

Original Research Article

# Crisis management in TikTok: Analyzing data privacy and online misconduct incidents

Xue Fu

Cardiff University, CF10 3AT

---

**Abstract:** This study analyzes TikTok’s crisis management regarding data privacy and online misconduct issues. Through case studies and crisis communication theories, it evaluates TikTok’s strategies including policy updates, content moderation, and anti-bullying initiatives. While TikTok has improved transparency, challenges remain in algorithmic bias and regulatory compliance. The research recommends stronger preventive measures and stakeholder collaboration for safer digital spaces.

**Keywords:** TikTok; Crisis management; Data privacy; Online misconduct

---

## 1. Introduction

In the digital age, data privacy has become a crucial concern due to social media sites’ massive user data collection. Both users and regulators are paying more attention because of worries about how this data is gathered, kept, shared, and utilized. Particularly for TikTok, the Chinese ownership has prompted more concerns about possible Chinese government access to data (Diawara et al., 2023).

Online Misconduct pose significant obstacles for social media networks. These networks’ anonymity and reach have the potential to encourage negative conduct, which can especially affect its younger and more susceptible members. Victims of Online Misconduct may experience severe psychological impacts, such as depression, anxiety, and, in severe circumstances, suicidal thoughts, according to recent research (Yuan & Liu, 2023). TikTok, a popular site among younger demographics, is under special pressure to handle Online Misconduct appropriately.

This thesis aims to examine TikTok’s crisis management tactics in light of particular instances involving Online Misconduct and data privacy. We will examine how TikTok has handled these difficulties through in-depth case studies, assess the efficacy of its methods, and compare its tactics to other crises.

### 1.1. Crisis management theories and frameworks

In the digital age, crisis management has changed dramatically, with new frameworks and ideas developed to handle the particular difficulties on online platforms. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by Coombs in 2002, is still widely used today. It emphasizes the significance of adapting crisis management tactics to the nature and intensity of the crisis. The Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model, which particularly covers the role of social media in crisis communication and management, was more recently suggested by Austin et al. (2021).

### 1.2. Social media crisis management

Social media networks’ enormous user bases and their real-time nature present unique crisis management issues. Kim and Krishna (2023) emphasize the significance of swiftness and openness in responding to crises on social media. According to their research, platforms that address crises promptly and transparently tend to have

more user trust. Eriksson (2022) also highlights the necessity of proactive crisis management techniques on social media, such as ongoing observation and prompt action.

### **1.3. Data privacy in social media platforms**

Both authorities and social media users are now apprehensive about data privacy. Users are becoming more conscious of and concerned about how their data is gathered and used on social media platforms, according to recent research by Zhang et al. (2023). Data privacy practices are receiving more attention due to laws like the CCPA in California and the GDPR in Europe (Politou et al., 2021). International rules and cross-border data movements add another layer of complexity for platforms such as TikTok (Diawara et al., 2023).

### **1.4. Online misconduct on TikTok on social media**

According to recent studies, Online Misconduct is still a problem on social media platforms and has a significant influence. In their systematic analysis of Online Misconduct on TikTok, Yuan and Liu (2023) discovered that the platform's distinctive elements—like duets and video comments—can encourage the emergence of new kinds of online harassment. To effectively prevent Online Misconduct, Kowalski et al. (2022) stress the necessity for multifaceted strategies that include user education, technical interventions, and explicit policy enforcement.

### **1.5. TikTok's growth and previous controversies**

A number of issues and controversies have accompanied TikTok's explosive expansion. Abidin and Kaye (2023) examine how TikTok went from being a specialized lip-syncing software to a worldwide cultural phenomenon, emphasizing the platform's cutting-edge features and algorithm. However, with expansion comes greater scrutiny as well. In discussing TikTok's handling of geopolitical conflicts, Zeng and Abidin (2023) pay particular attention to data privacy issues in the US and other nations.

Examining TikTok's content moderation procedures, Wang and Wang (2022) observe both advancements and continuous difficulties in handling offensive content. Research has also been done on the platform's response to false information during the COVID-19 epidemic; Basch et al. (2023) examined TikTok's attempts to counteract false health information.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1. Overview of TikTok's platform and user base**

With over 1 billion monthly active users worldwide, TikTok has seen tremendous growth in its user base (Siddiqui et al., 2021). The app's engaging user interface, innovative content production tools, and potent algorithm that tailors material to each user and encourages interaction are what makes it so successful (Al-Maatouk et al., 2020). TikTok is a strong medium for communication and enjoyment because of its large and diversified user base, but it also poses special issues regarding user safety and content management.

The site's fundamental elements, such as its "For You" tab that presents tailored content, have made trends more likely to become viral and attract a wide audience. Users can interact with each other's material using TikTok's "duet" and "stitch" capabilities, which promotes cooperation and engagement but also opens the door to harassment and abuse (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

The app has grown in popularity among various age groups and demographics, although younger consumers find it more appealing (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021). Because younger users are frequently more receptive to social pressure and online influence, this demography makes TikTok an especially vulnerable medium to Online

Misconduct(Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

## **2.2. Data privacy concerns**

TikTok's data privacy policies have been under increased scrutiny since the platform was launched. The amount and kind of user data gathered, how it is used, and whether it is sufficiently protected have all raised concerns (Kang et al., 2021). According to Al-Rahmi et al. (2021), the app allegedly gathers personal data, including browser history, contact information, and location information. These data practices have sparked worries about government monitoring, other security risks, and the possibility of misuse or disclosure of user information to unaffiliated third parties (Al-Adwan et al., 2021).

In addition, TikTok has come under fire for being opaque about its data methods. The app's privacy policy has drawn criticism for being ambiguous and challenging to read, which makes it challenging for users to completely grasp the uses and sharing of their data (Kang et al., 2021). Concerns have also been raised over TikTok's data-sharing policies with the Chinese authorities, especially considering the country's stringent cybersecurity regulations and long monitoring history (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

Notably, the US government has voiced serious concerns regarding TikTok's data policies. Citing national security concerns, the Trump administration attempted to outlaw TikTok in the US in 2020 (Kang et al., 2021). Due to worries about possible data sharing with the Chinese government, the Biden administration kept examining the app (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). The continuous examination of TikTok's data practices emphasizes how crucial it is for social media platforms to be transparent and accountable when collecting and using user data (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

## **2.3. Online misconduct on TikTok**

As allegations of harassment, wrong words and actions, and online abuse increase, The frequency of Online Misconduct on TikTok has been a major cause for worry (Mirza et al., 2020). This is partly because bullies can more easily target and harass people on the platform because of its anonymous nature, which permits users to register accounts without disclosing their genuine identities (Montes et al., 2022). TikTok's algorithms, which seek to customize the user experience, have also been under fire for perhaps endorsing objectionable or damaging content, which could aid in the propagation of Online Misconduct (Aizenkot & Kashy-Rosenbaum, 2021). The elements of TikTok, which are intended to encourage interaction and virality, may also contribute to the proliferation of Online Misconduct. Users can produce new content based on pre-existing videos using the platform's "duet" and "stitch" functionalities. This can be used to harass or make fun of the original author (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Al-Rahmi et al. (2021) state that the "For You" tab on the site, which employs algorithms to suggest content to users, may unintentionally endorse offensive material, subjecting users to Online Misconduct without their knowledge or consent. Because TikTok users are anonymous, offenders can more easily target and harass victims without worrying about consequences (Montes et al., 2022). The "Slap a Teacher" challenge on TikTok in 2021 prompted users to record themselves smacking their teachers, drawing attention to the possibility of negative tendencies developing on the platform (Gabrielli et al., 2021). Online Misconduct occurrences have the potential to spread quickly and reach a large audience due to the platform's vast reach and viral potential, which can exacerbate the suffering inflicted upon victims (Tozzoetal.,2022).

## **3. TikTik's crises management strategies**

### **3.1. Initial responses to data privacy concerns**

TikTok has taken the following actions to allay user fears and satisfy legal requirements in response to

growing concerns about data privacy:

*Updates to privacy policies:* TikTok has revised its privacy statement to increase openness around the gathering and use of user data. This means being clear about the types of data that are collected, why they are collected, and how long they are stored (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Although several privacy advocates have applauded these changes for increasing transparency, others have argued that they do not adequately address concerns over the potential for data abuse (Kang et al., 2021).

*Commitments to data security:* In order to safeguard user data from unwanted access, TikTok has committed to improving data security procedures, including the use of stronger access restrictions and encryption technology (Kang et al., 2021). Al-Rahmi et al. (2021) note that TikTok has been under fire for its previous data security policies and ties to the Chinese government, so these promises have not always been greeted with confidence.

*Engagement with regulators and lawmakers:* TikTok has communicated with legislators and authorities to allay their worries and show that the company is committed to ethical data procedures. This includes helping with inquiries and giving information to the relevant authorities (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Regulators from all around the world are still keeping an eye on TikTok, despite the fact that this involvement has helped to allay some worries (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). These initiatives show TikTok's attempts to lessen the negative effects of data privacy concerns, but more extensive and aggressive steps are required to properly handle this intricate problem (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

### 3.2. Crisis management strategies for online misconduct

TikTok has put in place a number of procedures to deal with instances of Online Misconduct:

*Content moderation policies:* TikTok has implemented content moderation procedures to eliminate detrimental content, such as hate speech, violent content, and Online Misconduct (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). To find and delete offensive information, these regulations rely on both automatic algorithms and human reviewers (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). However, these rules have come under fire for not doing enough to stop the spread of Online Misconduct, especially when it comes to identifying and dealing with more subtly abusive or harassing online behavior (Mikkola et al., 2022). TikTok's attempts to stop Online Misconduct have yielded inconsistent outcomes; some users claim that the app is ineffective in getting rid of offensive material (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

*User reporting mechanisms:* TikTok allows users to report content that they feel goes against community standards, such as Online Misconduct (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Through this feature, users can report content that they deem harmful or objectionable, and the platform has the authority to take appropriate action, such as removing the offending content or suspending the offending person. Though many users feel the site does not sufficiently respond to reported incidents of Online Misconduct, questions still remain over the efficacy of these reporting procedures (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Additionally, the site has been under fire for its lack of openness about its content moderation, making it challenging for users to comprehend how their reports are handled and whether the proper action is being taken (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

*Partnerships with anti-bullying organizations:* In order to help victims of Online Misconduct and encourage appropriate online conduct, TikTok has teamed with anti-bullying organizations (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). These collaborations have the potential to provide user education and support, increase public awareness of Online Misconduct, and create plans to stop such instances in the future (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Nevertheless, these collaborations have come under fire for failing to adequately address the structural problems underlying Online Misconduct on the platform (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). These initiatives show TikTok's attempts to lessen the adverse effects of Online Misconduct, but more thorough and preventive actions are required to deal with this complicated problem in a successful manner (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

## 4. Case study analysis

### 4.1. Effectiveness of TikTok's crisis management strategies

#### 4.1.1. Data privacy

*Evidence of improvement in data practices:* TikTok has improved its data methods, especially in reaction to public outcry and regulatory pressure. Among these are revisions to its privacy policy, which seeks to increase openness regarding the kinds of information gathered and its intended uses (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Additionally, the business has promised to improve data security protocols by implementing stronger access restrictions and encryption technology (Kang et al., 2021).

*Concerns and challenges:* Despite these initiatives, worries regarding TikTok's data privacy policies continue. Concerns regarding possible data sharing and surveillance have persisted due to the company's ties to the Chinese government (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Furthermore, the efficacy of TikTok's data security protocols is still up for discussion. Detractors contend that the company's security procedures are insufficient and that its data-gathering tactics are still intrusive (Kang et al., 2021). Al-Maatouk et al. (2020) have expressed concerns regarding the possibility of misuse and manipulation of user data resulting from TikTok's algorithms that gather copious amounts of data regarding user activity and preferences.

#### 4.1.2. Online misconduct

*Impact of content moderation and reporting measures:* The impact of TikTok's user reporting tools on Online Misconduct has been uneven. Many users claim that the platform does not sufficiently address subtle types of harassment or online abuse, even if the platform has taken steps to delete harmful information, including Online Misconduct (Mikkola et al., 2022). Additionally, the platform's algorithms—which seek to customize the user experience—have come under fire for perhaps endorsing objectionable or damaging information, which could aid in the propagation of Online Misconduct (Aizenkot & Kashy-Rosenbaum, 2021)(Putri et al., 2024).

*Challenges in combating online harassment:* TikTok has much work ahead of them in the fight against Online Misconduct. Because bullies can operate on the platform anonymously, it might be challenging to identify and bring them to justice (Montes et al., 2022). The sheer amount of information created on the network makes it challenging for moderators to stay on top of every instance of Online Misconduct that is reported. Furthermore, once harmful content has surfaced, it may be not easy to contain due to the platform's viral nature and the growing prevalence of Online Misconduct tendencies (Tozzo et al., 2022).

### 4.2. Factors influencing the effectiveness of TikTok's crisis management

#### 4.2.1. Public perception and media attentio

The way that the public views and is covered by the media significantly influences TikTok's crisis management initiatives. Public scrutiny and unfavorable media coverage can harm the platform's brand and erode confidence in its capacity to resolve issues with data privacy and Online Misconduct (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). On the other hand, favorable press coverage and popular opinion can support TikTok's standing and inspire users to have faith in the platform's dedication to security and safety (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

#### 4.2.2. Regulatory pressure and legal challenges

TikTok's attempts to enhance its content moderation and data privacy rules have been motivated mainly by regulatory pressure and legal challenges (Kang et al., 2021). TikTok's strategy for data gathering and sharing has undergone major adjustments as a result of the US government's inspection of the site, specifically (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). TikTok may be encouraged to solve these concerns more proactively if there is a chance of legal action and regulatory fines (Kang et al., 2021).

*Technological limitations and platform dynamics:* Both technological constraints and the intrinsic dynamics of the platform have an impact on how well TikTok manages crises. Misinformation and malicious content might spread due to the platform's algorithms, which are intended to tailor user experience and encourage participation (Al-Maatouk et al., 2020). It can be challenging to efficiently monitor and restrict content due to the platform's viral nature and the quick speed at which content is created (Tozzo et al., 2022).

## **5. Lessons**

### **5.1. Best Practices for Crisis Management in social media**

#### **5.1.1. Proactive measures for data privacy and safety**

According to Al-Rahmi et al. (2021), social media platforms ought to adopt a proactive stance towards data privacy and safety by immediately implementing strong security measures and transparent policies. This entails carrying out routine audits of data security procedures, restricting data collection to required data for the platform's operation, and getting users' explicit consent before gathering and disclosing their personal data (Kang et al., 2021).

#### **5.1.2. Effective content moderation and reporting systems**

Social media companies should develop comprehensive and compelling content moderation systems to detect and remove harmful content, such as hate speech, violent content, and Online Misconduct (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). These systems should be developed utilizing a combination of automated detection technology and human review in order to ensure accuracy and accountability (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Furthermore, platforms should give users clear and accessible reporting mechanisms to report information they believe violates community standards (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

#### **5.1.3. Transparency and communication with users**

Transparency and open communication with users is essential to fostering trust and confidence in a social media platform's crisis management efforts (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Platforms should be open and honest about their data rules, content moderation practices, and efforts to prevent Online Misconduct, claim Al-Rahmi et al. (2021). Furthermore, they must provide users with clear, concise instructions on reporting objectionable information and seeking support (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

#### **5.1.4. Collaboration with stakeholders**

Collaboration among stakeholders, including governmental agencies, law enforcement, advocacy groups, and researchers, is necessary to address the complex concerns of data privacy and Online Misconduct (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Platforms should engage with various stakeholders to develop best practices, share information, and organize initiatives to make the Internet a safer and more responsible environment (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

### **5.2. Challenges and future considerations**

Protecting user privacy while also inventing platforms to fulfill user demand is a tricky balancing act that social media companies must perform (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Privacy concerns arise because new features and technologies frequently necessitate the acquisition of additional data (Kang et al., 2021). Platforms must determine how to be innovative without compromising user privacy or violating data protection laws (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

*Combating misinformation and harmful content:* Social media companies face a big problem spreading false information and dangerous content, such as Online Misconduct (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Platforms must devise tactics to detect and eliminate such content while endorsing precise and dependable data (Al-Rahmi et al.,

2021). Practical content moderation guidelines, cooperation with fact-checking groups, and initiatives to warn users about the dangers of false information are just a few of the strategies needed to address this (Al-Rahmi et al., 2021).

*Navigating evolving regulatory landscapes:* The legal landscape surrounding social media is ever-evolving due to the ongoing adoption of new laws and guidelines to address difficulties with data privacy, content moderation, and other concerns (Kang et al., 2021). According to Al-Rahmi et al. (2021), platforms must possess flexibility and agility to stay up-to-date with these advancements and ensure that the necessary protections are in place to comply with evolving legal mandates.

## 6. Conclusion

Handling TikTok's data privacy and Online Misconduct crises has proven to be an intricate and challenging undertaking. The business has implemented several methods to address these problems, but there are still many obstacles to overcome. The present case study underscores the significance of adopting a preemptive stance toward data privacy and Online Misconduct, creating efficient systems for content moderation, advocating for transparency and user education, and cultivating cooperation with relevant parties.

Prioritizing user security and welfare is crucial for businesses as social media platforms expand and change. This calls for a dedication to moral data collection procedures, strict content filtering guidelines, and preemptive steps against Online Misconduct. It also calls for constant collaboration with policymakers, researchers, advocacy organizations, and regulators to create best practices and guarantee everybody a responsible and safe online environment.

## References

- [1] Abidin, C., & Kaye, D. B. V. (2023). TikTok and the Culture of Digital Participatory Media. *International Journal of Communication*, 17, 23.
- [2] Putri, N., Prasetya, Y., Handayani, P. W., & Fitriani, H. (2024). TikTok Shop: How trust and privacy influence generation Z's purchasing behaviors. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2292759.
- [3] Diawara, L., Nie, L. L., Huang, H., & Thierno, M. M. (2023). TIKTOK, A TICKING POLITICAL TIMEBOMB?. *Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 2023(22), 1-15.
- [4] Statista. (2023). Number of monthly active users of TikTok worldwide from January 2018 to February 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1267892/tiktok-global-mau/>.
- [5] YUAN, P. P., & LIU, W. W. (2023). The Study of Cyber-bullying from the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis: A Case Study of Tik Tok Comment Area Language. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 13(2), 82-88.
- [6] Zeng, J., & Abidin, C. (2023). '# OkBoomer, time to meet the Zoomers': Studying the memefication of intergenerational politics on TikTok. In *The Playful Politics of Memes* (pp. 93-115). Routledge.
- [7] Al-Adwan, A. S., Albelbisi, N. A., Hujran, O., Al-Rahmi, W. M., & Alkhalifah, A. (2021). Developing a holistic success model for sustainable e-learning: A structural equation modeling approach. *Sustainability*, 13(16), 9453.
- [8] Al-Rahmi, W. M., Shamsuddin, A., Alturki, U., Aldraiweesh, A., Yusof, F. M., Al-Rahmi, W. M., et al. (2021). The influence of information system success and technology acceptance model on social media factors in education. *Sustainability*, 13(14), 7770.
- [9] Al-Rahmi, W. M., Alzahrani, A. I., Yahaya, N., Alalwan, N., & Kamin, Y. B. (2020). Digital communication: Information and communication technology (ICT) usage for education sustainability. *Sustainability*, 12(12), 5052.
- [10] Al-Rahmi, W. M., Yahaya, N., Alamri, M. M., Alyoussef, I. Y., Al-Rahmi, A. M., & Kamin, Y. B. (2021).

Integrating innovation diffusion theory with technology acceptance model: Supporting students' attitude towards using a massive open online courses (MOOCs) systems. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 29(8), 1380-1392.

- [11] Aizenkot, D., & Kashy-Rosenbaum, G. (2021). Cyberbullying victimization in WhatsApp classmate groups among Israeli elementary, middle, and high school students. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 36(15-16), NP8498--NP8519.
- [12] Kang, K. I., Kang, K., & Kim, C. (2021). Risk factors influencing cyberbullying perpetration among middle school students in Korea: Analysis using the zero-inflated negative binomial regression model. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(5), 2224.
- [13] Mikkola, M., Ellonen, N., Kaakinen, M., Savolainen, I., Sirola, A., Zych, I., et al. (2022). Cyberharassment victimization on three continents: An integrative approach. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(19), 12138.
- [14] Montes, Á., Sanmarco, J., Novo, M., Cea, B., & Arce, R. (2022). Estimating the psychological harm consequence of bullying victimization: A meta-analytic review for forensic.