were proliferating on its App. In a September 2021 report by the *Washington Post*, Drug Enforcement Administration Administrator Anne Milgram said that fentanyl- and meth-laced counterfeit pills were being sold on TikTok.<sup>103</sup> More than a year later, drug content and sales—including from drugs that fuel the opioid epidemic—remained easily accessible on the App, including prescription drugs such as Xanax, Percocet, and OxyContin, as well as illegal drugs like cocaine, MDMA, LSD, and marijuana.<sup>104</sup>

157. TikTok is now a key marketing channel for off-label performance enhancements and steroid drugs, such as selective androgen receptor modulators (commonly called “SARMs”),

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<sup>103</sup> Devlin Barrett & Elizabeth Dwoskin, *With overdose deaths soaring, DEA warns about fentanyl-, meth-laced pills*, WASH. POST (Sept. 27, 2021), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/dea-warning-counterfeit-drugs/2021/09/27/448fcb18-1f27-11ec-b3d6-8cdebe60d3e2\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/dea-warning-counterfeit-drugs/2021/09/27/448fcb18-1f27-11ec-b3d6-8cdebe60d3e2_story.html).

<sup>104</sup> *Suicide, Incels, and Drugs: How TikTok’s Deadly Algorithm Harms Kids*, EKO (Mar. 2023), available at [https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/eko\\_Tiktok-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/eko_Tiktok-Report_FINAL.pdf).

which are synthetic variations of the male sex hormone testosterone.<sup>105</sup> These steroid-like drugs are subject to strict regulation under the Controlled Substances Act and are not approved by the U.S. Food Drug and Administration (“FDA”). These steroid drugs—which are dangerous to teens and are associated with serious and life-threatening health problems like heart attacks, hallucinations and liver failure—have racked up hundreds of millions of views on TikTok in the U.S. Some reports have found that these drugs have racked up *over 500 million views* among U.S. users on TikTok alone.

158. Second, the risks posed by TikTok’s flawed content moderation systems are compounded by TikTok’s failure to provide its moderators with adequate resources or effective training. Moderators are expected to review up to 1,000 videos a day, giving them less than 20 seconds on average to assess potentially harmful content. Without enough time to review each flagged video, they struggle to make accurate policy judgments.<sup>106</sup> TikTok also intentionally instructs its moderators to adopt an “if in doubt, leave it up” mantra.<sup>107</sup>

159. Third, TikTok selectively enforces its moderation policies, despite claiming its rules apply to “everyone and everything.”<sup>108</sup> For example, a December 2020 Trust and Safety presentation reveals that, contrary to its representations that moderation policies apply to “comments and messages,” TikTok was not monitoring the overwhelming majority of

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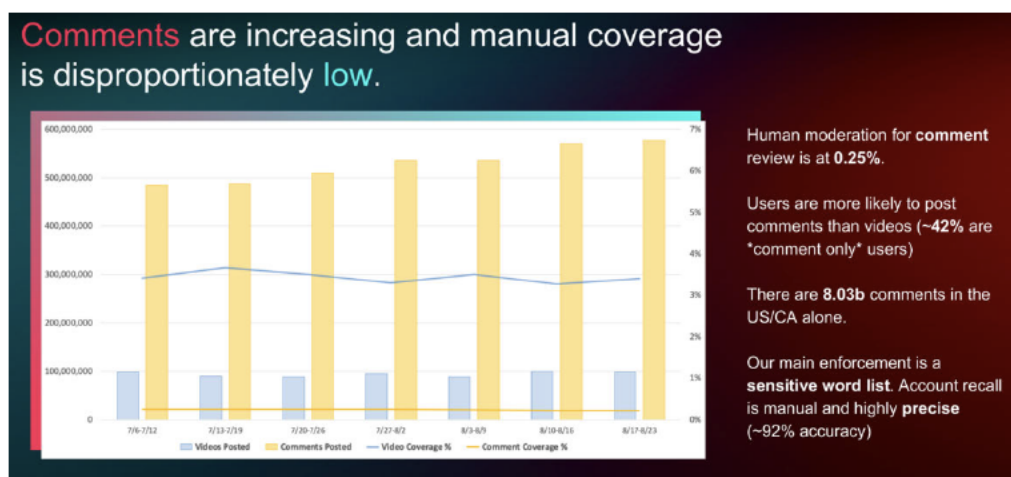
<sup>105</sup> *TikTok’s Toxic Trade: How TikTok promotes dangerous and potentially illegal steroids and steroid-like drugs to teens*, CTR. FOR COUNTERING DIGITAL HATE (Sept. 28, 2023), available at <https://counterhate.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TikToks-Toxic-Trade-Steroids-and-Steroid-Like-Drugs.pdf>.

<sup>106</sup> Olivia Carville, *TikTok’s Problem Child Has 7 Million Followers and One Proud Mom*, BLOOMBERG (Dec. 12, 2022), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-12-12/teentok-influencers-test-tiktok-s-rules-straining-moderators#xj4y7vzkg>.

<sup>107</sup> *Id.*

<sup>108</sup> *Community Guidelines, Overview*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), <https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/> (available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240417075432/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/> (archived July 6, 2025)).

comments. Apparently, moderators reviewed only 0.25% of user comments. *See Figure 19* below.



(Figure 19.)

160. Behind closed doors, the company also applies laxer standards when TikTok users of “high value” violate its policies. Trust and Safety policy leaders recall being asked “to be lenient on creators with more than 5 million followers.”<sup>109</sup> In 2020, TikTok also unveiled an “internal program” to “protect creators and other accounts that [TikTok] deem[s] to be high value.” The program featured policy shortcuts like “delayed enforcement,” “deferred policy decisions,” or “no permanent ban on Elite+ Accounts,” to protect its popular users who violate TikTok’s policies. TikTok deployed this two-tiered moderation policy despite knowing that the “majority of elite accounts appear to run afoul of [TikTok’s] policies on sexually explicit content,” among other violations. Approximately 1,400 minors were considered “elite creators.”

161. In January 2020, TikTok adopted a new “age-gate” policy to content recommendations made by creators under 16. But the rules did not apply to Charli D’Amelio (who was 15 years old at the time and a TikTok megastar with 150 million followers).

<sup>109</sup> Olivia Carville, *TikTok’s Problem Child Has 7 Million Followers and One Proud Mom*, BLOOMBERG (Dec. 12, 2022), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-12-12/-teentok-influencers-test-tiktok-s-rules-straining-moderators#xj4y7vzkg>.

Employees acknowledged she was a “real asset for the company” due to high user engagement and she was given “full privileges,” despite her posting content that “triggers [TikTok’s] policies.” Charli was also allowed to live stream and receive monetary rewards through Gifts at just 15 years old, despite the minimum age requirement to host on LIVE being 16 and the minimum age requirement to receive Gifts being 18.<sup>110</sup> See Figure 20 below, showing policy misalignment on minors from an August 6, 2020 TikTok PowerPoint.



(Figure 20.)

**2. TikTok’s misrepresentations about Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) are particularly glaring.**

162. TikTok falls especially short—and its public commitment to safety and content moderation are particularly deceptive—when it comes to the most harmful content on the App, like CSAM and other predatory behavior.

163. TikTok promises robust protection for specific categories of particularly harmful content on the App, like sexual exploitation and predatory behavior. The company promises a

<sup>110</sup> Baileyando, *Charli D’Amelio TikTok Livestream December 16, 2019*, YOUTUBE (Dec. 16, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGCwBYHO7Uk>.

“zero tolerance policy” for sexual exploitation and promises to use tools to address the exploitation of children using “human and machine-based moderation tools like photo identification technologies,” filtering “red-flag language,” and sharing information with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (“NCMEC”).<sup>111</sup>

164. These promises are a mirage and TikTok knows it.

165. TikTok knows that it has low moderation accuracy for harmful CSAM violations and has a 26% leakage rate on the App. In a 2023 product strategy roadmap, TikTok acknowledged that “[i]n effect we are missing [] 1 in 4 [] violative content due to leakage.” Internal surveys also demonstrate that 40% of users encounter inappropriate content related to children, indicating a significant amount of harmful material depicting child exploitation exists on the App that TikTok does not even detect.

166. The problem continues to grow out of control because TikTok never implemented adequate detection tools and reporting strategies for CSAM. In 2020, one of TikTok’s team leaders on minor safety described the company’s struggle to police CSAM by saying:

Frankly we are not doing nowhere near enough work in this field and most of our work is reactive takedowns. Not only is this poor in efficiency, we are letting our users down who have to see [CSAM] content and then report to us.

167. And despite repeatedly stating publicly that it uses specific, industry-leading tools to monitor and remove CSAM—such as image hashing technology—TikTok’s own [REDACTED] admitted internally in August 2021 that it never used those tools:

Hey [REDACTED] could you please share the current status of the issue? From previous chat in the group, we promised we were using NCMEC hashed to detect CP [Child Porn] content, but we actually didn’t.

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<sup>111</sup> Eric Han, *Protecting against exploitative content*, TIKTOK (Mar. 5, 2020), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/protecting-against-exploitative-content>.

Implemented as promised, NCMEC’s hash technology (i.e., identifying the unique digital fingerprints assigned to images and photos) would have helped TikTok identify known images of CSAM. Instead, TikTok failed to integrate with the hashing database, in part because employees could not even figure out the proper account username and password to connect with NCMEC.

168. These issues have persisted for years. In April 2023, nearly six years after introducing the App in the U.S., TikTok still had not launched a comprehensive “underage detection strategy,” is still unable to enforce policy violations due to “grey areas with policy gaps” relating to children (such as sharing personal information of minors on the App), and is still trying to educate its moderators on how to detect CSAM.

169. These misstatements expose TikTok’s users to real, material harms.<sup>112</sup> Serious risks persist for Minnesota parents and children even after TikTok publicly represented that it does not allow youth exploitation or abuse. As TikTok’s [REDACTED] acknowledged in 2022, exposure to harmful content can cause “permanent/irreversible damage (anxiety disorder, depression, etc.)” to youth.

### **3. TikTok’s “Filter Bubble” tools are ineffective.**

170. TikTok has repeatedly stated that it has “addressed” harms related to its Recommendation Engine and that its algorithms are “designed with safety as a consideration.”<sup>113</sup> In particular, the company has emphasized that it “address[es] the challenges of recommendation engines” and “filter bubble[s]”<sup>114</sup> by “[i]nterrupting repetitive patterns,” “[d]iversifying

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<sup>112</sup> *30-year-old Minnesota man arrested in northern Virginia after traveling to meet with teen*, FOX 5 DC (Jan. 29, 2025), available at <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/30-year-old-minnesota-man-arrested-northern-virginia-after-traveling-meet-teen>.

<sup>113</sup> *How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou*, TIKTOK (June 18, 2020), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/how-tiktok-recommends-videos-for-you>.

<sup>114</sup> *Id.*

recommendations,” and “[s]afeguarding the viewing experience.”<sup>115</sup>

171. In practice, TikTok’s Recommendation Engine continues to trap teenagers into “filter bubbles” that bombard them with precisely the kinds of content that TikTok claims not to allow, including videos about weight loss, body image, and self-harm content.

172. TikTok has known of concerns about its Engine sending children into these downward spirals of depressive content since at least 2020—and likely well before. One former employee, Charles Bahr, told his superiors that “the algorithm was sending Generation Z users endless streams of depressing and suicide-glorifying videos.”<sup>116</sup> A few months after he raised the problem, TikTok fired him.

173. TikTok knows that “filter bubbles” pose serious harms, and has acknowledged that one “grey area” in its policies includes content that is not harmful in isolation but “can negatively influence users when the content is consumed in a condensed way.” For example, the company knows that the App is unable to prevent users from seeing clusters of thematically similar videos, like “weight loss content,” that lead to psychological harm.

174. TikTok’s public claims that it “addressed”<sup>117</sup> filter bubbles merely reference minor tweaks that have proven ineffective.

175. On March 16, 2023, TikTok launched a new “Refresh your For You feed” feature, which the company promoted as an “option to start fresh on TikTok.” As the company explained to users, “[w]hen 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

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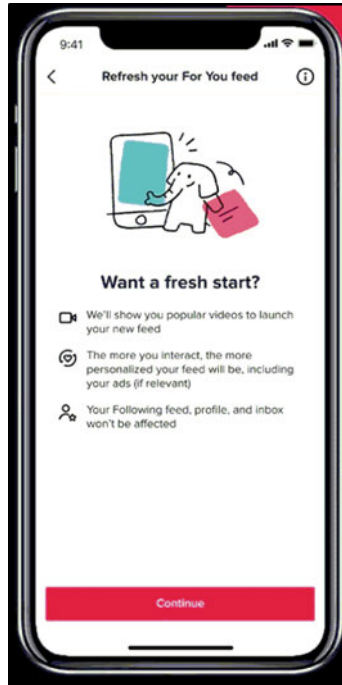
<sup>115</sup> *Id.*

<sup>116</sup> Olivia Carville, *TikTok’s Algorithm Keeps Pushing Suicide to Vulnerable Kids*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 20, 2023), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2023-04-20/tiktok-effects-on-mental-health-in-focus-after-teen-suicide>.

<sup>117</sup> *How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou*, TIKTOK (Jun. 18, 2020), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/how-tiktok-recommends-videos-for-you>.

content based on new interactions.”<sup>118</sup>

176. When users open the “Refresh your For You feed” (“Refresh”) page in the App’s settings, they are asked if they “Want a fresh start?” and informed that the feature will allow them to “launch your new feed.”<sup>119</sup> See Figure 21 below.



(Figure 21.)

177. Leading up to the launch of Refresh, TikTok’s spokespersons claimed the feature would solve the App’s filter bubble problem. For instance, as *TechCrunch* reported in February 2023:

With the new refresh button, which will be available in account settings, users will be able to force the app to bring “new, diversified content not based on previous activity or interactions” to their For You feed.

After hitting the button, users will then begin to see content that’s based on their new interactions, a TikTok spokesperson told TechCrunch. In addition to providing a refreshed feed, the company noted that the feature could serve as a way to support

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<sup>118</sup> Sandeep Grover & Mabel Wang, *Introducing a way to refresh your For You feed on TikTok*, TIKTOK (Mar. 16, 2023), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-ca/introducing-a-way-to-refresh-your-for-you-feed-on-tiktok-ca>.

<sup>119</sup> *Video*, TIKTOK, <https://p16-v-a-tiktok.ibytemg.com/obj/musically-maliva-obj/0a66a83d69c5ba153546bb9b8fd0efbc.gif>.



potentially vulnerable users who want to distance themselves from their current content experience.<sup>120</sup>

178. However, contrary to TikTok’s representations, the Refresh feature was designed not to work at scale. As TikTok’s Director of Product Management explained in an internal chat, this is because “teams involved may be considering ways to add friction to the user experience that might limit adoption (e.g. discoverability, multiple steps to execute, etc.).” Employees were then directed to figure out “how [to] both offer a Reset feature with limited adoption ‘by design’ and credibly claim externally we are addressing [safety] issues etc. observed by critics.”

179. Not only did TikTok make it difficult to use the Refresh feature, but the tool was not even designed to solve the filter bubble problem at all.

180. For instance, the Refresh feature only offers a temporary reset for 200 videos—a fact TikTok does not disclose to users. After a user watches 200 refreshed videos, the App’s recommendation system resumes pushing content based on the user’s pre- and post-Refresh engagement data.

181. The Refresh feature also does not reset personalized ads. This means that young users who actually manage to activate Refresh continue to see personalized ads informed by the content that trapped them in a filter bubble in the first place.

182. Users seeking to escape filter bubbles with the Refresh feature quickly find themselves pulled down the same (and new) rabbit holes by TikTok’s Recommendation Engine, often with the same extreme content they were seeking refuge from.

183. TikTok’s other efforts to curb these features of its platform were also ineffective. When running initial tests on a strategy to “disperse” similar content, TikTok found that nearly

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<sup>120</sup> Sarah Perez, *TikTok Introduces a strike system for violations, tests a feature to ‘refresh’ the For You feed*, TECHCRUNCH (Feb. 2, 2023), <https://techcrunch.com/2023/02/02/tiktok-introduces-a-strike-system-for-violations-tests-a-feature-to-refresh-the-for-you-feed/>.

10% of videos pushed to the test account included *more* mature themes than in the past—a “concerning” result given those themes were not searched for, and were not present on the account, before introducing the dispersion tool.

184. Despite TikTok’s representations, nothing has changed: the App continues to quickly recommend graphic, violent, and distressing content to children, for example showing a thirteen-year-old videos about disordered eating and self-harm and videos celebrating or encouraging suicide within 30 minutes of creating an account.<sup>121</sup> Since TikTok’s launch, videos tagged with suicide content amassed over 1.43 million posts and 8.8 billion views and were readily available to children.<sup>122</sup>

**4. TikTok knows its age-gating is ineffective.**

185. TikTok promises parents and users that the company’s product is age-appropriate for children. According to TikTok, this starts with blocking children under 13 years old from creating accounts:

We are deeply committed to TikTok being a safe and positive experience for people under the age of 18 (we refer to them as “youth” or “young people”). This starts by being old enough to use TikTok. You must be 13 years and older to have an account ... To support a safe experience on LIVE, we restrict young people from using this feature. You must be 18 years and older to go LIVE, and to send gifts to a creator during a LIVE session.<sup>123</sup>

186. The primary tool that TikTok uses to filter content and features for minors and

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<sup>121</sup> *Deadly by Design: TikTok pushes harmful content promoting eating disorders and self-harm into users’ feeds.*, CTR. FOR COUNTERING DIGIT. HATE (Dec. 15, 2022), <https://counterhate.com/research/deadly-by-design/>.

<sup>122</sup> *Suicide, Incels, and Drugs: How TikTok’s Deadly Algorithm Harms Kids*, EKO (Mar. 2023), available at [https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/eko\\_Tiktok-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/eko_Tiktok-Report_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>123</sup> *Community Guidelines, Youth Safety and Well-Being*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250630110118/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/youth-safety/> (archived June 30, 2025); *Community Guidelines, Accounts and Features*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250701161408/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/accounts-features> (archived July 1, 2025).

prevent children under 13 from accessing the App at all is “age-gating,” which refers to the practice of blocking certain content or features based on a user’s self-selected age. But because users self-report their age, this tool is largely ineffective—children can quickly and easily enter a fake age—and TikTok knows it does not in practice “restrict” minors from accessing certain App features.

187. When a user signs up for TikTok, the user must self-report their date of birth before gaining access to the App. The process relies on the user, whether a child or adult, to accurately input their actual age. But this age-gating process has the opposite effect: it incentivizes children to input a false date of birth when registering.

188. TikTok knows this.

189. According to internal data and studies from November 2022, “[u]p to 70% of L1 users [aged 13-15] report their age as 18+ when prompted to give their age via the age-gate feature” to avoid being placed into the more restrictive version of the App.

190. TikTok employees have also consistently recognized the dangers of its open-door policy for underage users on LIVE. In a document from June 2022, the company admitted that it “lack[ed] identity verification mechanisms” which meant that it could not “systematically prevent minors from going LIVE or sending virtual gifts.” Documents from the same time showed that the company’s policies were failing, admitting that minors were bypassing age restrictions and “easily accessing Livestream feed.” For instance, a “key issue” on LIVE included the fact that minors “still go LIVE by lying about their ages and appeal with fake IDs.” Despite the widespread and familiar nature of this tactic, TikTok remained obstinate and decided that use of fake IDs “require[d] further investigation” rather than immediate action.

191. In addition to easily bypassing TikTok’s age-gate by self-reporting an older age, young users could create a TikTok account through a backdoor by inputting their Facebook or Google login credentials without ever providing their age to TikTok when setting up their account. A document from April 2023 shows that TikTok was aware that a total of 96.1 million users were allowed to use TikTok without entering a birthdate—and, of those users, 20.5 million were active on the App. This loophole evidently resulted in approximately 100,000 TikTok accounts with a listed age younger than the minimum age requirement of 13. Upon information and belief, TikTok has made some attempt to fix this issue with its age-gating, but there remains a significant number of users on the platform who have not even gone through TikTok’s age-gate.

192. Contrary to its public representations that it restricts access to the App and certain features like live streaming, the company fails to identify users’ true ages and allows for loopholes.

**5. TikTok knows LIVE drives financial and sexual exploitation of children.**

193. TikTok represents that it does “not allow content that may put young people at risk of psychological, physical, or developmental harm.”<sup>124</sup> The company further expressly represents:

**We are deeply committed to TikTok being a safe and positive experience for people under the age of 18** (we refer to them as “youth” or “young people”). This starts by being old enough to use TikTok. You must be 13 years and older to have an account. ... To support a safe experience on LIVE, we restrict young people from using this feature. You must be 18 years and older to go LIVE, and to send gifts to a creator during a LIVE session.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Community Guidelines, Youth Safety and Well-Being*, TIKTOK (Apr. 17, 2024), available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250630110118/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/youth-safety/> (archived June 30, 2025).

<sup>125</sup> *Id.*

194. But the company knows that LIVE is unsafe and exploits children financially and sexually. Operating in part like a virtual strip club, LIVE allows young streamers to turn their homes into a performance stage, and allows other users to entice streamers into sexual acts in exchange for virtual money.

195. First, as described in detail above, TikTok specifically designed LIVE to encourage users to buy virtual Coins and send Gifts. The company is fully aware these monetary rewards encourage predatory “giftbaiting”—or soliciting Gifts during live streams in exchange for promises that are never fulfilled—which appears in over 25% of predatory livestreams.<sup>126</sup> Research confirms this: studies show that younger generations report higher rates of victimization from online fraud—like giftbaiting—than adults.<sup>127</sup> TikTok knows this as well, admitting that giftbaiting on LIVE leads to “moderate financial harm” and exposes “minors to a misleading environment that encourages addiction and impulsive purchasing of virtual items.”

196. TikTok has long known that children are duped into spending money on the App. For example, impersonations of celebrities, another popular form of giftbaiting, has been a “longstanding issue” where users “defraud fans and bait gifts.” Among the celebrities who have been impersonated are Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, Chris Pratt, Charli D’Amelio (who has the second largest following on TikTok), and Bella Poarch (who created the single most viewed video on TikTok)—all of whom are popular with young audiences.<sup>128</sup>

197. The lack of oversight has resulted in other forms of predatory financial behavior—

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<sup>126</sup> Judy Tidy, *TikTok’s young fans ‘exploited’ for digital gifts*, BBC (July 2, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-48725515>.

<sup>127</sup> A.W. Ohlheiser, *Gen Z falls for online scams more than then boomer grandparents do*, Vox (Sept. 21, 2023), <https://www.vox.com/technology/23882304/gen-z-vs-boomers-scams-hacks>.

<sup>128</sup> Satnam Narang, *TikTok LIVE Scams: Stolen Live Footage Used to Earn TikTok Gifts, Promote Scams to Make Money*, TENABLE (Oct. 22, 2021), <https://www.tenable.com/blog/tiktokscams-stolen-live-footage-used-to-earn-tiktok-gifts-promote-scams-to-make-money>.

—none of which TikTok discloses to consumers and all of which are encouraged and facilitated by TikTok’s lack of appropriate safeguards. For instance, TikTok knows that gambling rings are run on LIVE by Russian and Thai users, who use a VPN to “pretend to be US accounts” in a likely attempt to target American users.

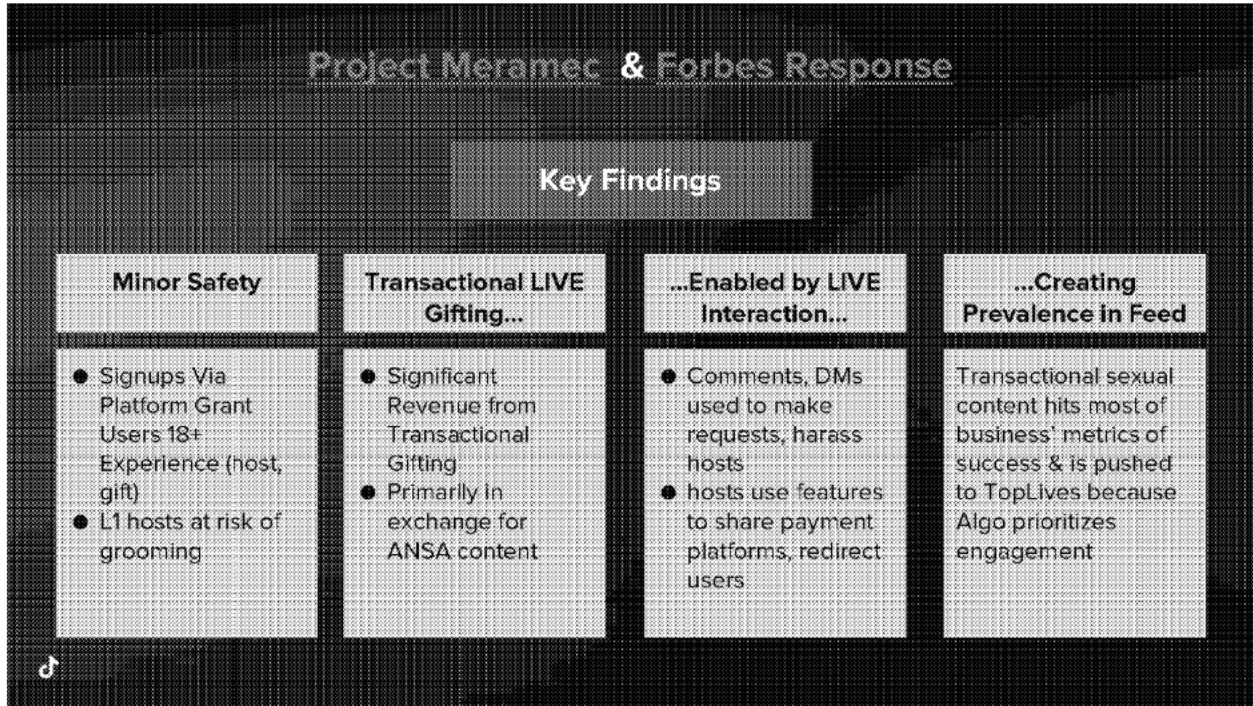
198. Second, TikTok knows LIVE also encourages and facilitates serious harms, including the sexual exploitation of children.

199. These harms were made public in April 2022, after a Forbes article entitled “How TikTok Live Became ‘A Strip Club Filled With 15-Year-Olds’” reported that teens and other users were being sexually exploited over LIVE, where older adults enticed young users live streaming to perform sexually explicit acts in exchange for Gifts. This included a fourteen-year-old who told viewers they were “paying [her] bills” in exchange for viewing nudity and more.<sup>129</sup>

200. Months before the Forbes article broke, TikTok conducted an internal investigation largely confirming the harms made public in the Forbes story. The investigation, called “Project Meramec,” confirmed that children were accessing LIVE and that sexual exploitation was rampant. *See* Figure 22 below.

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<sup>129</sup> Alexandra S. Levine, *How TikTok Lives Became a ‘Strip Club Filled with Fifteen-Year-Olds,’* FORBES (Apr. 27, 2022), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandralevine/2022/04/27/how-tiktok-live-became-a-strip-club-filled-with-15-year-olds/?sh=63b0efa762d7>.



(Figure 22.)

201. TikTok's internal findings of sexual exploitation reveals not only the lack of control TikTok has exercised over LIVE, but also the extent to which exploitative content drives the entire success of LIVE for TikTok's bottom line.

202. In February 2022, two TikTok leaders ( [REDACTED] ) discussed the need to remove "egregious content from clearly commercial sexual solicitation accounts," and were aware of issues with women and minors being sexually solicited through LIVE.

203. In another example from a March 2022 LIVE safety survey, users reported that "streamer-led sexual engagements (often transactional) [were] commonly associated with TikTok LIVE." Users also reported "often seeing cam-girls or prostitutes asking viewers for tips/donations to take off their clothes or write their names on their body ...." TikTok leaders have known since at least 2020 that TikTok has "a lot of nudity and soft porn." An internal document from May 2020 also highlighted concerns about "camming"—users giving sexually

explicit performances on a livestream for money—becoming more popular on TikTok as sex workers turned to online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

204. Despite acknowledging internally how downright “irresponsible” it is to not implement appropriate safeguards on LIVE, company leaders have admitted TikTok placed profits over the safety of consumers—especially vulnerable children—because LIVE “is such a huge part of the strategy for the platform.”

205. Despite years of problems, these core issues with LIVE persist today.

206. In September 2022—five months after the Forbes story—a private technology investigator found that “within minutes of browsing the [LIVE] feed” they were shown underage girls providing sexually suggestive content in exchange for money and young boys using filters to pose as girls to receive Gifts.<sup>130</sup>

207. The investigator also found a “never-ending stream” of hosts who openly admitted that they were 14 and 15 years old while also “holding signs” or “standing in front of the camera” with a sign saying “Rose = say daddy,” “ice cream = 360 spin,” or “universe = cut shirt.” See Gift Emojis in Figures 15 and 16 above. These symbols represented Gifts that corresponded to each sexually suggestive act—payments the investigator deemed to be “built for obfuscation.”<sup>131</sup>

208. As the investigator continued viewing, he describes being “bombarded” by a stream of underage hosts who “did spins, bent over on camera, lifted their shirts, or engaged in other clearly suggestive content directly for money” with a chatroom of users asking them to get

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<sup>130</sup> Upper Echelon, *TikTok Is Poisoning Society*, YOUTUBE (Sept. 13, 2022), <https://youtu.be/qbv-VteX5H8?feature=shared>.

<sup>131</sup> *Id.*



into even more compromising positions.<sup>132</sup> See Figure 23 below.



(Figure 23.)

209. That same month, TikTok's internal records [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] According to TikTok's own [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] TikTok's [REDACTED] ostensibly attempted to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], but the company was [REDACTED]

210. In April 2023, CNN created a test account for a 14-year-old. After just 17 minutes of use on the first day, the account was flooded with sexually suggestive LIVE recommendations in the For You Feed on the user's account. These included LIVE videos of a girl in short shorts

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<sup>132</sup> *Id.*

with the reporter stating, “all we’re really seeing is this girl’s bottom in the frame, it looks like that’s the point of this video.”<sup>133</sup>

211. In short, TikTok’s actions and internal admissions contradict its public statements that it is “*deeply committed to TikTok being a safe and positive experience*” for young users.<sup>134</sup>

**6. TikTok knows its user and parental controls do not work.**

212. TikTok markets several features of its App as a means for parents and users to help reduce the time users spend on the App. TikTok publicly markets many of these features as part of its “You’re in Control” safety video series.<sup>135</sup> These features include (i) “Take a Break” videos; (ii) private accounts; (iii) keyword filters; (iv) mute functions; and (v) self-report controls, as well as parental controls called “Restricted Mode” and “Family Pairing.” TikTok launched these features to allay public concerns that children were spending too much time on the App and that they lacked the capacity to disengage.

213. TikTok knows none of these features are effective nor does it provide users with meaningful control as advertised.

214. For example, TikTok launched the “Take a Break” (or “TAB”) feature in February 2020 to help curb “internet addiction” following public criticism about overuse and internal data showing children struggling to disengage from the App. TAB lets users schedule

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<sup>133</sup> *CNN Takes Over a 14-Year-Old’s TikTok Account. 17 Minutes In, This Is What We Saw*, CNN (Apr. 20, 2023), <https://www.cnn.com/videos/business/2023/04/18/teen-tiktok-experimentclare-duffy-zw-orig.cnn-business>.

<sup>134</sup> *Youth Safety and Well-Being*, TIKTOK; *Accounts and Features*, TIKTOK, <https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/accounts-features?cgversion=2023#2> (last updated Apr. 17, 2024) (emphasis added).

<sup>135</sup> *You’re in Control, TikTok’s new user safety videos, merge education with entertainment*, TIKTOK (Feb. 27, 2019), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktoks-new-user-safety-videos-merge-education-with-entertainment>; *“You’re in Control” video series stars TikTok creators to educate users about safety features*, TIKTOK (Oct. 22, 2019), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/youre-in-control-video-series-stars-tiktok-creators-to-educate-users-about-safety-features>.

video reminders to take breaks from using the App.<sup>136</sup> Yet TikTok knows this feature is not effective at actually getting users to stop using the App, because it “has very low friction,” meaning it allows “users to easily skip past it and not be mindful of their time spent on TikTok.” Contrary to public representations, TAB videos “reduce[] user agency and can lead to people spending more time on the platform than they intend to.”

215. TikTok’s employees understand how ineffective TAB videos are at countering the App’s core features designed to push compulsive use, and discuss internally about what TikTok’s true [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

While it’s unclear whether TAB videos have helped TikTok’s [REDACTED] TikTok’s internal data suggests that the videos actually do more harm than good for users’ addiction to the App: 91% of users swipe away TAB videos after less than five seconds, only 2% of users watch an entire TAB video, only 12% of users close TikTok within five minutes of watching a TAB video, and 55% of users actually stay on TikTok *longer* than 45 minutes after viewing a TAB video.

216. TikTok’s feature allowing users to make their account “private” is also supposedly intended to protect users by restricting the followers and content they engage with.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Stephanie Hind, *Helping users manage their screen time*, TIKTOK (Feb. 13, 2020), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/helping-users-manage-their-screen-time>.

But as TikTok knows, private accounts are effectively useless at helping children overcome the lure of the App's [REDACTED] In one 2023 experiment, TikTok [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Only [REDACTED]

217. Other features like “keyword filters,” “mute,” and “self-report” are all in-App tools marketed as keeping live streaming on TikTok “safe.”<sup>138</sup> These functions do not work, in part because the tools are difficult to find in the App and do not function properly. For example, “keyword filters,” which allow users to block certain words that appear in comments during a live stream, need more “keyword signals” to be effective for minor safety. And the “mute” function has a very low use rate among users, in part because TikTok apparently did not adequately inform users about the feature.

218. TikTok also markets several features as helping parents manage their children’s interactions and time on the App.<sup>139</sup> But these parental controls do not work as advertised.

219. “Family Pairing” lets parents link their own TikTok account to their teenagers’ accounts and set controls, like time limits, restricting content flagged as mature, and limiting who can send messages to their child.<sup>140</sup> Another control, called “Restricted Mode,” allegedly allows parents to “limit[] the appearance of content that may not be appropriate for all

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<sup>137</sup> *Choosing between a private or public account*, TIKTOK, available via the WayBack Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250602091548/https://support.tiktok.com/en/account-and-privacy/account-privacy-settings/making-your-account-public-or-private> (archived June 2, 2025).

<sup>138</sup> *LIVE Safety Features: Tools to Keep Your LIVE Safe*, TIKTOK (Oct. 21, 2022), <https://www.tiktok.com/live/creators/en-UK/article/live-safety>.

<sup>139</sup> *TikTok Parental Guide*, TIKTOK (Oct. 16, 2019), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktok-parental-guide>.

<sup>140</sup> Jeff Collins, *TikTok Introduces Family Pairing*, TIKTOK (Apr. 15, 2020), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktok-introduces-family-pairing>.

audiences” by setting up a passcode to ensure content is age-appropriate. Yet both controls allow children to easily bypass these restrictions. For example, teenagers can simply turn off Family Pairing and Restricted Mode and manage their experience on the App themselves with little parental oversight. As the company admits, “[t]een users can disable Family Pairing without [a] PIN [code].” Parents receive a notification if Family Pairing is disabled but have only 48 hours to act. This short window is insufficient for busy parents and, as TikTok acknowledges, even receiving the notification requires them to be an “active TikTok user.” Content that children see within Restricted Mode is also “often still too mature for that space,” including material tagged for “Sexy Themes” and “Profanity.”

## **CLAIMS FOR RELIEF**

### **COUNT I: UNIFORM DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES ACT (Unfair or Unconscionable Acts or Practices – Addictive Features)**

220. The Attorney General realleges and incorporates by reference the foregoing allegations as if fully set forth herein.

221. Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1, reads in pertinent part: “A person engages in a deceptive trade practice when, in the course of business, vocation, or occupation, the person: .... (13)(ii) engages in ... unfair or unconscionable acts or practices.”<sup>141</sup>

222. TikTok is a “person” within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 645.44, subd. 7.

223. Minnesota Statutes sections 325D.44, subdivision 2(b), and 325F.69, subdivision 8, define an unfair or unconscionable act or practice “[as] any method of competition, act, or practice that: (1) offends public policy as established by the statutes, rules, or common law of

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<sup>141</sup> Pursuant to 2023 Minnesota Laws, chapter 57, article 4, section 6 (codified at Minn. Stat. § 325D.44, subd. 1(13)), this provision took effect on August 1, 2023. The relevant time for the State’s claim under Count I for unfair or unconscionable acts or practices pursuant to Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(13) began on August 1, 2023, and continues through the present.

Minnesota; (2) is unethical, oppressive, or unscrupulous; or (3) is substantially injurious to consumers.”

224. In the course of its business, vocation, or occupation, TikTok has repeatedly violated Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1 (13)(ii), by engaging in deceptive acts or practices that are unfair and/or unconscionable as described in this Complaint. TikTok knows that the features on its App cause users to compulsively use the App, and that this compulsive use results in significant mental, physical, and financial harms to its users, especially children. TikTok’s delivery of these features is unfair or unconscionable because it (1) offends public policy as established by the statutes, rules, or common law of Minnesota; (2) is unethical, oppressive, and/or unscrupulous; or (3) causes substantial injury to consumers.

225. TikTok’s design features are unfair and/or unconscionable because they contribute to and/or cause Minnesota consumers, especially children, to use the App compulsively and excessively, and this use harms their mental, physical and financial well-being. Such compulsive and excessive use inflicts substantial harm on children that is independent of the harms caused by the type of content they see or by third-party users of the App. The features that inflict this substantial harm on children are those that TikTok has designed and deployed to induce compulsive and excessive use, including TikTok’s Recommendation Engine, Infinite Scroll, Push Notifications, Filters, and LIVE (collectively, the “Addictive Features”).

226. Defendant’s unfair and/or unconscionable acts or practices include but are not limited to:

- a. Designing and maintaining TikTok with Addictive Features that contribute to and cause children to use TikTok compulsively and excessively to the detriment of their health and well-being;
- b. Misrepresenting and failing to disclose to consumers the extent to which TikTok contributes to and causes compulsive and excessive platform use; the

extent to which such use is harmful to children; and the extent to which TikTok exposes children to harmful content and harmful experiences; and

- c. Failing to adequately verify TikTok users' age upon account creation and thereby exposing children (either those under the age of 13 or under the age of 18) to TikTok and other age-gated features on TikTok such as LIVE which TikTok knows to be especially harmful to children at those ages.

227. TikTok also uses the Addictive Features to collect more data about users, including children, which is itself an unfair and/or unconscionable act or practice that causes injury.

228. As a direct result of the unfair and/or unconscionable acts or practices described above, TikTok obtained income, profits, and other benefits that it would not have otherwise obtained.

229. Each instance in which TikTok engaged in an unfair and/or unconscionable act or practice as alleged in this Count constitutes a separate violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(13)(ii). Accordingly, TikTok's conduct, practices, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple separate violations of Minn. Stat. § 325D.44, subd. 1(13)(ii).

230. TikTok continues to cash in on the addictive structure of its App despite knowing the harm compulsive use of and addiction to its App causes to numerous Minnesota children. TikTok's violations present a continuing harm to those children.

**COUNT II: PREVENTION OF CONSUMER FRAUD ACT  
(Unfair or Unconscionable Practices – Addictive Features)**

231. The State realleges and incorporates by reference the foregoing allegations as if fully set forth herein.

232. Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1, provides:

The act, use, or employment by any person of any fraud, unfair or unconscionable practice, false pretense, false promise, misrepresentation, misleading statement or deceptive practice, with the intent that others rely thereon in connection with the sale of any merchandise, whether or not any person has in fact been misled,

deceived, or damaged thereby, is enjoined as provided in section 325F.70.<sup>142</sup>

233. The term “merchandise” within the meaning of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69 includes goods, such as TikTok’s App, and services, such as TikTok’s provision of social media features and the facilitation of user-to-user payments in the form of its virtual currency—Coins and Gifts. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 2.

234. The term “sale” within the meaning of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69 includes TikTok’s provision of its App and the delivery of its features in exchange for users’ personal data, as well as the sale of Coins and Gifts for money. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 4 (Sale “means any sale, offer for sale, or attempt to sell merchandise for any consideration.”). This same exchange of use of the App for personal data acts as consideration for TikTok’s terms of service contract to which it binds its users.

235. TikTok is a “person” within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 3.

236. Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 8, defines an unfair or unconscionable practice “[as] any method of competition, act, or practice that: (1) offends public policy as established by the statutes, rules, or common law of Minnesota; (2) is unethical, oppressive, or unscrupulous; or (3) is substantially injurious to consumers.”

237. TikTok repeatedly violated Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1, by engaging in unfair or unconscionable practices as described in this Complaint. TikTok knows that the features on its App cause users to compulsively use the App, and that this compulsive use results in significant mental, physical, and financial harms to its users, especially children.

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<sup>142</sup> Pursuant to 2023 Minnesota Laws chapter 57, article 4, section 16, the prohibited conduct of “unfair or unconscionable” practices was added to Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1 and took effect August 1, 2023. The relevant time for the State’s claim under Count II for unfair or unconscionable practices pursuant to Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1 began on August 1, 2023, and continues through the present.



TikTok's delivery of these features is unfair and/or unconscionable because it (1) offends public policy as established by the statutes, rules, or common law of Minnesota; (2) is unethical, oppressive, or unscrupulous; or (3) causes substantial injury to consumers.

238. TikTok's design features are unfair and/or unconscionable because they contribute to and/or cause Minnesota consumers, especially children, to use the App compulsively and excessively, and this use harms their mental, physical and financial well-being. Such compulsive and excessive use inflicts substantial harm on children that is independent of the harms caused by the type of content they see or by third-party users of the App. The features that inflict this substantial harm on children are the Addictive Features.

239. Defendant's unfair or unconscionable acts or practices include:

- a. Designing and maintaining TikTok with Addictive Features that contribute to and cause children to use TikTok compulsively and excessively to the detriment of their health and well-being;
- b. Misrepresenting and failing to disclose to consumers the extent to which TikTok contributes to and causes compulsive and excessive platform use; the extent to which such use is harmful to children; and the extent to which TikTok exposes children to harmful content and harmful experiences; and
- c. Failing to adequately verify TikTok users' age upon account creation and thereby exposing children (either those under the age of 13 or under the age of 18) to TikTok and other age-gated features on TikTok such as LIVE which TikTok knows to be especially harmful to children at those ages.

240. TikTok also uses the Addictive Features to collect more data about users, including children, which is itself an unfair and/or unconscionable act or practice that causes injury.

241. TikTok's Addictive Features are essential components of the App and the social media services TikTok provides to its users. TikTok designed the Addictive Features with the intent that they would maximize users' engagement with the App and provide TikTok valuable personal data, that both powers the Addictive Features further and that TikTok can also use to

increase the value of the ad space they sell to advertisers.

242. TikTok's unfair and/or unconscionable misrepresentations and omissions about the App's addictive qualities, and the known harms the App causes to children, were similarly made with the intent that young users and their parents would rely on that information (or lack thereof) to inform and maximize their engagement with the App. Given the representations it made, its special knowledge, and/or the circumstances described in this Complaint, TikTok had a duty to disclose material facts to consumers in connection with its advertising, marketing, promotion, and other representations regarding the sale of its merchandise. TikTok's failure to disclose material information is unfair and/or unconscionable in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1.

243. TikTok also designed the App's ineffective age-gating and other safety tools so that children and their parents would wrongly believe those tools were effective at screening and protecting young users.

244. As a direct result of the unfair and/or unconscionable acts or practices described above, TikTok obtained income, profits, and other benefits that it would not have otherwise obtained.

245. Each instance in which TikTok engaged in an unfair and/or unconscionable practice as alleged in this Count constitutes a separate violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1. Accordingly, TikTok's conduct, practices, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple separate violations of Minn. Stat. § 325F.69, subd. 1.

246. TikTok continues to cash in on the addictive nature of its App despite knowing the harm its App causes to numerous Minnesota children and TikTok's violations present a continuing harm to those children.

**COUNT III: UNIFORM DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES ACT  
(Unfair or Unconscionable Acts or Practices – TikTok LIVE Monetization)**

247. The State realleges and incorporates by reference the foregoing allegations as if fully set forth herein.

248. TikTok has, and at all relevant times in the course of its business, vocation, or occupation had an understanding that its live streaming features induce users to compulsively use the App and of the increased risks of fraud and other criminal activity—including the financial and sexual exploitation of children—that it created by coupling live streaming features with a virtual monetary system in LIVE, in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(13)(ii).<sup>143</sup>

249. TikTok is a “person” within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 645.44, subd. 7.

250. The compulsive use induced by LIVE, including by its virtual currencies, and TikTok’s facilitation of the financial and sexual exploitation of children on LIVE is an unfair and/or unconscionable act or practice because it (1) offends public policy as established by the statutes, rules, or common law of Minnesota; (2) is unethical, oppressive, or unscrupulous; and (3) causes substantial injury to consumers.

251. TikTok’s live streaming features, including its virtual currencies, manipulate the neurobiological systems in its users’ brains—especially the still-partially developed systems in its young users’ brains—to deliver dopamine rewards that keep users compulsively engaged with the App. Despite knowing the effects its LIVE features have on users, TikTok failed to take steps to mitigate these harms or inform consumers about the harms it knew were being caused by

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<sup>143</sup> Pursuant to 2023 Minnesota Laws, chapter 57, article 4, section 6 (codified at Minn. Stat. § 325D.44, subd. 1(13)), this provision took effect on August 1, 2023. The relevant time for the State’s claim under Count III for unfair or unconscionable acts or practices pursuant to Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(13) began on August 1, 2023, and continues through the present.

LIVE.

252. TikTok also failed to take measures to mitigate the risks of fraud, sexual exploitation, and financial harm that TikTok knows LIVE creates. TikTok has built, maintained, and delivered the design features that create these risks and has failed to implement compliance programs common for the industry and required under complimentary state and federal regulatory schemes, like structuring or obscuring the true nature of its virtual currency to avoid registration with the Minnesota Department of Commerce and the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury's FinCEN as a money transmitting business under Minnesota Statutes, section 53B.36(a) and 31 U.S.C. § 5330, despite admitting that it is unregistered and is required to be so.

253. TikTok also not only failed to inform users of the risks on LIVE—

—but actively limited its

if doing so might have negatively impacted TikTok's profits.

254. TikTok also obscures the true value of its virtual Coins and Gifts, creating currency confusion for its users, especially its less financially sophisticated young users.

255. TikTok directly profits from the virtual currencies used on LIVE—Coins, Gifts, and Diamonds—despite knowing the risks of fraud, sexual exploitation, and financial harm that its currencies create. Thus, TikTok, through LIVE, knowingly harms its users monetarily and psychologically for its own financial gain.

256. Each instance in which TikTok engaged in an unfair or unconscionable act or practice as alleged in this Count constitutes a separate violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(13)(ii). Accordingly, TikTok's conduct, practices, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple separate violations of Minn. Stat. § 325D.44, subdivision 1(13)(ii).

257. TikTok continues to cash in on the exploitation of children despite knowing the harm LIVE causes to numerous Minnesota children and TikTok’s violations present a continuing harm to those children.

**COUNT IV: PREVENTION OF CONSUMER FRAUD ACT  
(Unfair or Unconscionable Practices – TikTok LIVE Monetization)**

258. The State realleges and incorporates by reference the foregoing allegations as if fully set forth herein.

259. TikTok has, and at all relevant times in connection with the sale of its merchandise, had an understanding that its live streaming features induce users to compulsively use the App and of the increased risks of fraud and other criminal activity—including the financial and sexual exploitation of children—that it created by coupling live streaming features with a virtual monetary system in LIVE, in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1.<sup>144</sup>

260. TikTok’s App and its social media services are “merchandise” within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 2.

261. TikTok’s provision of its App and its social media services to consumers is a “sale” within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 4.

262. TikTok is a “person” within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 3.

263. The compulsive use induced by LIVE, including by its virtual currencies, and TikTok’s facilitation of the financial and sexual exploitation of children on LIVE is an unfair or

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<sup>144</sup> Pursuant to 2023 Minnesota Laws chapter 57, article 4, section 16, the prohibited conduct of “unfair or unconscionable” practices was added to Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1 and took effect August 1, 2023. The relevant time for the State’s claim under Count IV for unfair or unconscionable practices pursuant to Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1 began on August 1, 2023, and continues through the present.

unconscionable practice because it (1) offends public policy as established by the statutes, rules, or common law of Minnesota; (2) is unethical, oppressive, or unscrupulous; or (3) causes substantial injury to consumers.

264. TikTok’s live streaming features, including its virtual currencies, manipulate the neurobiological systems in its users’ brains—especially the still-developing systems in its young users’ brains—to deliver dopamine rewards that keep users compulsively engaged with the App. Despite knowing the effects its LIVE features have on users, TikTok failed to take steps to mitigate these harms or inform consumers about the harms it knew were being caused by LIVE.

265. TikTok also failed to take measures to mitigate the risks of fraud, sexual exploitation, and financial harm that TikTok knows LIVE creates. TikTok has built, maintained, and delivered the design features that create these risks and has failed to implement compliance programs common for the industry and required under complimentary state and federal regulatory schemes, like structuring or obscuring the true nature of its virtual currency to avoid registration with the Minnesota Department of Commerce and the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury’s FinCEN as a money transmitting business under Minn. Statutes, section 53B.36(a) and 31 U.S.C. § 5330, despite admitting that it is unregistered and is required to be so.

266. TikTok also not only failed to inform users of the risks on LIVE—

—but actively limited

if doing so might have negatively impacted TikTok’s profits.

267. TikTok also obscures the true value of its virtual Coins and Gifts, creating currency confusion for its users, especially its less financially sophisticated young users.

268. Live streaming is a prominent feature on TikTok’s App. LIVE, and its virtual currencies, were designed to maximize users’ engagement with the App and engagement with

content creators through the purchase of Coins and delivery of Gifts.

269. As one of the App's newest and most impactful features, LIVE is an essential element of TikTok's strategy for delivering social media services in exchange for users' money and personal data. LIVE was designed with the intention that users would rely on the feature to engage with a vast network of streamers through the purchase of Coins and delivery of Gifts. Despite TikTok's representations that LIVE is only intended for adults, LIVE's cartoonish virtual currencies are designed to attract child users and create a slot machine effect that keeps them coming back for more live content, more Coins, and more Gifts. TikTok also knows that adult users rely on LIVE's Coins and Gifts to financially and sexually exploit children, and despite this knowledge, TikTok has failed to implement effective systems to stop this behavior and mitigate the harms to children. LIVE's virtual currencies also create currency confusion as to the true value of the Coins and Gifts users are purchasing and distributing on the platform, which is especially harmful to financially unsophisticated child users. State and federal oversight of money transmitters like TikTok exists to prevent the conduct TikTok is engaged in and the harms LIVE's currency causes, which is why TikTok failed to register with the Minnesota Department of Commerce and FinCEN as a money transmitter even though it knew it was required to do so.

270. TikTok directly profits from the virtual currency used on LIVE—Coins, Gifts, and Diamonds—despite knowing the risks of fraud, sexual exploitation, and financial harm that its currency creates. Thus, TikTok, through LIVE, knowingly harms its users monetarily and psychologically for its own financial gain.

271. Each instance in which TikTok engaged in an unfair and/or unconscionable practice as alleged in this Count constitutes a separate violation of Minnesota Statutes section

325F.69, subdivision 1.

272. TikTok continues to cash in on the exploitation of children despite knowing the harm LIVE causes to numerous Minnesota children and TikTok's violations present a continuing harm to those children.

**COUNT V: UNIFORM DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES ACT  
(Misrepresentations and Omissions – Safety and Design)**

273. The State realleges and incorporates by reference the foregoing allegations as if fully set forth herein.

274. Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1, reads in pertinent part:

A person engages in a deceptive trade practice when, in the course of business, vocation, or occupation, the person: .... (5) represents that goods or services have sponsorship, approval, characteristics, ingredients, uses, benefits, or quantities that they do not have or that a person has a sponsorship, approval, status, affiliation, or connection that the person does not have; .... (7) represents that goods or services are of a particular standard, quality, or grade, or that goods are of a particular style or model, if they are of another; [or] .... (14) engages in any other conduct which similarly creates a likelihood of confusion or of misunderstanding.<sup>145</sup>

275. TikTok is a "person" within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 645.44, subd. 7.

276. In the course of its business, vocation, or occupation, TikTok has repeatedly violated Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(5), (7), and/or (14) by representing that its goods or services have characteristics or benefits that they do not have; by representing that its goods or services are of a particular standard or quality when they are of another; and by engaging in other conduct that similarly creates a likelihood of confusion or misunderstanding. TikTok's deceptive acts and practices have the tendency or capacity to deceive and/or mislead

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<sup>145</sup> Pursuant to 2023 Minnesota Laws chapter 57, article 4, section 6, Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(13) has been re-codified as Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(14). For simplicity, the State refers to this provision as Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(14), though this provision has been in effect for the full relevant time period and continues through the present.



consumers and therefore, constitute multiple, separate deceptive trade acts or practices.

277. In connection with the advertising, marketing, promotion, and other representations regarding their goods and services, TikTok has repeatedly made misrepresentations, directly or indirectly, expressly or by implication, including but not limited to the following claims:

- a. TikTok is deeply committed to TikTok being a safe and positive experience for people under the age of 18;
- b. TikTok's App is a safe environment for users of all ages, including children;
- c. TikTok works to support teen users and parents by building effective controls;
- d. TikTok works to support the well-being of everyone on the App;
- e. TikTok worked to address issues with its Recommendation Engine, including filter bubbles, as early as June 2020;
- f. TikTok's policies are strict and apply to everyone;
- g. TikTok prohibits content about bullying, drugs, mature themes, disordered eating and weight loss, suicide and self-harm, and content that exploits children, including CSAM;
- h. TikTok identifies and proactively removes content that violates those policies;
- i. TikTok's tools to address filter bubbles, including the "Refresh your For You feed" feature, and algorithm recommendations that lead to extreme harmful content are effective;
- j. LIVE is safe; and
- k. TikTok implements LIVE safety features that will keep teens and children safe.

278. In addition to TikTok's affirmative misrepresentations, TikTok's omissions are deceptive. These omissions include failing to inform children and parents about:

- a. the risks that children will encounter extensive harmful material on the App or be contacted by predators on the App;

- b. the risks that children will encounter or be coerced into sexually exploitative activities on LIVE;
- c. the risks that children will be taken advantage of financially by LIVE Gifting;
- d. that TikTok takes up to, if not more than, 50% in commission from virtual currency transactions on the App, including the cash-to-Coin-to-Gift-to-Diamond transactions via LIVE;
- e. that the “Refresh your For You feed” feature is temporary and designed to minimize user activation; and
- f. TikTok’s use of Addictive Features and design tactics that limit user agency, particularly childrens’, and coerce them into making decisions on the App they otherwise would not have.

279. As a direct result of the deceptive acts, omissions, and practices described above, TikTok obtained income, profits, and other benefits that it would not have otherwise obtained.

280. Each instance in which TikTok engaged in a deceptive trade practice as alleged in this Count constitutes a separate violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(5), (7), and/or (14). Accordingly, TikTok’s conduct, practices, omissions, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple separate violations of Minn. Stat. § 325D.44, subdivision 1(5), (7), and/or (14).

281. TikTok continues to cash in on its misrepresentations and omissions about its App despite knowing the harm its deceptive acts or practices are causing to numerous Minnesota children and TikTok’s violations present a continuing harm to those children.

**COUNT VI: PREVENTION OF CONSUMER FRAUD ACT  
(Misrepresentations and Omissions – Safety and Design)**

282. The State realleges and incorporates by reference the foregoing allegations as if fully set forth herein.

283. In connection with the sale of its App and the social media services it provides to users, TikTok uses or employs misleading statements and deceptive practices about core

elements of its platform, in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1.

TikTok's misleading statements and deceptive practices have the tendency or capacity to deceive and/or mislead consumers and therefore, constitute multiple, separate deceptive trade acts or practices.

284. TikTok's App and its social media services are "merchandise" within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 2.

285. TikTok's provision of its App and its social media services to consumers is a "sale" within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 4

286. TikTok is a "person" within the meaning of this statute. *See* Minn. Stat. § 325F.68, subd. 3.

287. In connection with the advertising, marketing, promotion, and other representations regarding the sale of its merchandise, TikTok has repeatedly made misrepresentations, directly or indirectly, expressly or by implication, including but not limited to the following:

- a. TikTok is deeply committed to TikTok being a safe and positive experience for people under the age of 18;
- b. TikTok's App is a safe environment for users of all ages, including children;
- c. TikTok works to support teen users and parents by building effective controls;
- d. TikTok works to support the well-being of everyone on the App;
- e. TikTok worked to address issues with its Recommendation Engine, including filter bubbles, as early as June 2020;
- f. TikTok's policies are strict and apply to everyone;
- g. TikTok prohibits content about bullying, drugs, mature themes, disordered eating and weight loss, suicide and self-harm, and content that exploits children, including CSAM;

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- h. TikTok identifies and proactively removes content that violates those policies;
- i. TikTok's tools to address filter bubbles, including the "Refresh your For You feed" feature, and algorithm recommendations that lead to extreme harmful content are effective;
- j. LIVE is safe; and
- k. LIVE implements safety features that will keep teens and children safe.

288. In addition to TikTok's affirmative misrepresentations, TikTok's material omissions are deceptive. These material omissions include failing to inform children and parents about:

- a. the risks that children will encounter extensive harmful material on the App or be contacted by predators on the App;
- b. the risks that children will encounter or be coerced into sexually exploitative activities on LIVE;
- c. the risks that children will be taken advantage of financially by LIVE Gifting;
- d. that TikTok takes up to, if not more than, 50% in commission from virtual currency transactions on the App, including the cash-to-Coin-to-Gift-to-Diamond transactions via LIVE;
- e. that the "Refresh your For You feed" feature is temporary and designed to minimize user activation; and
- f. TikTok's use of Addictive Features and design tactics that limit user agency, particularly children's, and coerce them into making decisions on the App they otherwise would not have.

289. Given the representations it made, its special knowledge, and/or the circumstances described in this Complaint, TikTok had a duty to disclose material facts to consumers in connection with its advertising, marketing, promotion, and other representations regarding the sale of its merchandise. By not doing so, TikTok failed to disclose material information in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1.

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290. TikTok’s misrepresentations are published widely in documents and other sources that are integral to consumers’ engagement with the App, including on TikTok’s website, in its Community Guidelines and Terms of Service, and in its Quarterly Enforcement Reports. TikTok’s leadership, including its CEO, then amplify these misrepresentations in public statements about the App. TikTok’s misrepresentations and omissions are not inconsequential; they concern the operation of the App’s core features and the impacts those features have on the wellbeing of its users. TikTok fully intended for consumers to rely on their misrepresentations and omissions to maximize user engagement on the App and TikTok’s profits.

291. As a direct result of the deceptive practices described above, TikTok obtained income, profits, and other benefits that it would not have otherwise obtained.

292. Each instance in which TikTok made a misleading statement and/or engaged in a deceptive practice as alleged in this Count constitutes a separate violation of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69, subdivision 1. Accordingly, TikTok’s conduct, practices, omissions, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple separate violations of Minn. Stat. § 325F.69, subdivision 1.

293. TikTok continues to cash in on its misrepresentations and omissions about its App despite knowing the harm its conduct is causing to numerous Minnesota children and TikTok’s violations present a continuing harm to those children.

**COUNT VII: MONEY TRANSMISSION ACT  
(Engaging in the Business of Money Transmission Without a License)**

294. The State realleges and incorporates by reference the foregoing allegations as if fully set forth herein.

295. The Attorney General is authorized to prosecute any violations of Minnesota law “respecting unfair, discriminatory, or other unlawful practices in business, commerce, or trade.”

Minn. Stat. § 8.31, subd. 2.

296. TikTok has engaged in unlawful practices in business, commerce, or trade by engaging in practices that violated Minnesota’s money transmission laws, including by engaging in the business of money transmission without obtaining the required license to do so as required by Minnesota Statutes section 53B.36(a).

297. “Money transmission” means: “(1) selling or issuing payment instruments to a person located in this state; (2) selling or issuing stored value to a person located in this state; or (3) receiving money for transmission from a person located in this state.” Minn. Stat. § 53B.28, subd. 18(a).

298. “Payment instrument” means “a written or electronic check, draft, money order, traveler’s check, or other written or electronic instrument for the transmission or payment of money or monetary value, whether or not negotiable.” Minn. Stat. § 53B.28, subd. 24(a).

299. “Receiving money for transmission” means “receiving money or monetary value in the United States for transmission within or outside of the United States by electronic or other means.” Minn. Stat. § 53B.28, subd. 27.

300. Minnesota Statutes section 53B.36(a) requires persons engaged in the business of money transmission to obtain a license from the Minnesota Department of Commerce unless “(1) a person is an authorized delegate of a person licensed under this chapter acting within the scope of authority conferred by a written contract with the licensee; or (2) a person is exempt under section 53B.29 and does not engage in money transmission outside the scope of the license.”

301. The requirement to have a money transmission license also separately and independently extends to companies, like TikTok, that engage in virtual currency business activity in Minnesota. Minn. Stat. § 53B.71(a). “Virtual-currency business activity” includes,

among other things, “exchanging, transferring, or storing virtual currency or engaging in virtual-currency administration, whether directly or through an agreement with a virtual-currency control-services vendor ....” Minn. Stat. § 53B.69, subd. 8.

302. TikTok is engaged in the business of money transmission and virtual currency business activity under Minnesota law. TikTok sells or issues virtual Coins and Gifts to Minnesota consumers for the purpose of transmitting money from user to user and receives money from Minnesota consumers for the transmission to other users. This constitutes both money transmission and virtual currency business activity under Minnesota law.

303. Notwithstanding the fact that it is engaged in the business of money transmission and virtual currency business activity, TikTok is not licensed to do so in Minnesota.

304. Minnesota law requires persons engaged in the business of money transmission to report to the Department of Commerce any bankruptcy filings, revocation or suspension of other money transmission licenses, and felony indictments or convictions of key officers or directors related to money transmission, Minn. Stat. § 53B.48; report audited financial data, *id.* § 53B.46; maintain relevant records for three years, *id.* § 53B.50; and submit to in-person inspection, *id.* §§ 53B.65, 45.027. Minnesota law further requires persons engaged in virtual currency business activity to make the disclosures required by Minnesota Statutes section 53B.72.

305. Minnesota has been unable to properly examine and regulate TikTok’s money transmission and virtual currency business activity due to its failure to obtain a money transmission license.

306. Each transmission of money TikTok has engaged in without a license as alleged in this Count constitutes a separate violation of Minnesota Statutes section 53B.36(a).

307. TikTok’s violations present a continuing harm, and the unlawful acts and

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practices complained of here affect the public interest.

**RELIEF**

**WHEREFORE**, the State of Minnesota, by its Attorney General, Keith Ellison, respectfully asks this Court to award judgment against TikTok as follows:

1. Declaring that TikTok's acts or practices, as described in this Complaint, are deceptive and unfair or unconscionable constituting multiple, separate violations of Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44, subdivision 1(5), (7), (13)(ii), and/or (14), and/or 325F.69, subdivision 1.
2. Declaring that TikTok is engaged in the business of money transmission without a license, constituting multiple separate violations of Minnesota Statutes section 53B.36(a).
3. A permanent injunction pursuant to Minnesota Statutes sections 8.31, subdivision 3, 325D.45, subdivision 1, and 325F.70, subdivision 1, prohibiting TikTok from engaging in the deceptive and unfair or unconscionable acts or practices identified herein and from engaging in the business of money transmission without a license;
4. A judgment pursuant to Minnesota Statutes sections 8.31 and 325D.45, subdivision 3, the general equitable powers of this Court, and any other authority requiring Defendant to disgorge all profits obtained as a result of their violations of Minnesota Statutes sections 325D.44, subdivision 1, 325F.69, subdivision 1, and 53B.36(a);
5. A judgment pursuant to Minnesota Statutes section 8.31, subdivision 3, for a civil penalty award of up to \$25,000 for each separate violation of Minnesota Statutes sections 325D.44, subdivision 1, 325F.69, subdivision 1, and 53B.36(a);



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6. A finding that, at a minimum, each instance in which a child accessed TikTok in the State of Minnesota represents a distinct violation of Minnesota Statutes sections 325D.44, subdivision 1, and 325F.69, subdivision 1;

7. Awarding the State its costs, including costs of investigation, reasonable attorneys' fees, and expert consultant and expert witness fees, as authorized by Minnesota Statutes sections 8.31, subdivision 3a, and 325D.45, subdivision 2; and

8. Granting such further relief as the Court deems appropriate and just.

Dated this 19th day of August, 2025.

KEITH ELLISON  
Attorney General  
State of Minnesota

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**MINN. STAT. § 549.211 ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The party on whose behalf the attached document is served acknowledges through its undersigned counsel that sanctions, including reasonable attorney fees and other expenses, may be awarded to the opposite party or parties pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 549.211.

Dated: August 19, 2025

/s/ Jessica Whitney  
Jessica Whitney  
Deputy Attorney General