

CS/Analytics Breakout Assignment 3  
To be done only by CS and Analytics majors  
Due: Oct. 4

In our discussions on privacy, I mentioned that TikTok harvests massive amounts of information from the videos that are uploaded to it. This has been flagged as a potential national security issue by the US government (because TikTok is a Chinese company and it is assumed/known that all Chinese companies must comply with Chinese government dictates, including sharing data they collect) and has been given a deadline of Jan. 19, 2025 to either sell itself to a non-Chinese owner or be shut down within the US.

For this assignment you are to find two different articles and summarize them. One article should be on what kinds of information TikTok is believed to be collecting from uploaded videos. The second article should be about why the US government has given this ultimatum to TikTok. You must provide summaries, links to the referenced articles and then your own comments as to what you think of this action.

I expect this assignment to be 1-2 pages long and reference 2 articles total.

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TikTok is known to collect massive levels of data from its users and the videos that have been uploaded to the platform. As a result, large concerns over data privacy and security have arisen, due to TikTok's parent company being Chinese owned and operating in non-Chinese regions of the world. Due to the lack of policy within China around user data and its transmission individuals have been concerned about where their data may be going. Furthermore, the US has given the platform only a few more months to operate in their borders, at which point if they have not sold to a US based company, they will be shut down.

Unfortunately many people do not often take the time to read a software product's Privacy Policy or Terms of Service, to see what data is being collected from them, as they are often long winded and hard to understand. In the case of TikTok, its users need to input some data at account creation that is typically collected by most software products, this includes things like name, email, phone number, and age. However, the app also collects additional information such as the messages you send to others on the app, your purchase information such as card numbers and addresses, as well as with permission your phone contacts (Jeunesse). TikTok also automatically collects a plethora of other information. Most notably this includes things like "keystroke patterns and rhythms, IP address, mobile carrier, time zone settings, and/or model of your device and operating system." (Jeunesse). Most notably TikTok will also save any uploaded content to the platform regardless of whether or not the content was saved and published. As per the *TikTok Privacy Policy* it states this is done through "pre-loading", resulting in any uploaded content to be in the possession of TikTok indefinitely no matter if the content was actually used.

In recent news the US government has taken legal action against TikTok calling for it to be sold or inevitably banned in the US market. The reason for this is largely to do with the parent company of TikTok, ByteDance, a Chinese based company. Most notably the US government "pointed to laws that allow the Chinese government to secretly demand data from Chinese companies and citizens for intelligence-gathering operations" (Maheshwari). This would allow the Chinese government to utilize TikTok as a large data surveillance operation toward the US and could also potentially control the content being distributed to US users of the app. Additionally, according to the *TikTok Privacy Policy*, they analyze the surrounding area of uploaded videos as part of the algorithm that pushes content to users. This data could be further used by the Chinese government as a form of video surveillance of the US.

To conclude, the data that TikTok collects from its users, and the content uploaded by users, could prove to be a major security breach if given to the wrong individuals. As a result of all this data collection, and closeness to the Chinese government, the US has brought forth the case against TikTok to either sell to a US based company, or be banned within the country. Lastly, I believe it makes sense for the US to put this ultimatum in motion to protect the safety of its country and citizens from foreign governments.

## References

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