

PULSAR*



Breaking news on portrait mode

TikTok's impact on journalism & the news cycle

Audiences are seeking novel news formats in novel places

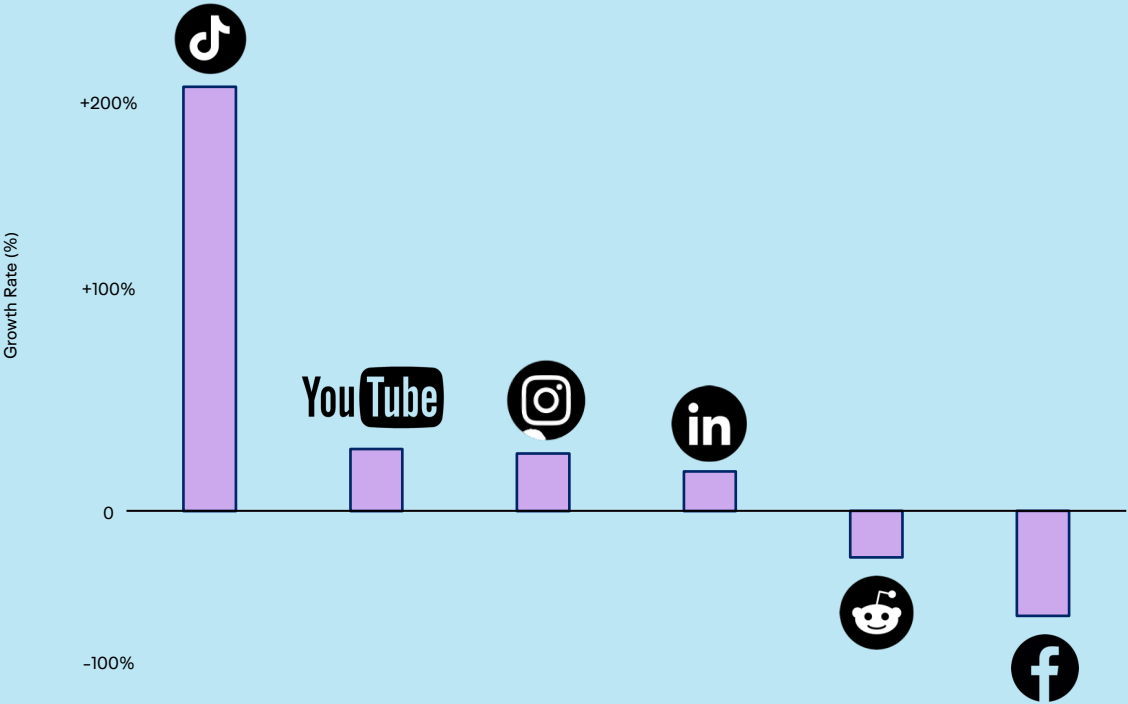
The rise to prominence of short form video, and the platforms that enable it, is expanding the audience for news and journalism. At the same time, it also impacts what topics and stories get covered, and how.

This has implications for the news cycle as a whole, impacting how information (or in some cases, misinformation) spreads amongst communities.

Clearly, this is a trend driven by platforms – most notably, TikTok. When we investigate where social audiences report getting their news, it's TikTok that sees the biggest upswing. The platform is well established as an originator of – or vector for – cultural and behavioral trends. But as we'll explore, it's impact on the news cycle at large is only growing greater, and for myriad different reasons.

The paper explores an extensive selection of mainstream and citizen journalists across TikTok, between January 1st, 2024 to October 20th, 2024, to better understand the topics, accounts and cultural dynamics that are driving audience engagement.

Twitter/X: traditionally the platform for news & journalism
Today, where else do X users report getting their news?



Where audiences report accessing news and journalism, percentage change (2020 vs. 2024) on X* Source: Pulsar TRAC.
*Mentions of X excluded, to accommodate the dynamics of how users talk about a platform on said platform.

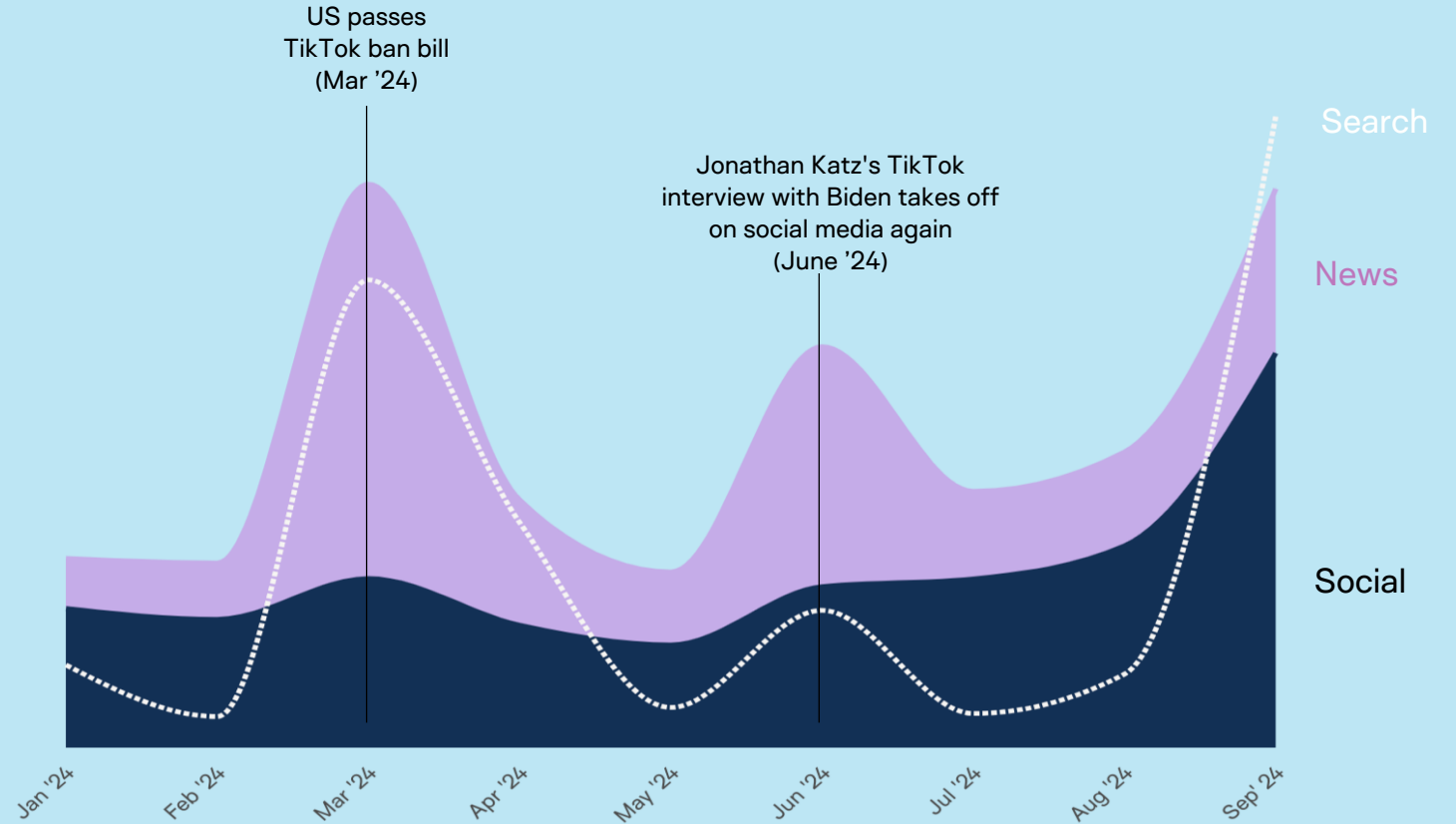
TikTok Journalism: onto the front page

The connection between TikTok journalism is one that's entered mainstream consciousness – attracting a significant amount of interest across social platforms, news media and Google search.

When we map mentions of 'TikTok' and 'Journalism' over the past year, it's instructive how focus has moved on from journalism *about* TikTok, particularly the US Senate passing legislation against the app, to journalism *on* the platform.

In a notable case of the latter, independent journalist Jonathan M. Katz interviewed President Biden on the platform. The two discussed the conflict in Gaza, with the interview's content making significant waves across TikTok, social platforms such as X, and traditional media.


Much of this conversation revolved around viewers lauding Katz's investigative approach, while calling out politicians and traditional media for their lack of accountability. Aside from the platform element, this indicates the growing positivity towards citizen journalists – with users seeking both regular updates and increasingly diverse perspectives.




Algorithm lets individual accounts mix with mainstream media

High-performing posts on TikTok can achieve reach and engagement that massively outperform an account's number of followers.


Official accounts can garner massive engagement, but still come second to self-style 'citizen journalists'.

 **kingpanda.bb**
5.3k followers



BREAKING NEWS: Donald Trump receives full throated endorsement from Elon Musk.


Breaking News / Edit
251k engagement


 **joseyahp21**
25.8k followers



Bridge Collapse in Baltimore. Prayers to the fallen. Wake up people. Wake up. You been warned

Conspiracy Commentary
16.8k engagement

 **accuweather**
697.2k followers



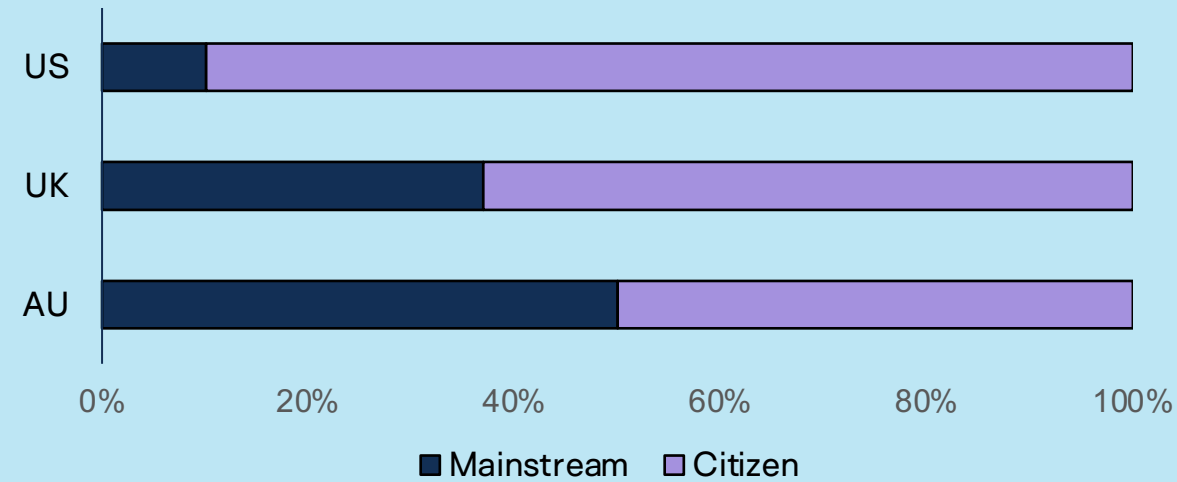
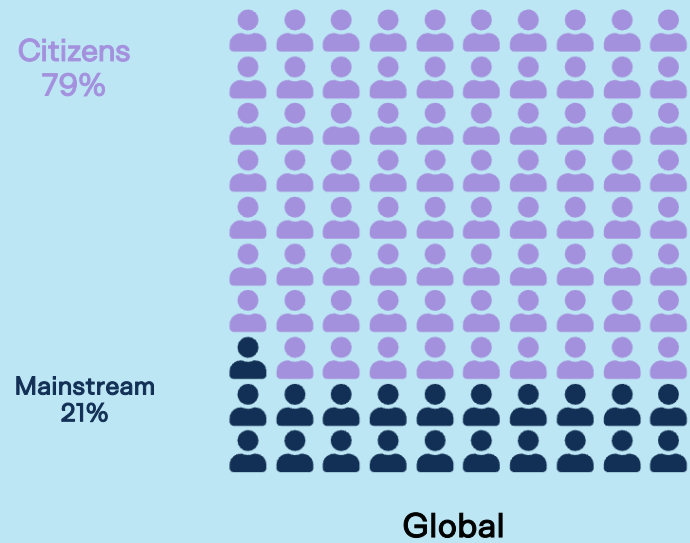
Drivers on Interstate 80 got a terrifying view of a powerful tornado this afternoon in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Disaster Video
119k engagement

Citizen journalism drives news content on TikTok

A low barrier to entry, together with an algorithm that distributes audience interest according to user preference rather than the cultural capital of the content provider, means that mainstream news accounts are outnumbered by the public – or ‘citizen journalists’.

Our own research into top TikTok profiles suggests that this ratio can vary depending on geography, with Australia media apparently playing a far bigger role in domestic journalism than we see in the US, for instance.



Journalism on portrait mode


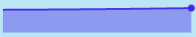





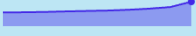

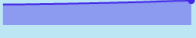

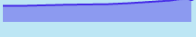

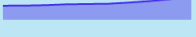

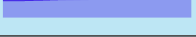

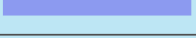

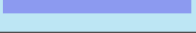
TikTok’s influence grows with new audience

The good news for brands in the space – they may be outnumbered, and outperformed on individual posts, but the platform contains within it the opportunity for massive audience growth. This is reflected by both follower count, and the upward trajectory of these numbers across






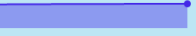



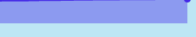

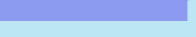

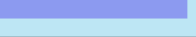

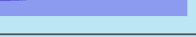

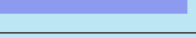

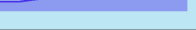
Accounts such as The Daily Mail or CNN. In the case of the latter, it appears that the election has helped turbo-charge a period of growth, resulting in an increase of 14% for the latter in a single month, and 18% for rivals NBC. The Daily Mail, meanwhile, has engaged in a phony ‘war’ with ‘News Daddy’ Dylan Page.

The back and forth helped boost his followers by a further 2M fan growth in September. Such an approach – interfacing with other users, either unilaterally, as here, or bilaterally– provides a potential guide to other brands and individuals in the space.

Mainstream

	Account	Region	Social Impressions	Followers	Followers over time
	espn	US	20,107,637,758	48M	
	cbsnews	US	16,604,522,383	5.4M	
	enews	US	16,283,536,013	5.8M	
	dailymail	US	16,126,454,397	14.1M	
	bleacherreport	US	6,015,043,233	8.5M	
	abcnews	US	2,092,452,573	8.3M	
	cnn	US	1,666,809,918	5.9M	
	todayshow	US	1,189,927,249	2.3M	
	itvnews	UK	1,103,658,592	3.7M	
	nbcnews	US	985,245,454	5.5M	

Citizen

	Account	Region	Social Impressions	Followers	Followers over time
	dylan.page	UK	3,534,005,264	13.5M	
	realraywilliam	US	1,002,997,834	15M	
	philipdefranco	US	345,907,730	3.1M	
	harryjsisson	US	277,977,202	1.3M	
	jennalynn468	US	249,186,255	782.k	
	johnstone.gregory	US	200,542,172	2.6M	
	vegasstarfish	US	179,311,346	1.6M	
	niickjackson	US	167,504,633	3.1M	
	photogsteve81	US	163,318,508	457.7K	
	dripboolin	US	108,904,979	198.4k	

The most influential mainstream and citizen accounts across the globe on TikTok between Jan 7 – Oct 16, 2024. Social impressions are calculated based on the total views, likes and shares on TikTok. Source: Pulsar TRAC

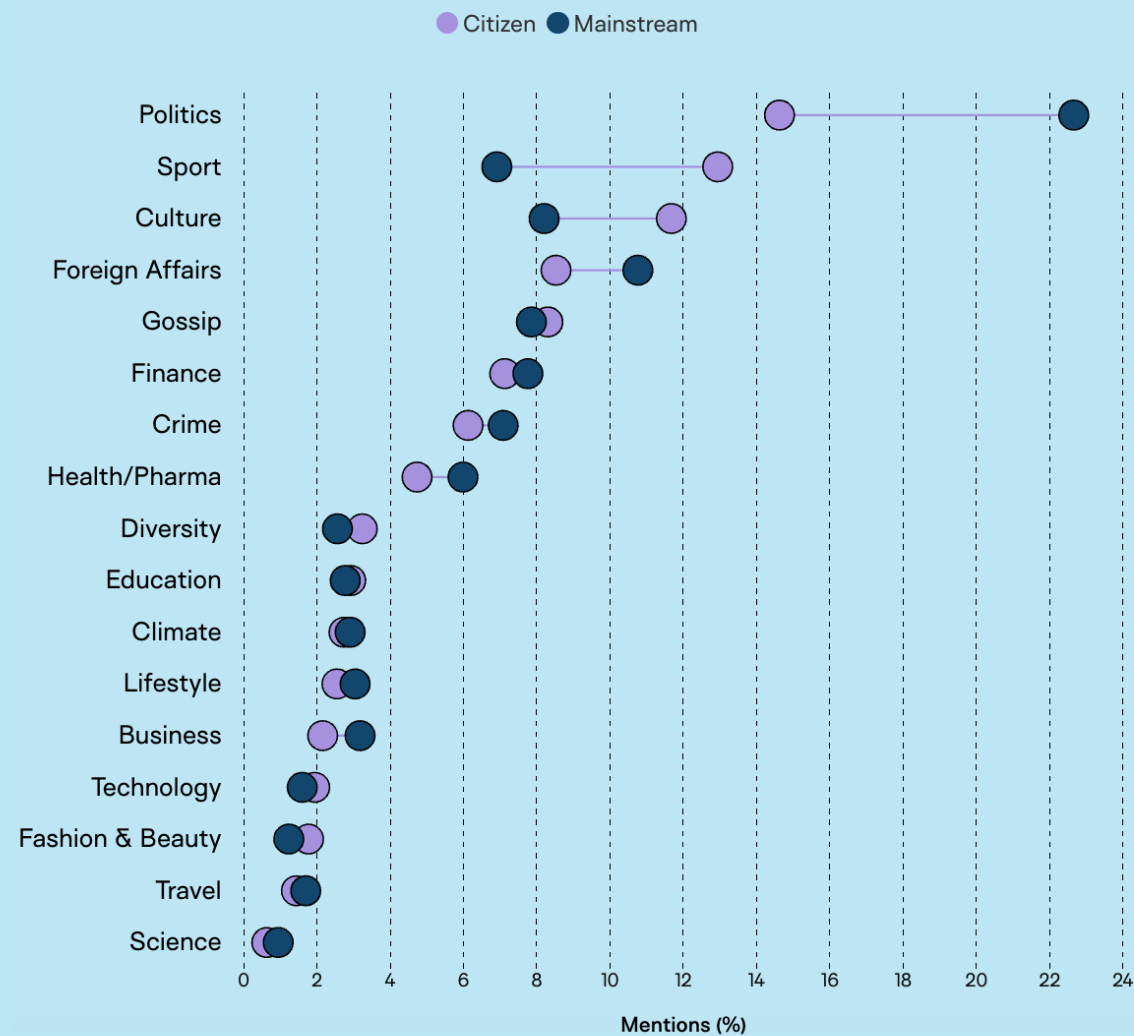
Election year sees explosion in political content – in good news for mainstream media channels

Politics has been a massive driver of engagement over the course of 2024, as we see the impact of the US and UK elections reflected in audience interest levels.

As visualized on the previous slide, this has acted as something of a boon for traditional media brands with TikTok presences, allowing them to translate their contacts and resources authoritative reporting that many of their citizen counterparts cannot hope to match.

However, citizen journalists are nonetheless able to generate massive engagement around particular posts, and that is because of the avowedly activist stances many such journalists take, particularly when focusing on something they label as underreported within mainstream media outlets.

If any topic might be said to underperform relative to its appearance within mainstream news titles, then it's crime. By its nature, the majority of crime is region- or location-specific. Impactful TikTok content tends to resonate beyond specific geographies, being consumed and propelled instead by communities which share interests and affinities rather than physical space.

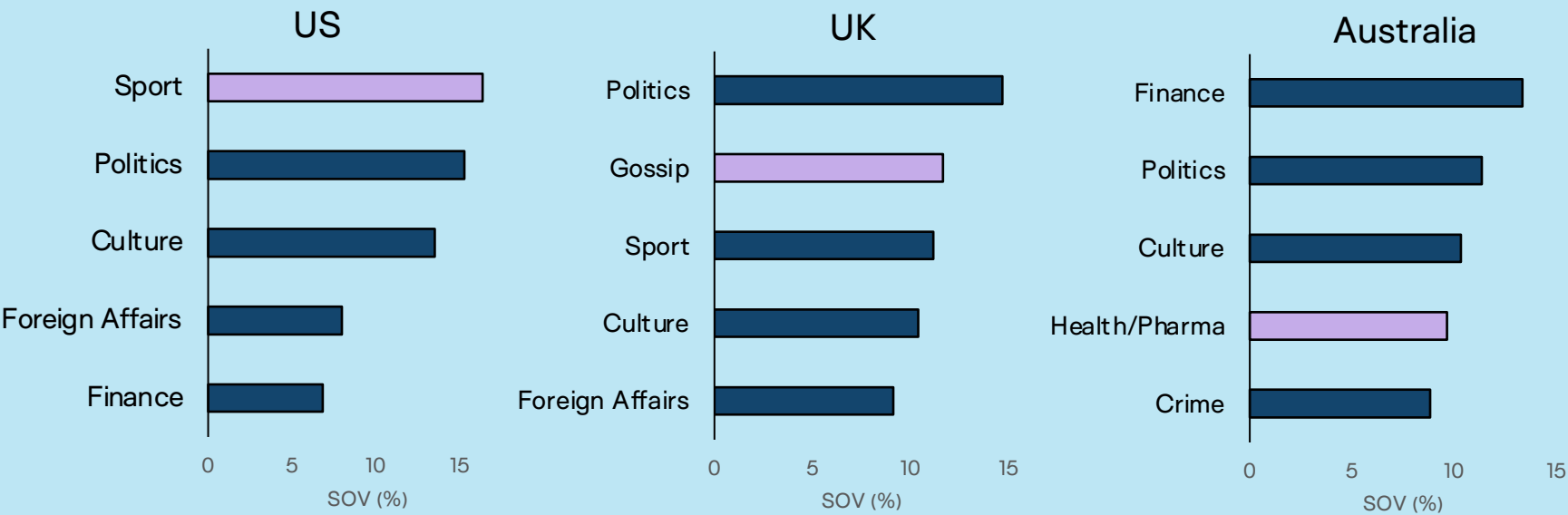


Top news topics differ on TikTok

Sports fuel US news, as gossip and health dominate the UK and AU respectively

Once again, we can detect some interesting country-by-country variance as we investigate topic splits within TikTok news content.

This can obviously be impacted by the news cycle. Australia's interest in healthcare, for example, is driven in part by coverage of rising obesity rates.



US Election: TikTok and traditional news share similar peaks, but top content differs

When we set the conversation taking place on TikTok against that playing out in mainstream news, we see some intriguing variance.

For instance, around the same time that Donald Trump was found guilty of felony crimes, one of the top performing posts on TikTok focuses on the enrolment of American men into a military draft. The fact this coincided with a largescale social storm in the UK – around then PM’s Rishi Sunak’s plans for a new national service – suggests that the topic might have been selected for coverage due to its virality.

Later, when the former President survived an assassination attempt, the two news types converge to share a similar focus, but these diverged once again around the time of the debates. The comparatively youthful demographic who consume TikTok journalism predictably found Taylor Swift’s endorsement a more noteworthy moment than the debate itself.



UK Election: TikTok embraced by mainstream media – and parties

The most popular content related to the UK General Election on TikTok didn't come from individual creators offering fresh perspectives, as seen in the U.S. Instead, it was dominated by established press publishers like ITV News.

Emerging media companies, such as Novara Media, also captured significant engagement, providing a left-leaning angle on political reporting.

Personality played a key role, particularly that of Reform UK leader Nigel Farage. Despite being frequently framed as a leader from bygone days, his to-the-point pronouncements on hot-button topics was also perfect primed for an election playing out across TikTok.

TikTok
Mainstream news



The Telegraph

Why Rishi Sunak had to go bold and call an election now (May 22)

The Guardian

Starmer and Sunak clash over taxes, the NHS and immigration in head-to-head TV debate – as it happened (June 4)

BBC

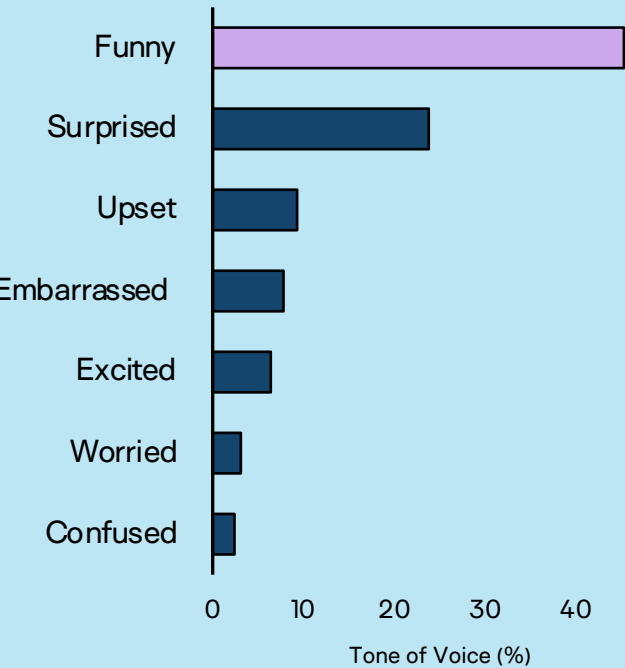
Rishi Sunak accepts responsibility for historic Tory defeat (Jul 4)

News as entertainment and personal branding


Citizen journalists on TikTok break away from mainstream media with creative formats that blend news and entertainment. Humor drives nearly half of their content. By merging their personal and professional lives, they connect with audiences in ways traditional outlets

can't match. Dylan Page, with his 13.4M followers, uses humor to make news engaging, while Sophia Smith Galer's focus on etymology has allowed her to carve out a niche removed from the stress and conflict of the news cycle.

Media figures like Max Foster of CNN are also pivoting to TikTok, mimicking the informal hand-held stylings of user generated content. In fact, mainstream figures co-opting TikTok in this way are often more informal than the individual journalists, such as Dylan or Sophia, developing their own personal brands.




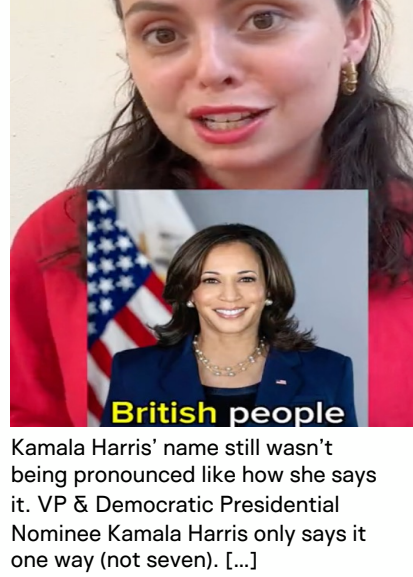
Tone of Voice (%) in the global news conversation on TikTok between Jan 7 – Oct 17, 2024. Source: Pulsar TRAC

 Dylan Page




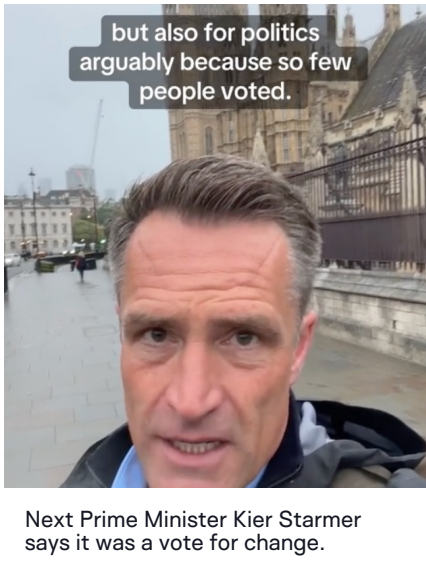
Followers: 13.4M
Focus: News / Reporting
Content type: Storytelling

 Sophia Smith Galer



Followers: 550k
Focus: Language
Content type: Education

 Max Foster




Followers: 1.2M
Focus: News / Opinions
Content type: Gatekeeper


Indigenous creators: surfacing overlooked stories & perspectives within Australia

Both individual Indigenous creators and media bodies serving the community have used the platform to break down complex political jargon and address cultural misconceptions. However, this rise also prompts concerns about non-Indigenous

users co-opting or misrepresenting these stories, exemplified by the debate around cultural trends such as 'naarmcore.' TikTok is empowering Indigenous voices to take a leading role in the production of journalism about their own community,


enabling them to challenge misinformation and reclaim narratives around Australia's history, particularly key political moments like the Voice to Parliament referendum.


 NITV



Uncle Brendan Kerin responded to conservative backlash over his Welcome to Country delivered at last weeks AFL Semi Final.


NITV (132.6k followers)
Focus: First Nations news


 natindigtimes



Kuku Yalanji and Magarr-Magarr Warra woman, Cathy Freeman remains an iconic Australian hero after she made history ...


National Indigenous Times
(26.5k followers)
Focus: First Nations news

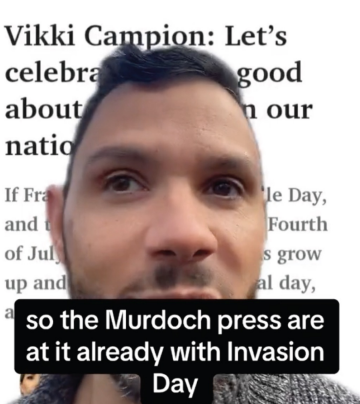
 Madison King



The story about the Aboriginal Flag - Harold Thomas

Madison King (14.6k followers)
Focus: Political commentary and criticism

 Braden Hill



Settlers via Murdoch press getting in early this year. #invasionday #auspol #australia 🇦🇺 #australiaday

Braden Hill (11k followers)
Focus: Indigenous culture, history, humanities, and education

Global Wars:

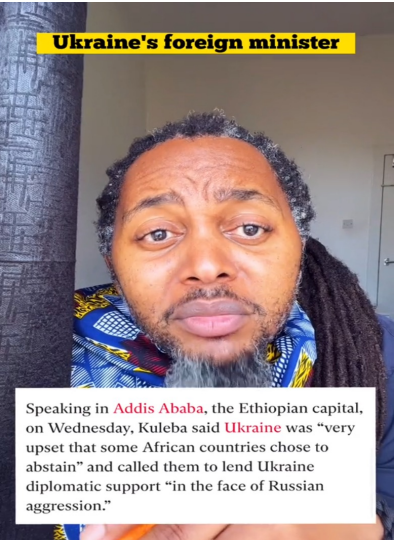
citizen journalists combine reporting with activism

One of the mooted benefits of TikTok journalism is that it can give populations impacted by war a voice, and a means of communicating the situation unfolding around them through a very human lens.

In actuality, the current spate of conflicts are currently more likely to be shared by journalist-cum-activists from around the world, particularly those who see their mainstream media and political classes as complicit.

theafricandiary

Ukraine's foreign minister



Speaking in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, on Wednesday, Kuleba said Ukraine was "very upset that some African countries chose to abstain" and called them to lend Ukraine diplomatic support "in the face of Russian aggression."

Africa's stance on Ukraine-Russia conflict. Dialogue over war.

Followers: 102.9k
Focus: Commentary on Culture, History & Foreign Affairs

ajplus

Palestinians in Gaza are resisting



How Palestinians in Gaza are resisting through food

How Palestinians are resisting Israel's genocide through food in this insightful video featuring @yara Elmjouie

Followers: 1M
Focus: Foreign Affairs

invader.zema

#AllEyesOnAlAqsa



Israel bombs a makeshift displacement camp in the courtyard of a central Gaza hospital, spreading fear.

Followers: 109.8k
Focus: Activism

geonews

عسے کے بعد ایران میں جشن



Latest Situation_Iran Israel War_Breaking News_Geo News

Followers: 5.8M
Focus: Middle East Breaking News


Global South:

regional creators challenge misrepresentation and break stereotypes


TikTok Journalism succeeds in elevating voices from the global south, either by adding specificity and human connection to stories of international interest – or

else by bringing to global attention stories and topics that might previously have been overlooked entirely. Such creators can often lean into the activist aspects of

citizen journalism, taking as their mission the goal of breaking down stereotypes or, in the case of the first post below, internalised misogyny.



africanstream1



Women remove their wigs to show their natural hair and spread the message of not losing one's identity

Followers: 79k
Focus: Politics, Culture and History edits of Africa




expert.desk



PTI workers entered Liaquat Bagh | Maltreatment with journalists

Followers: 306.1k
Focus: National News



invader.zema



Stay informed on the current political landscape in South Africa, including discussion on the Bela Bela Bill and key figures such as Panyaza Lesufi and DA minister Siviwe

Followers: 228.6k
Focus: Commentary on politics in Africa and South Africa



Ultimatekombo2



Celebration in Iran after the attackLatest Situation_Iran Israel War_Breaking News_Geo News

Followers: 604.6k
Focus: Sports commentary

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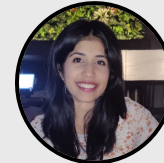


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