Notes on TikTok

- First thing it asked me was for my interested
    - Gear content towards my interests
- Visual cues such as swiping up

Goal on this application: learn how to find specific Tiktoks and create a TikTok video

Initial browsing phase:

Following vs For you tabs?
- Following lets you follow specific people and content creators
- For you tabs is mostly recs based on interests
    - Swiping right on video shows user's profile but there's a spinning circle with user's avatar to go on profile page too
- No left swiping option?
    - Have to manually click following to go from 'for you' to 'following' page

Discover
- Can search for specific TikToks
    - E.g. searched sports shows top, user, videos, sounds(?), hashtags
- Hashtags that are trending

Creating a TikTok phase:

- Click plus button
- Asks for permission
- Initial screen shows
    1. 60s
    2. 15s (*Trying this for initial notes*)
        a. Can hold or click red recording circle
            i. When I let go, stops recording or if I click and it turns from square back to circle
            ii. Couldn't tell how much I recorded until I saw thin blue progress bar at top
        b. Small arrow with x in the middle
            i. For deleting last segment (last point where you clicked red circle to record to when you clicked stop)
        c. Bigger 'X' at the top left
            i. Reshoot or exit out of currently recorded video

      d. Other features on right side
- i. Flip camera, speed up video, beauty (?), filters, timer, flash
  1. What's the difference between filters and effects on TikTok? (filter option at bottom left confusing)

      e. Red check mark at bottom right to go to next page
- i. Click it and replays video you record
- ii. Still giving me options like filters, effects
- iii. NEW: sounds, text, stickers, and voice over features show up now
- iv. Clicked next and takes me to final post page
  1. Asking to describe video like IG posts
  2. Who can view, comment, share, etc.
  3. Post or draft option

3. Photo templates
      a. 10 options to decide from e.g. film, photo flow, etc.

Feature: Adding effects to a recorded video

Summary: When I add an effect, it does not show me the specific event unless I am on the tab of the effect I added.

Heuristic: #6 - Recognition and recall

Severity: 3 (high)

Description:

      I recorded a 15 second video and wanted to edit the video by adding some effects to it. Before even editing any part of the video, there is a video preview bar that horizontally runs across the screen (similar to when you watch a video in your iPhone gallery). The effects that are available include visuals (neon colored screen), effects (warping the screen), transitions (fading in and out), splitting the screen, and time. First, I implemented a visual effect by holding down the effect I wanted for a given amount of time in the video; on the video preview bar, it showed how much of the video would have this new visual. Next, I switched over to the transition tab, but when I switched over, the visual that I had added did not show up in the video preview bar. Therefore, I replayed the video to make sure the visual was still there and the visual did play as I had intended when I added it. To furthermore test out this issue, I switched to the split tab added a 'split' effect and held down the effect to add for a specific time period. When I switched back to the visual tab, the 'split' effects now disappeared from the video preview bar again just like before. Once again, I replayed the video to see if the split and transition effects I had added before were still implemented in the video. They were implemented as expected but due to the lack of visible actions, I had to keep bouncing back and forth between the tabs to remember which ones I had added. My only other option was to keep replaying the video to remember what effects I had added at what points.

Possible Fix:

One fix to this issue is to just have one overall video preview bar that shows all different types of effects added over the span of the video instead of having a new preview everytime you click a new tab. If there are time periods where several effects overlap each other, the user could simply click that time frame and it would show you the different effects that are currently in play. This will reduce the user's need to recall what they had added and allow them to actively work on fine tuning the video instead of having to go back and forth trying to remember what effects were added.

Feature: Time bar and individual video frames when recording the video

Summary: When recording the video, the time elapsed for recording is shown at the top of the screen but the bar is very thin. Also, as explained before, releasing the button stops recording but you cannot see the last frame you recorded individually.

Heuristic: #1 - Visibility of system status

Severity: 2 (medium)

Description:

When I initially record a video, I click the red circle on the bottom of the screen to begin recording. The time progress bar for how much I have recorded is at the top of the screen but it can be very faint to see at first. Also, having the recording button and the time progress bar on opposite ends of the screen makes it hard to keep track of the system status. Another issue when recording the video is that when you press to start recording and then release the button, a small vertical white line shows up in the time progress bar indicating where the last video frame started and ended. While this is helpful to see, you cannot actually see the last recorded frame; it only lets you delete the last segment you recorded. This is problematic because I can only delete the previous segment and the frames before the currently recorded one are not even visible. This lack of information makes it difficult for the user to know whether to continue recording or not because the previous video frame is not what they envisioned, they should not waste time continuing.

Possible Fix:

An ideal fix for this issue would be to have appropriate user feedback that lets them know what is going on in the system at all times. Similar to Snapchat and Instagram, when you record a video, the 'time progress bar' is boldly outlining the recording button going in a clockwise direction indicating how much has been recorded. This will help prevent the user from wandering around on the screen trying to understand what is happening within the system. For being able to see the previous frames, the best solution would be to simply have each video segment pop up as a small frame (similar to Snapchat when you record past 15 seconds - every 15 secs, a new frame appears separately at the bottom of the screen). This will keep users informed of the current status of their video to see whether they are on the right track to create the video they would like.

Feature: Navigation within the application, specifically, the homescreen

Summary: On the majority of the different screens, there are a lot of different things taking place e.g. video playing, music playing and name of song scrolling horizontally across the screen like a banner, profile avatar spinning in a circle, etc.

Heuristic: #8 - Aesthetic and minimalist design

Severity: 2 (medium)

Description:

When I first opened the app, there were a lot of different actions taking place. For example, on the home screen, there is a TikTok video playing with a moving banner at the bottom of the screen going from right to left. Next to that moving word banner is a rotating profile picture of the person who created the video. The 'like video' button, 'comment' button, and 'share' button are also on the right side of the screen which I am not used to because other apps such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter where these options are right below the original post. I think the placement of the buttons makes it very chaotic to look at the screen because there is no hierarchy. The user is constantly scanning different parts of the screen which gives it an overwhelming feel within the design.On other screens, there is a lot of repetition which causes the screen to become clustered. When you record a video, the screen shows many options such as effect, filters, text, etc. Again, the 'effects' option is at the bottom left part of the screen while all the other options are on the top right hand side of the screen. When you proceed to the next step of editing the video, the same options once again appear but in different spots. As a user, I have to again look at different parts of the screen for something that should be more trivial. The app itself is still usable but the overwhelming amount of information being thrown at you from the initial screen can scare off some users.

Possible Fix:

While the aesthetics of the app are pleasing, it definitely could use minimalist design. Specifically, there should be some sort of hierarchy where you are scanning the screen up to down instead of up, down, left and, right. One way to do this is to adapt a layout similar to Instagram where the video post is at the top/middle of the screen and all the other options like comment, share, like are below it. Also, the moving banner at the bottom of the screen should stay still to get rid of unnecessary distractions. Finally, for the editing portion of the videos, the location of the different effect features should stay in the same locations. This will give the app a consistent aesthetic.

Final Report

      Since TikTok has been trending over the past several months, I decided to check out what makes this app so special compared to previous iterations of it. My first impression of this system was that there were a lot of different things going on at once and it required some knowledge of other apps on the market e.g. swiping up to see the next video in order to quickly adapt to the TikTok system. From a thematic standpoint, I felt that this application was designed mainly for users with short attention spans because of how quickly you could access new content. The content itself was also not very dense which made it easier to get a user into viewing more new content.

      One system usability problem that I noticed throughout the application was the sheer amount of options a user has when creating a video. From the variety of effects to transitions to screen splits, it felt very overwhelming as a new user. As mentioned in the UARs, if you are giving the user so many options for editing a video, there should be an equivalent amount of feedback too which the system lacked. As a new user, I think feedback was the poorest aspect of the whole application. With poor feedback, the learning curve also becomes a little more difficult and users with a lack of patience may not want to use the system anymore. There were also subtle inconsistencies; you could swipe right on the homepage to see the user profile of the current video but swiping left did nothing when you are on the homepage. Having a left swipe could have given a natural mapping to switch between the "For You" tab to the "Following" tab.

      Systematically. the biggest change I would make is to reduce the number of actions available on every screen. This would allow users to focus on one task at a time and allow them create more meaningful content or more meaningful engagement with other users. As for the additional features such as the editing options, there needs to be better visual feedback. Going back to the theme of short attention span users, the visual feedback will help them stay on track when creating a video. Lastly, having a short walkthrough of the system when you first use it would be very helpful. For example, TikTok should have a user create a video through a walkthrough so that there are no surprises later on because they will be familiar with the system.

      Overall, the heuristic evaluation was very interesting because it forced me to pay attention to small nuances that are often overlooked. It was definitely useful in terms of helping me understand how to better design a product to avoid similar issues I faced in the TikTok system. I did not have an expectation of finding a high or low number of heuristic violations but it was eye opening to see the same heuristic violations pop in several different aspects of the system. The ten heuristics that were provided also covered the majority of the problems I would notice in an application. Having more detailed heuristics would not have changed my results and I feel that more heuristics would become overkill when analyzing a system. It could possibly lead to more false positives which will then lead to unnecessary fixes. I also think more heuristics would make it harder for me to analyze the larger problems because I would be so focused on smaller issues that do not truly impact the system on a higher level.