

Why Banning TikTok Is a Good Idea

By Dr. Ella Painter

This is an opinion column.

In recent months, the movement to ban TikTok at federal and state levels has gained momentum as security concerns mount. The popular social media app's ties to China, and the sensitive information it collects about its users have raised suspicions within American politicians. Last week, a House committee voted to allow legislation that would remove obstacles from president Joe Biden's path to banning the app in the United States. Additionally, in December, Biden signed a bill preventing federal employees from using the application on government devices.

Similar decisions have been made at the university level as well. In January, Auburn University's decision to ban TikTok on campus Wi-Fi networks developed after Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey's approval of new legislation blocking the use of the app on state networks and devices.

Although many Alabamian TikTok users were disappointed, it is for the best.

For example, many college students report that TikTok's fashion videos have led them to feel the need to buy more and more clothing to fit in and remain fashionable. However, this endless cycle does not have an end in sight as every week there is a new trend or product that influencers promote as the latest and coolest thing. With discussions about the importance of sustainability and the increasing urgency of our planet's global warming crisis, the application's encouragement for users to constantly consume is not helping the situation. And it's hurting people's wallets.

Furthermore, not only does TikTok promote overconsumption, it also shortens attention spans and decreases the brain's capacity for critical thinking. Upon opening the app, TikTok users are bombarded by fifteen second videos of teenagers dancing to a catchy song, showing off their new clothing hauls or telling a captivating story. These short, riveting snippets make TikTokers crave more entertainment, and what feels like a five minute break from homework can quickly snowball into an hour-long hiatus. Additionally, TikTok's clever algorithm, which studies the kinds of videos users engage with, allows the app to keep people captivated by feeding them similar posts. In direct correlation with this is users' attention spans. For example, many young adults have reported the inability to finish a 20 minute TV show episode without pausing it to watch TikTok.

However, China seems quite aware of the potential addictiveness of the social media app as its parent company, ByteDance, has placed strict limits on how much time Chinese users can spend

on the app. As of this month, Chinese users between the ages of 13 and 18 may not use the app for more than 60 minutes a day.

Overall, the United States must quickly realize that this app has a multitude of negative attributes. Banning TikTok would be an excellent decision from both a national security and citizen interest standpoint as it would protect Americans' private information and get them away from their screens.

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