

TikTok and the privacy issue

What is TikTok?

TikTok is an app that allows users to create and post short, funny videos and to share them on the app itself or on other apps. It is the result of a merger with a previous app, called Musical.ly, which allowed people to produce 15-seconds videos while **lip-syncing** or dancing on a song.

So-far, TikTok has achieved enormous popularity, especially among teenagers, and in 2019 it registered more downloads than the most popular apps of social networking sites. • However, some **concern** has recently emerged over the data security of TikTok users, who are mainly young people, most of them under 18.

Data security

Cyber security companies located in different countries all over the world have researched the app and noticed **weaknesses** linked to the access to users' data within the app itself. The weaknesses allowed attackers to send TikTok users some messages (appearing to come from the app itself) with malicious links. The researchers tested the app's security system by sending themselves links with malware. Once users clicked on the links, attackers would have been able to take control of their accounts, upload videos or gain access to their private videos.

Another **flaw** allowed hackers to **retrieve** personal information from TikTok users' accounts through the company's website. The researchers found that TikTok's site was vulnerable to a type of attack that injects

malicious code into trusted websites and were thus able to retrieve users' personal information, including names and birth dates.




Data privacy

There have also been concerns about the company's data privacy practices. The Federal Trade Commission in the US claimed violation of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act – which requires websites and online companies to direct children under 13 to get parental consent before collecting personal information – saying that the TikTok company illegally collected personal information from **minors**. The Beijing company owning the app, ByteDance, is also being investigated by the British Information Commissioner's Office to determine if it violated European privacy laws that offer special protection to minors and their data. However, despite all of these issues, TikTok is still one of the most popular online products created in the last few years.


Adapted from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/08/technology/tiktok-security-flaws.html>

concern: preoccupazione
flaw: falla
to lip-sync: cantare in playback
minor: minorenni
retrieve: recuperare
so far: finora
upgrade: aggiornamento
weakness: debolezza


Do you use any app or social networking site? Which ones?

1  Match these words from the text with the correct definition.

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1. App | <input type="checkbox"/> | a. A person who studies something to discover new facts about it. |
| 2. Cyber security | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Hurting or causing damage. |
| 3. Malicious | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. Refusal to obey a law. |
| 4. Malware | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Software that can damage an electronic device. |
| 5. Researcher | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. Software designed to do a particular job. |
| 6. Violation | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. Protection for the use of communication networks. |

2  Decide whether these statements are true or false. Correct the false statements.

- | | T | F |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. TikTok bought Musical.ly. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. In 2019 TikTok was downloaded more than other social media apps. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. All TikTok users are minors. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The TikTok security system is completely safe. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The researchers tested the app by sending themselves links. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. TikTok belongs to a Korean company. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. The company's security policy was not correct. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Children under 13 must ask for their parents' consent to put their data online. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. ByteDance has only been investigated in the US. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. After this investigation, TikTok lost much of its popularity. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3  **PAIR WORK** Use your knowledge to write a short description for each of the following apps or social networking sites.

- TikTok – With this app, users can create short, funny videos and share them on the app itself or on social networking websites.

1. Facebook
2. Instagram
3. YouTube
4. Snapchat