

ALGORITHMS AND THEIR ROLE IN
CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL MEDIA BUSINESS

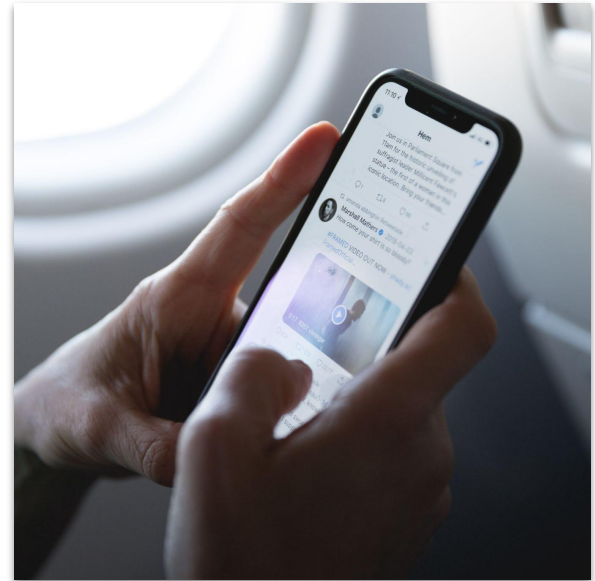
FIND OUT HOW IT WORKS


LESSON 2

What Are Social Media Algorithms?

As of last year, there were approximately **4 billion** internet users, and of these users, about **3 billion** were on social media.


That's a massive undertaking to monitor and manage. This is why algorithms are so crucial in determining the validity and placement of social media accounts and content.





Algorithms in social media platforms can be defined as technical means of sorting posts based on relevancy instead of publish time, in order to prioritize which content an user sees first according to the likelihood that they will actually engage with such content.

For example, the posts which are recommended to you when you scroll through your Instagram feed, or the stories of your friends that appear first on the dashboard, are determined by algorithms.



Algorithms can be written by coders who make use of machine learning. And algorithms manage several tasks which would be tedious for humans to carry out, such as managing flows of content through active recommendations as well as negative shadow bans and mediating interaction with information through likes and comments to improve content discoverability.


In addition, algorithms rank and filter information in ways that create incentives and conditions of interaction for content creators that are similar to markets.



Algorithms are designed in a way that takes into account different aspects.

Some of these aspects are content-based, meaning that this kind of algorithmic design seeks to match a user's taste, based on their profile, to specific posts that the system guesses the user will like.

Once users show interest in a specific tag or category, they are directed to other items in the same category.



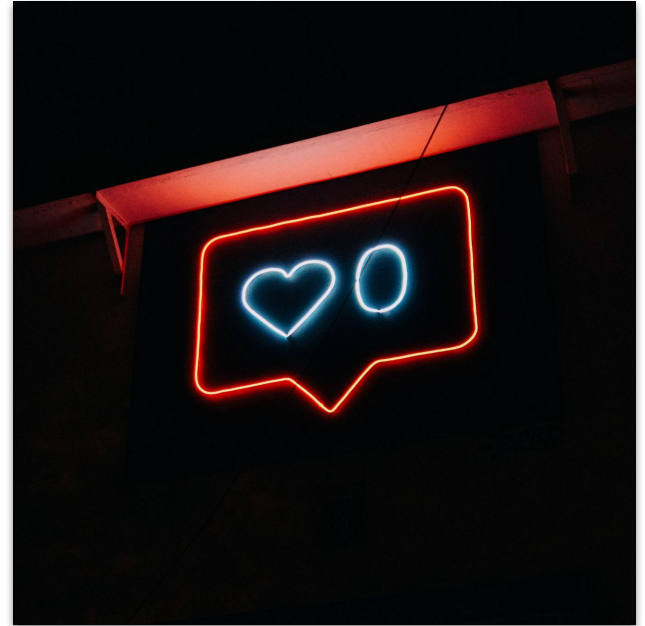
Social networks **prioritize** which content a user sees in their feed first by the likelihood that they'll actually want to see it. Moreover, algorithms can operate in a collaborative way.

Collaborative filtering consists in matching users to other users who seem to share similar interests; this way, a person is directed to posts or videos that they might want to see based on the fact that a user with a similar profile searched for that specific source.

Algorithms can be context-aware, in the sense that they can individuate personal data such as a user's exact geographic location in order to include it in the algorithmic calculations.

While there's no handbook on the many algorithms and how to maintain them, we know enough to maneuver the social media landscape and succeed.

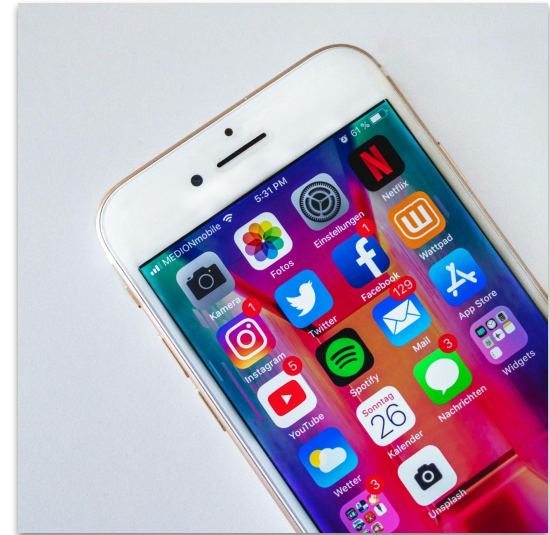
One of the **major shifts** witnessed in the past few years is a user-friendly focus, much like the one Google ranks by. This encourages social media users to submit relevant, high-quality content, and engage with consumers.



What Are The Types Of Social Media Algorithms?

Social media **algorithms vary by platform**. Therefore, you can break it down by social media brand.

The main platforms are Google, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Spotify and TikTok. Here's a look at each and how they're currently ranking content and users.



Google

Google search algorithm is a complex system that allows Google to find, rank and return the most relevant pages for a certain search query.

To be precise, the whole ranking system consists of multiple algorithms that consider various factors such as quality, relevance or usability of the page.





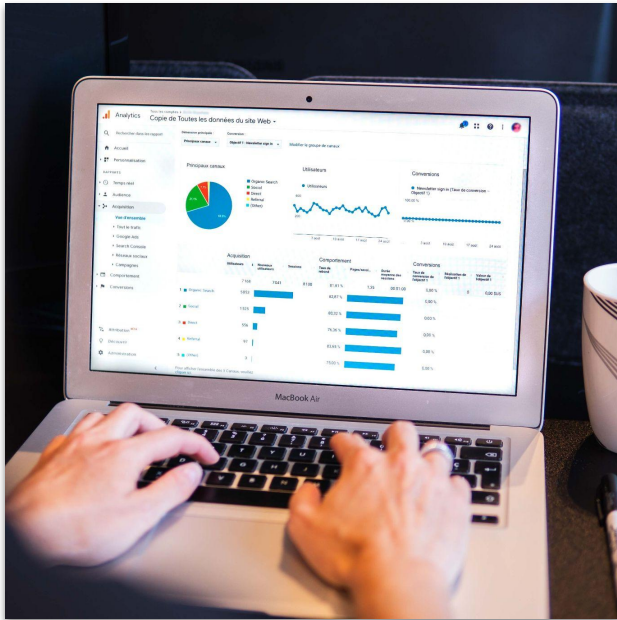
Google's algorithm does the work for you by **searching** out Web pages that contain the keywords you used to search, then **assigning** a rank to each page based on several factors, including how many times the keywords appear on the page.

Higher ranked pages appear further up in Google's search engine results page (SERP), meaning that the best links relating to your search query are theoretically the first ones Google lists.

The background of the slide is a light gray grid of numerous small, slightly tilted document icons. Each icon represents a different type of file, such as a PDF, a spreadsheet, or a presentation, with various colors and symbols. The icons are arranged in a regular pattern, creating a textured, data-rich background.

How **Google** Search Works


(in 5 minutes)



When you use Google's search function to learn about the world, Google is using your searches **to learn about you**.

The search giant builds multifaceted profiles of users based on their search history, as well as browsing history on Google-owned sites like YouTube.

It uses that data to build an advertising profile, serving users with ads that it thinks will match their demographics.



By clicking [this link](#) from a Google account settings page, you can see what Google thinks it knows about you. Google predicts your age, gender, marital status, income, and personal interests.

The page also allows you to correct Google's assumptions, remove their information from Google's ad database, or stop Google from predicting your profile entirely going forward.

Facebook

With 2.5 billion active monthly users, Facebook is still the top social media platform in terms of users.

However, this social media giant takes much heat from businesses because of how difficult it is to get organic reach with a business page (versus a regular user profile).





Here are some of the **defining factors** of this social media algorithm:

- Prioritizes content from friends and family members over businesses;
- Heavily prioritizes content from people you engage with (people whose posts you comment and like on, or whom you message);
- Prioritizes number and length of comments;
- Prioritizes number of reactions and variety of reactions;
- Shows both recent content from your top friends and highly engaged content from friends that you personally engage with less often.



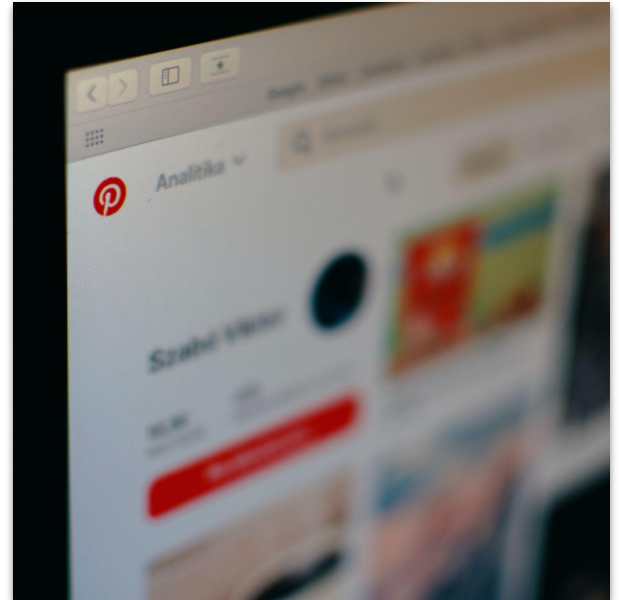
The most significant updates for 2021:


- Facebook is prioritizing posts in Groups and Events. Their redesign puts more emphasis on these, as they are “the two biggest reasons people visit Facebook every day”;
- **Hashtags:** Facebook has implemented recommended tag listings for when you’re composing a post. Not everyone can use this new feature yet, as it is still in beta, but it could be a great way to get a bigger reach on Facebook.

Pinterest

While Pinterest has a very different layout and follower strategy, it counts as a social media platform, nonetheless. It's **guided search method** uses data collected from past content interactions to encourage new links.

For example, if you've previously viewed wedding hairstyles, Pinterest is more likely to show you more hairstyles the next time you log in.





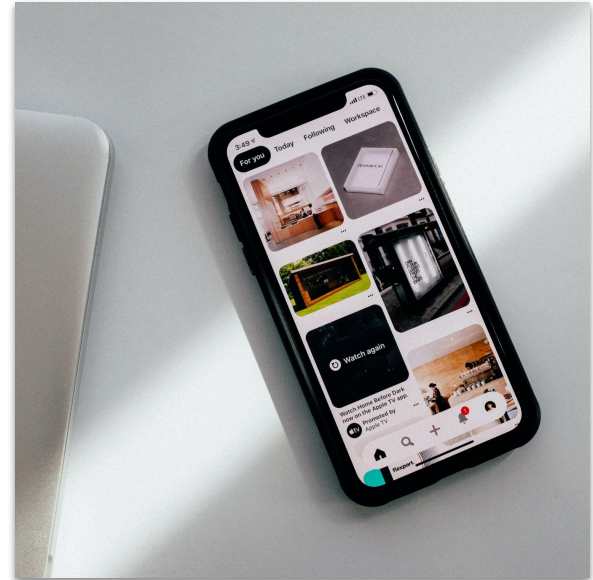
The benefit to this **interest themed** algorithm is that it's always showing the user something Pinterest knows they like. This makes the content more likely to be consumed and enjoyed.


The Pinterest algorithm has the following characteristics as for what shows up in your main feed:

- Prioritizes fresh, recent pins;
- Prioritizes pins with the most engagement (repins and comments);
- De-prioritizes pins that someone is repinning to too many boards;
- De-prioritizes pins from groups with hundreds or thousands of contributors.

It's important to note that Pinterest news feed isn't the only place that users see the content.

SEO really matters for Pinterest because many users discover new content by searching for their interests in the search bar.





Pinterest will continue the trends they set in 2018, 2019, and 2020, which is to downgrade spammy pins in the algorithm. Pinners need to be cautious with pinning the same pin in dozens of group boards, and group boards with too many contributors no longer have the distribution reach they used to. The Pinterest algorithm is also growing in its ability to vet pins for visual quality and check that pins are only pinned to relevant boards.

For Pinterest, it's **quality over quantity**. So you should pin less but newer and higher-quality content.

LinkedIn

Recognized as a leader in B2B marketing, LinkedIn is a social platform dedicated to networking, rather than building followers.

The site has developed an algorithm based on connection and engagement, so strong and relevant content is the key to LinkedIn success.


Even if you don't have a lot of links in your networking chain, you can build this later if you have read-worthy content.





The LinkedIn algorithm does the following:

- Prioritizes content from users whom you have engaged with in the past and who post consistently;
- Prioritizes content from users who get large amounts of engagement, even if you don't tend to like or comment on their posts;
- Favors lengthy comments over a high volume of reactions;
- Does not prioritize content from business pages;
- Prefers native content such as text posts, images with text, and videos with text.



While LinkedIn video is still important in 2021, it's not like it was when they first allowed users to upload videos. Then, the algorithm was clearly prioritizing any video at the top of the feed. Now, videos have to get good engagement to get prioritized, but they still might have a slight leg up on static content.

In 2021, LinkedIn is continuing a trend that they started in 2019, which is to **de-prioritize content from mega influencers** and give users a chance to see content from the non-internet-famous people in their network.

Twitter



With 206 million daily active users worldwide, you can't completely ignore Twitter. Twitter is still vital even in the B2B space.


Twitter is unique in that it ranks its posts not only by relation to the user but to time and date posted. Fresh and updated material ranks higher than day-old news. The number of comments a Tweet has will also influence its rank.



Of all the social media algorithms, Twitter factors in **recency** more than any other. But there are other characteristics too.

- Prioritizes recent content (last 24 hours) with the highest amount of engagement from users you follow;
- Prioritizes content posted recently (within minutes);
- Prioritizes content with retweets and comments over likes.

Twitter released the ability to toggle between the top tweets algorithm and recent tweets. That is for iOS only. It's predicted that they could roll this out to desktop too.



Twitter will continue to prioritize tweets with high engagement and recent tweets, so volume and frequency still matter on this platform.

We've also seen higher engagement rates when:

- Tweets contain up to two hashtags and 100 characters;
- Tweets contain an image link;
- you specifically ask your followers to retweet.


Instagram

Instagram is about showing as many people as much information in a day as possible.

Therefore, its algorithm **focuses on every aspect** of social media, from relevancy and connection to engagement and content popularity.

The reasoning behind the Instagram algorithm is to encourage comments, shares, likes, adds, and further posting.



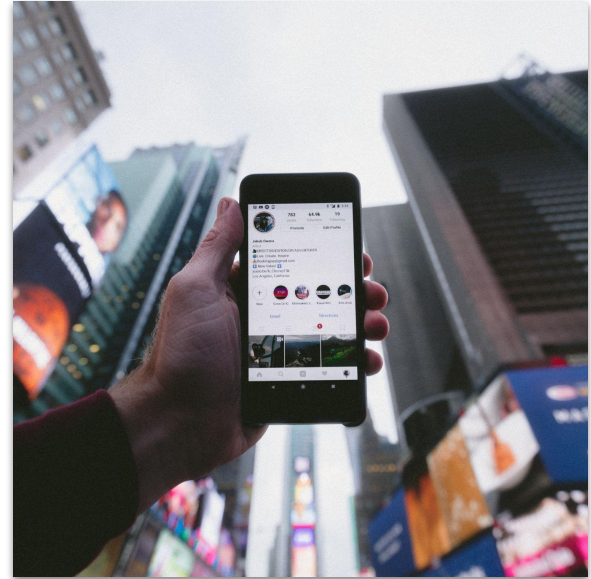



The Instagram algorithm has the following characteristics:

- Prioritizes posts with the highest number of likes;
- Prioritizes very recent posts (created within minutes of a user logging on);
- Prioritizes posts from profiles that the user engages typically with;
- Prioritizes posts from hashtags that the user follows;
- Occasionally shows posts with great engagement from a profile and using hashtags that the user does not follow;
- Is believed to treat brands' content and consumers' content equally.

While there's always a concern that Instagram will start to downgrade content from business profiles, there's still evidence of this being true.

In 2021, even more users see content by profiles that they don't follow (not in the Discover tab but their main feed).





Instagram has announced on what basis they decide whether they recommend your content or not. The most important points are:


- Posts with clickbait or engagement bait don't get recommended;
- Contests or giveaways don't get recommended;
- Repurposed content from another source without added value doesn't get recommended;
- Also, Instagram has enrolled **Reels**, their very own version of TikTok. Some Instagram accounts have exploded since using this new feature, so it may be worthwhile to invest some time in this type of content.



YouTube

YouTube is complicated. It has the following features:

- Recommends video content related to what you previously watched.
- Recommends video content by the same content creator as what you once watched.
- Recommends viral videos (getting mass amounts of engagement and watch time in a short period), even if it's not relevant to you.
- Lets you toggle to your subscriptions and shows videos from your subscriptions in reverse chronological order.



The YouTube algorithm selects videos for viewers with two goals in mind: finding the right video for each viewer, and enticing them to keep watching.

When we talk about “the algorithm,” we’re talking about three related but slightly different selection or discovery systems:

- one that selects videos for the YouTube homepage;
- one that ranks results for any given search;
- one that selects suggested videos for viewers to watch next.

YouTube says that in 2021, homepage and suggested videos are usually the top sources of traffic for most channels. Except for explainer or instructional videos (i.e., “how to tune up a bicycle”), which often see the most traffic from search, instead.

Like Pinterest, YouTube also has an algorithm, which means that SEO-optimizing your YouTube content is essential.

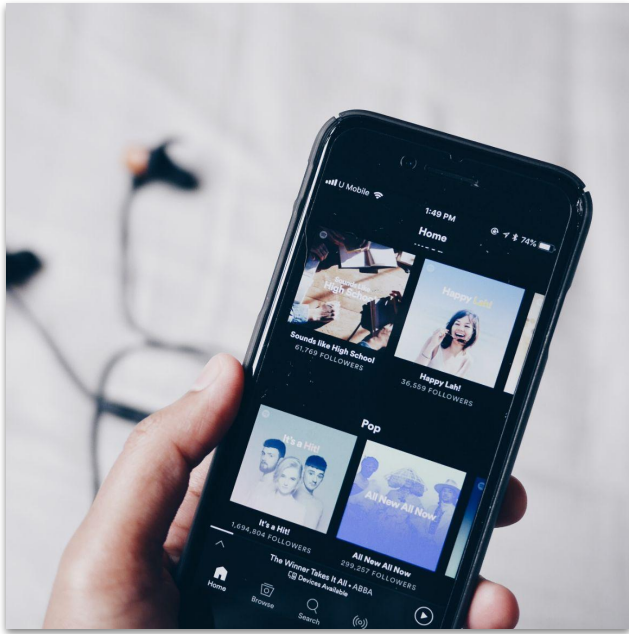


Spotify


Spotify's algorithm is always **finding new ways** to understand the kind of music one listens to – from the songs that are always on repeat to the favourite genre that one can't let go.

Not only is the algorithm monitoring the music history but also analyses the reason behind a person listening to a particular song or preferring a particular genre over the other.






The first thing one notices on Spotify is the home screen, that's where the recommendations start, and the home screen is governed by an AI system called Bandits for Recommendations or simply known as BaRT. BaRT is the real reason why one doesn't go on searching for an appropriate playlist to listen to on Spotify.




Of course, if one has been on Spotify for some time, it starts recommending songs based on the previous listening activities. But, this is not just it, BaRT also drops in fresh music that it thinks users will like in order to keep them out of the same listening loop.

Now two concepts come into play with BaRT – **exploit** and **explore**. The combination of ‘exploit’ and ‘explore’ is the key to Spotify’s recommendation.



While **exploiting**, Spotify makes use of every activity produced by a user. Exploit usually makes use of the user's listening history, songs skipped, playlists the user has created, social media activity on platforms and even one's location to recommend music.

While **exploring**, Spotify studies the rest of the world. It starts searching for playlists and artists similar to your listening taste and also looking at the popularity of the artists in that area whom you haven't heard of or any other related works.



BaRT's success totally depends on whether one listens to the songs recommended in the 'shelves' or 'rows' on their home screen.

Spotify's algorithm looks at the duration of the time one has spent on a song, and if it is for more than **30 seconds**, then the platform takes it as a check on their recommendations. The longer one spends on a song or a playlist, the better their suggestions will get.

So, if one doesn't like the first 28-second of a song, it is better to skip it before the 29-second mark to never get to listen to something like that again!



A digital culture publication The Pudding has created an artificial intelligence (AI) that sounds like a judgmental music snob.

One who will review your Spotify library and harangue you mercilessly based on your taste. You are welcome to visit [The Pudding website](#) and let its “sophisticated AI judge your awful taste in music”.

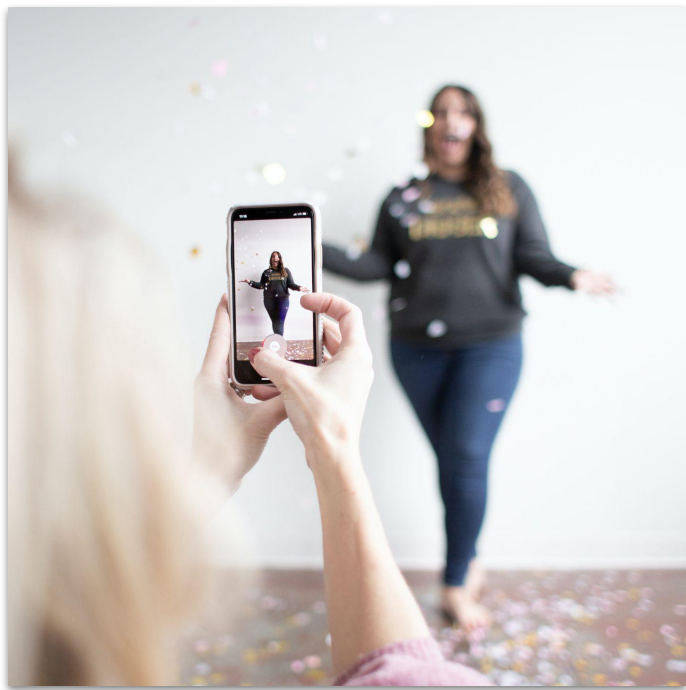
TikTok

TikTok is one of the fastest growing social media platforms in the world which presents an alternative version of online sharing.

It allows users to create short videos with music, filters, and some other features.

Sometimes it's funny, sometimes it's cringey, but it's definitely addictive.






If you've scrolled TikTok, you'll know that the **For You** page is the best place to find the best new content.

According to TikTok, the system recommends content by ranking videos based on a combination of factors – starting from interests you express as a new user and adjusting for things you indicate you're not interested in, too.



These factors include things like:

1. User interactions: such as the videos you like or share, accounts you follow, comments you post, and content you create.
2. Video information: this might include details like captions, sounds, and hashtags.
3. Device and account settings: like your language preference, country setting, and device type.



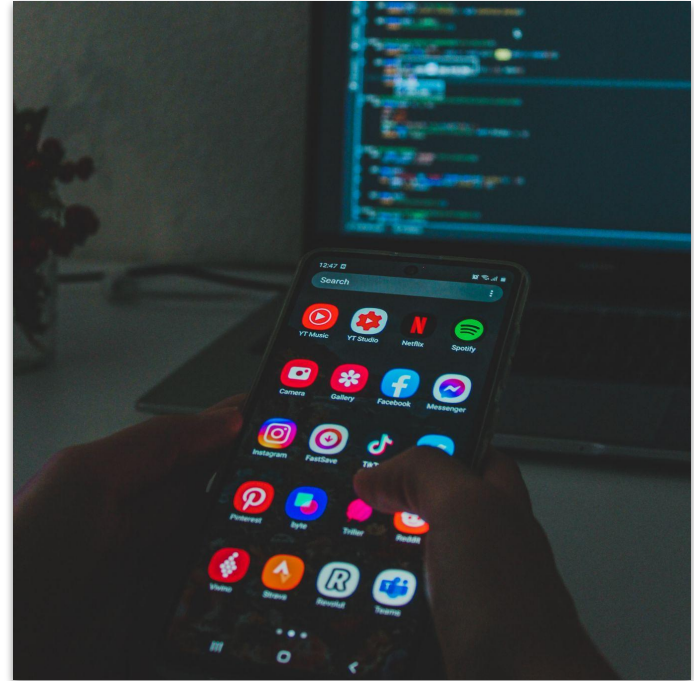
And it doesn't stop there.


Each of these factors is individually weighted by the TikTok's **For You** recommendation system, meaning that each **For You** page will be completely unique to a user and their level of interest.

For example, TikTok explains that a strong indicator of interest could be if a user finishes watching a longer video from beginning to end. This would receive greater weight than a weak indicator, such as whether the video's viewer and creator are both in the same country.

From these “indicators of interest,” For You page videos are then ranked based on the likelihood of a user’s interest in a piece of content.

But what about the age-old question of “do I need thousands of followers to go viral?”. In short, the answer is no.





TikTok explained that while a video is likely to receive more views if posted by an account that has more followers (by virtue of having a large follower base), “neither follower count nor whether the account has had previous high-performing videos are direct factors in the recommendation system”.

So even if you have zero followers, and have never posted to TikTok before, there’s still an opportunity for your video to appear in the **For You** page of other users!



Extra Reading

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