

Assessing the impact and effectiveness of the TikTok 2022 creator safety videos

Briefing paper



Executive Summary

In 2022, TikTok worked with video creators in 13 countries around the world to commission a series of informative videos to help their community understand online challenges, and decide whether they'd like to engage with a challenge. This is referred to as the 'STOP THINK DECIDE ACT' creator video campaign.

To ensure the important message in each video reached their intended target audience, TikTok then served these videos in the For You feeds of all accounts belonging to under 18s. You can find a selection videos here:

Video 1

Younes Zarou
Germany



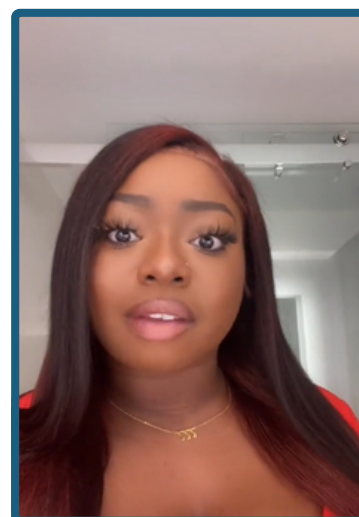
Video 2

Demi Skinner
Australia



Video 3

Therealtati
USA



To understand the effectiveness and impact of these videos and to support with the design of youth safety solutions which resonate with young people, TikTok commissioned Praesidio to conduct a global research project, in which the quantitative and qualitative research design was developed by a panel of experts, including a Child Psychiatrist and Prevention Scientist.

The research has included a large global survey conducted in 11 markets (Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, the UAE, the UK, and the US) and detailed qualitative research in 6 markets (Brazil, France, Indonesia, the UAE, the UK, and the US). The research was targeted at teens between the ages of 13-17 years and has been led by their voices, opinions, and feedback.

We discovered that the creator safety video campaign successfully appealed to and engaged teens with evidence of impact in encouraging teens to think differently about risks. We believe that this has exciting implications, as it indicates the potential for short form video to reach a range of teens with protective information and advice that may help them better assess risk and interpret content.

A key finding, and inherent trade-off for online education campaigns, is that it is easy to create engaging and enjoyable online content, but harder to ensure the content effects behavioural change – i.e. achieving the outcome where teens indicate they would be less likely to copy a challenge having watched the videos.

This report presents key findings from the research, discussing:

- The effectiveness and impact of the online education campaign.
- Suggestions for how future projects could be replicated.
- What efforts could be made to refine and maximise future online education campaigns of this nature.



Background to the project



TikTok believes that creative and joyful experiences start with feeling safe, allowing people to make the most out of watching content and connecting with others. To foster a safe environment for its community, and especially teens who use TikTok, in 2021 TikTok launched a global project to better understand young people's engagement with potentially harmful challenges and hoaxes.

As part of this project, TikTok partnered with Dr. Richard Graham, a clinical child psychiatrist specialising in healthy adolescent development, and Dr. Gretchen Brion-Meisels, a behavioural scientist specialising in risk prevention in adolescence to develop a four-step process for engaging with potentially harmful online challenges and hoaxes. The STOP, THINK, DECIDE and ACT process asks people to pause for a moment to think about what they've seen, how it made them feel and how they want to respond.

Additionally, TikTok worked with content creators who have a large following on the platform, in 13 countries around the world to promote the four step process. Through videos delivered in the unique style of each content creator, community members were asked to use the four-step process when they came across an online challenge.

To ensure the important message in each video reached their intended target audience, TikTok then served these videos in the For You feeds of all accounts belonging to under 18s in the countries where these creators were based.

To help them understand the impact of this large-scale global safety campaign, TikTok has commissioned Praesidio to discover:

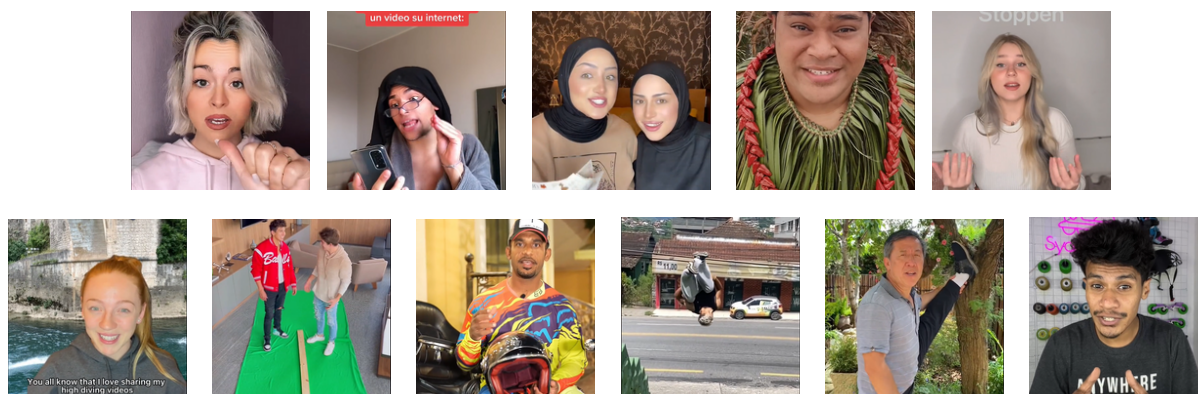
- What kind of safety videos are most likely to appeal to young people?
- What is the formula for an engaging safety video campaign?
- Whether a call to action such as STOP, THINK, DECIDE, ACT encourages young people to make positive decisions on platforms?
- When developing safety video campaigns, how can TikTok guide its creator community to make the most effective safety content possible?



Methodology

Global survey

Our quantitative research included a global survey of 5,616 teens between the ages of 13 and 17. The survey was programmed in 11 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, the UAE, the UK, and the US. There were more than 500 respondents from each country except the UAE which had 437 respondents. Three videos were produced for each country (two in Canada). Survey participants were shown the videos produced specifically for their country in each of the 11 countries.



- The survey screened teens to ensure they were social media users, with access to a smartphone and/or computer. It included attention checks and other quality controls.
- Survey participants were asked 12 questions after each video and the survey took them 13 minutes on average to complete. It was in the field between December 9, 2022, and January 9, 2023.
- The survey sought to discover how teens responded to the videos, what they liked and disliked and whether the videos would affect their behaviour or response to the challenges they see online.
- As part of our quantitative data analysis, we also coded each of the videos for key features so that we could compare the successful features of different videos across the whole dataset. Key features included length, creator follower number, the use of humour, the demonstration of skills, music, or entertaining visual content.

Focus groups

Following our survey, we undertook qualitative research in the form of focus groups with teens aged 13-17 in Brazil, France, Indonesia, the UAE, the UK, and the US to discuss and explore the creator safety videos in detail. These groups were split by age into groups of 13–15-year-olds and 16–17-year-olds.

These sessions allowed for teens to share their views on the videos that had been produced for their market in free open discussion with the researchers. They were given the opportunity to explain what they thought of each of the videos in terms of what they liked and disliked. We also asked them if they thought the videos would be effective in promoting critical thinking about risk and positive behaviour change. We invited them to contribute any ideas they had about ways to make future safety videos as effective as possible.

The research undertaken was informed by a robust safeguarding policy and ethical review process. In conducting the research, we sought informed consent from the teens and their parents in advance, and worked to ensure that the teens engaging with us were comfortable with the nature of the content in advance (whilst also ensuring that any teen could access support at any point during the sessions). In addition, we agreed additional processes for support and for reporting with our in-country partners in the event that any child became distressed or disclosed abuse, or where we were concerned that they might be at risk and wanted to follow up. Planning for safety and wellbeing was integral to the research approach and session design and work with the safety partners in each country.



Key Insights

Campaign success

Our research found that, overall, the creator safety videos were successful in appealing to and engaging with their target audience and in influencing behaviour in a positive direction.

Our quantitative data found:

- Over half of teen responses indicated that they would be less likely to copy a challenge after watching a video
- More than one third said they would share the video with friends
- Almost three quarters said they would recommend the videos they saw for schools to use to educate their students and help them to stay safe online. These findings of successful appeal and influence were also reflected in the focus group data.



Authenticity and creator voice

The teens we spoke to in our qualitative data were familiar with TikTok and it was striking how strongly they felt about the importance of the authenticity of a TikTok as a key part of how they respond and react to content. The videos worked best where the messaging seemed to fit creators' 'authentic voice' and creators could convey their ideas without being patronising, wooden, or looking like they had been paid to do so. All groups disliked that the videos were labelled as 'ads' in their feed as this automatically made them feel commercial and less authentic.

"I think because of her genuine feeling...a lot of people would like to listen." (Girl, aged 14 UAE)

Key to the popularity of videos was the tone, style, and personal appeal of the creator to the audience. Perhaps unsurprisingly those creators with the very highest follower numbers got the best feedback for their videos. The quantitative data suggests that this is likely to be because these creators produced appealing videos rather than because respondents were familiar with them and already knew who they were. Interestingly, there was no direct correlation between follower numbers and video appeal at the under 10 million follower level.

The strength of feeling around the importance of authenticity has implications for future creator campaigns. It may be useful to target creator recruitment towards creators within the community that:

- have experience themselves of the issues addressed in the videos;
- who might be said to be 'experts by experience';
- or who have the ability to explore and deliver the message in an empathetic, engaging, and effective way which shows that they care about it.

"I do not reshare prevention videos, I prefer to reshare people who testify about what they have experienced." (Girl, aged 13 France)

Promising models of engagement

It was clear from both the quantitative and qualitative data that teens appreciate videos that have engaging content. This could include different visual approaches, images, and video editing, displaying stunts or skills, use of humour or dialogues, and stories or accounts related in an engaging way. Some teens appreciated the professional skills of some of the creators whereas others simply preferred relatability – creators doing everyday things and sharing the message in an engaging or humorous way.

Humour and storytelling

Directing creators to avoid demonstrating stunts that might be risky could make it harder for some to get their message across in an engaging and appealing way. However, the data suggested the effectiveness of some alternative strategies, such as humour. Both sets of data suggest humour can be polarising for audiences; it was one of the most appealing aspects for some audiences but could also be a dislike for some audiences with a potential to detract from the message. However, the quantitative data shows that videos that used humour outperformed all others on the key metrics, and in discussion it was for many teens the key deciding factor in whether they would watch. If we accept that some teens will simply scroll past if the humour does not work for them, and that not all videos will be effective for all teens, this seems like a useful strategy to use.

“She [therealtati] seemed more genuine compared to the other two... [she] actually seemed like she would know people who would try to attempt these challenges, like she’s an everyday person, like the everyday person that would be like, ‘Oh, I see this TikTok, maybe I’m going to go and try out this thing.’ Then she’s actually just gone and put some comedy into it so that it doesn’t seem like it’s from school.”
(Girl, aged 17 USA)

Other interesting strategies that teens themselves identified as liking included personal story telling and connection with real experiences - a number of the teens talked about the #Storytime TikToks and shared that some of these had been a vehicle to make them think and reflect on new issues. Relatability and the telling of personal stories tend to have strong appeal with teens according to the qualitative data.

STOP THINK DECIDE ACT

The STOP THINK DECIDE ACT (STDA) call to action fared well in the quantitative data, which suggests that overall, the teens appreciated the core message of the videos. However, not all the focus groups responded positively, and the message was felt to work better in some videos - (where the ‘STDA’ message was explained and presented more naturally) - than others where it was felt to be bolted on at the end and the video felt scripted. It appears from what we heard from teens that it is the effectiveness of the creator in delivering the ‘STDA’ message that is critical to the overall success and appeal of the message.

“In my opinion, STDA is the right thing to do...and we should think about whether the risk is high or not.” (Girl, aged 13 Indonesia)

Age, developmental differences and consequences

The quantitative data indicates an overall risk reduction effect of videos of the teenage population, with nuanced effectiveness among specific groups. Specifically, younger teens, characterised by heightened susceptibility to sensation seeking and risk-taking behaviours, may exhibit reduced responsiveness to prevention messages. Moreover, while inconclusive, there exists the potential for certain videos to amplify excitement about risks among a subset of 13–14-year-old boys predisposed to risk-taking tendencies.

In talking to the teens about risk reduction, many were unsure about the impact the videos would have. The teens we spoke to suggested making videos that explained some of the negative impacts in a more direct and personal way and in doing so made challenges seem less glamorous and fun. They had a range of ideas for how they felt the negative consequences could be explained through stories and visuals that shared experiences with a non-sensational but authentic approach. Some of these included ideas such as creators sharing their accounts of harm or emotional impact through storytelling (not through showing an actual challenge going wrong), but by explaining how and why they had made the decisions they had and what they would now do differently.

The different age-based responses to risk suggests it may be worth exploring different content and approaches for different age groups and targeting content more specifically. The younger groups may benefit from clearer messaging on risk and consequence to address the potential excitement of watching stunts and the overconfidence of early adolescence, whereas it may be that older teens can absorb messaging that is subtler and less direct.



Recommendations for using short form video for safety campaigns

Our data found that there is no one clear format that is appreciated by all teens and which makes creator videos effective, and teens often expressed different preferences and tastes. However, there are some useful findings and recommendations for any platform or agency seeking to run a creator safety campaign.

- Future campaigns should seek to replicate the many successes of the 2022 TikTok creator video campaign in relation to achieving strong appeal and likeability for the videos and evidence that the campaign challenged teens to think differently about content.
- The research clearly found that appealing videos had energy, were engaging and felt authentic to their audience. One of the clearest findings concerned the relationship between the creator, the message and whether videos felt authentic and truly like other content on the platform.
- Online platforms should build on their experience of finding and working with creators who are able to convey the messaging in a way that reflects their own distinct voice and experience, and which come across as empathetic and genuine. Our findings suggest that working with those with lived experience of the campaign issues within the creator community will lead to an authentic and well received piece of content.
- Whilst ensuring compliance with applicable legislation, platforms should find innovative ways to deliver content to teens without it being labelled as an advert or paid content. All groups felt that videos labelled as adverts felt less authentic than regular platform content.
- For future campaigns, it's important to focus on visually engaging content, incorporating humour, relatable creators, authoritative figures, and engaging stories or personal experiences. Where future creator videos do demonstrate skills or stunts, this content should be assessed to determine if young people could attempt to replicate it and the risks this might pose. This will not only maintain effective engagement but also ensure that the excitement doesn't overshadow the campaign's message about the potential dangers of imitating such activities.

- The findings around the call to action are mixed, with many teens feeling very positively about the message while others clearly find that in some of the videos it feels too wooden or scripted. The qualitative findings suggest that there may be benefit in allowing creators scope to evolve this message to express it in a more organic way (without using the strapline) if they feel this makes the message work better. The effectiveness of the performance by the creators and what they do with the message overall appears critical to success.
- The quantitative data showed that creators with the highest follower numbers (over 10 million) made the most successful videos. The data suggests that this is more likely to relate to their skills in making content than the influence of the creator being well known. However, there is evidence from the qualitative data that some teens were more likely to listen to a creator who was well known or famous and that this could be a useful strategy to reach some teens.
- The data showed that creators do not need to worry about length or taking longer to deliver messages if the method of delivery is effective and engaging.
- In future campaigns it would be useful to test videos that focus on potential negative consequences of risky challenges where this can be delivered in a way that is matter of fact, authentic, and honest. This would not include scare tactics but convey that some activities, stunts, or challenges are not achievable without a significant risk of harm (especially without training and support). Introducing a more open explanation of consequences was uniformly suggested by teens themselves.
- In future campaigns it would be useful to test different styles of content with early or late teens based on their different propensity to take risks and the different ways they respond to content.
- A core message from our qualitative data is that one of the reasons the TikTok platform is loved by teens lies in the fact that it is a natural, raw, unscripted, and spontaneous space. To maximise the success of future safety video campaigns platforms should seek to commission creators that make content that feels true to them and their platform, and which shares the authenticity that teens respond to. These videos appear to be effective at least in part because they do not feel like the kind of safety message that teens would receive in a school setting.

