

## Erasmus Mobility November 2024 - Zuckmayer School, Berlin

### Workshop: Social Media Skills - How does the TikTok algorithm work?

#### Objective:

TikTok is the most frequently used app among Generation Z. Over 76% of this generation uses the app, with a global user base of 2 billion. As such, it is also the most used app among our students.

The app was originally introduced in China in 2016 under the name Douyin and gained international recognition in 2017 as TikTok. What makes TikTok unique compared to other well-known social media platforms like Instagram or Twitter is the short video format, typically between 15 and 60 seconds. This encourages users to watch as many videos as possible. Over time, the content on TikTok has evolved. Initially, TikTok was primarily known for dance and lip-syncing challenges, which are still present. However, the spread of fake news and hateful content on the platform has been increasing. This is partly due to the app's closely guarded algorithm. Unlike Instagram or similar platforms, any TikTok user can appear on the For-You-Page (FYP). TikTok thus often promotes new content creators (people who upload videos to the platform) without any verification. The FYP is the main interface of the app, where users are shown content recommended by an AI. This content is no longer based on people you follow or their fame, as with Instagram, but rather on topics. As a result, fake news can quickly spread since the AI suggests similar content to users. Without critical evaluation, users may assume a "sense of authenticity" as certain content appears repeatedly.

On one hand, TikTok offers a creative way to connect globally with a large community by participating in dance challenges or similar trends. TikTok also has the most users from the queer community, who freely discuss topics of sexuality and identity, contributing to broader acceptance and a more positive view of these subjects.

At the same time, efforts by the U.S. to ban the app entirely reflect concerns that the app may disregard European and international surveillance regulations. In the U.S. and Germany, the app is banned on government or military service devices due to fears of connections to the CCP (the Chinese Communist Party). Additionally, as mentioned, the app's algorithm can present fake news as truths. Content that some users view positively may be seen negatively by others, leading to an increase in eating disorders and other mental health issues.

Thus, it's challenging to take a clear stance on the app, as there are both positive and negative aspects for Generation Z and society as a whole. However it is important that students understand that their FYP can be tailored to their own needs and interests. To achieve this students have to learn a critical understanding of the app's AI and how it uses each movement and interaction on the app itself. **Today's lesson will do exactly this, in a playful manner the students will use their prior knowledge to express their knowledge about TikTok's AI. In a second phase the students will use that knowledge to draw conclusions for their personal use of the app.**

**Note:** As the term “social networking skills” as used in the application for this Erasmus+ project is not a term used in the English-speaking world, I took the liberty to interpret what I believe was a German translation mistake. The students, as outlined in the application, will still understand how their behaviour on social media platforms, like TikTok, is used to present content to them. Students need to understand their data privacy and how to make sure that they are - at least superficially - in control of how they want to share their data online. Most social media platforms no longer work predominantly via chat functions (e.g. older platforms like Facebook) but use a multi-modal approach of “networking”.

<b>warm-up</b>	students fill in a mentimeter cloud to share their feelings/association about TikTok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students get introduced to today's topic</li> <li>- using a digital word cloud</li> </ul>
Phase I <b>opener</b> think-pair-share	Individually students think about their use of TikTok, share this with their partner(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students get activated to speak English and share personal information with each other</li> <li>- teacher only listens in</li> <li>- as the students might share personal details it should remain private</li> </ul>
<b>Working</b> group work	students will play an analog game about TikTok's For-You-Page (see attached materials= They'll use symbols to show how they think the TikTok algorithm works slides on the board will indicate each phase of the game and how to use the symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students use their prior knowledge and guess (there is no right or wrong)</li> <li>- teacher only helps out and clarifies</li> </ul>
<b>Sharing</b> classroom/groups	The teacher will go around and take pictures of the final playing fields. These will be shown on the board Each group will explain their playing strategy and reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students explain their reasoning</li> </ul>
Phase II <b>transfer</b>	Is there a formula to explain the TikTok algorithm?	
<b>opener</b> group work	Why is it important for the students to understand the algorithms on social media platforms? Is there content you wish you didn't see on your FYP?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students share their opinions</li> <li>- if students want to share it with the classroom they may do so</li> </ul>

	What can you do to change your FYP?	- students should brainstorm, using their knowledge from the game, how they could make their FYP truly theirs
<b>working</b> watching a video	While watching a three-minute long video, the students should name at least three things they can do to change their FYP content	
<b>Personal feedback</b>	Using mentimeter, is there anything the students would change about their personal use of TikTok after today's class?	- the students will use a digital feedback platform to express their personal opinion about today's lesson