TikTok is financing polarization in Europe and elsewhere

Some are making big money after realizing TikTok's algorithm boosts accounts that feature highly emotional political disinformation. After growing their follower count with AI-generated content, they sell the accounts or get paid directly by the platform through its 'creator rewards' program
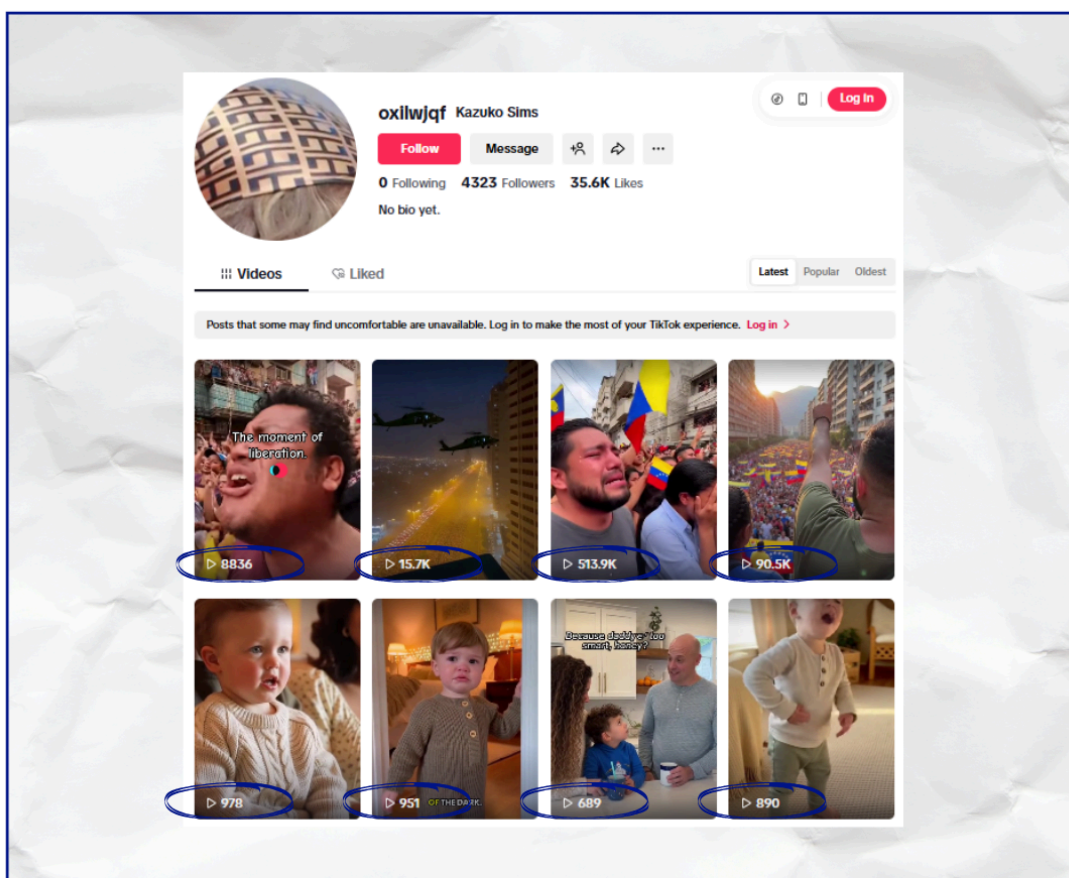
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Key Findings

- [An investigation by Fundación Maldita.es](#) has tracked 550 TikTok accounts that produce AI-generated emotional videos of alleged political protests. They are behind over 5,800 videos connected to 18 different countries, accumulating over **89 million views**.

- Those users exploit the algorithm's fondness for emotional political disinformation about current events to grow follower counts, then **make money from TikTok's "Creator Rewards" program** or put up the accounts for sale to the highest bidder.

- The videos—some of them reaching 4 million views—are **clear violations of TikTok's Community Guidelines**, but the platform is not only not enforcing them. In practice, it is encouraging large-scale manipulation by providing algorithmic amplification and monetization to those accounts.

- The Digital Services Act (DSA) says TikTok must mitigate the risk of its systems being abused in a way that has **"negative effects on civic discourse and electoral processes"** in the European Union. TikTok fails to do that as it is creating an economic incentive for manipulating users about current political events.

- The fact that accounts with massive audiences of politically-segmented users are for sale is in itself very concerning. It is basically **an existing infrastructure for large-scale interference that might be activated on a moment's notice** during crises or elections.

A thriving industry of AI-generated disinformation

[An investigation by Fundación Maldita.es](#) has tracked **over 500 TikTok accounts that exploit the platform's algorithm craving for emotional political content** to grow their follower count and then cash in, either by joining TikTok's "Creator Rewards" program or by putting the accounts for sale to the highest bidder.

The videos are AI-generated using OpenAI's Sora or Google Gemini's VEO, and they focus on content about current events that could seem genuine: Venezuelans crying in the streets in celebration, pro-Palestinian protesters being arrested by the police in London, or massive pro-government marches in Spain. **The users behind the videos know that there are few more effective ways to get the attention of TikTok's algorithm** and they are right. Some of the videos have reached 4 millions views despite being, all of them, false.
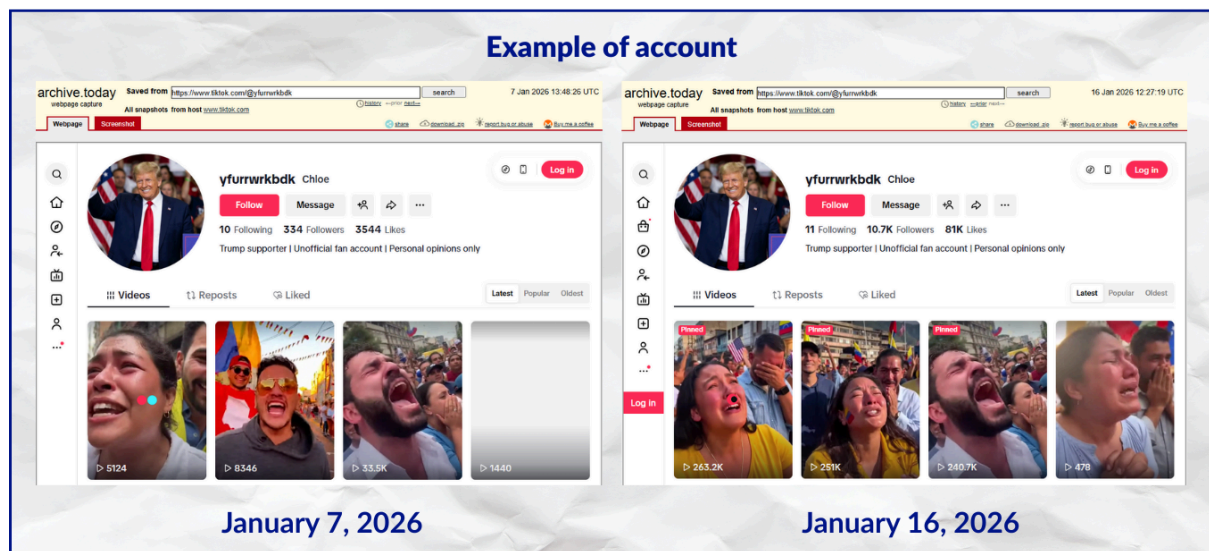
The motivation of the people behind the accounts seems to be more financial than anything else: some would even post emotional disinformation about all candidates competing in the same election. Some others have also used other kinds of videos too, featuring babies or psychics, before realizing political **disinformation works much better to gain followers because TikTok gives it much more visibility**.

Baby Content vs. AI-generated Disinformation: the algorithm really likes the latter

The first milestone for them is to **grow the accounts until they reach 10,000 followers, which would make them eligible for TikTok's "Creator Rewards" program**. Only accounts from a handful of countries are theoretically able to join, but the people using these techniques explained to our investigators that they use a VPN to conceal their real location. Once they are part of the program, they can earn money from TikTok for videos longer than one minute.

It is normal for many of them to be behind several accounts at once for the same purpose and using the same playbook. AI-generated disinformation is such an effective tool to get in the good graces of TikTok's algorithm that **some accounts have gone from a handful of followers to more than 10,000 in one week**. Some of the people selling accounts brag that they can get 50,000 followers in three or four days if they choose the news topic well.

Example of account

January 7, 2026   January 16, 2026

How to gain 10,000 followers in 9 days by posting political disinformation

Because the kind of content they post is **particularly attractive to very active hyper-partisan audiences**, the accounts explicitly appeal to them for building engagement with calls to share, follow, and comment. Judging from the comments, it is clear that many users think the content is genuine and current.

An unmitigated systemic risk

The accounts are **clearly in violation of TikTok's 'Community Guidelines'**. First of all, their content infringes TikTok's rules prohibiting AI-generated content that is "misleading about matters of public importance" or against its misinformation policies. Their way of operating multiple accounts is also a banned practice under its spam policies and selling "all or part of any of the Services", such as selling an account, is also against the Terms of Service.

Since TikTok establishes that the accounts violating the platform Community Guidelines cannot enter its monetization "Creator Rewards" program, it is clear that the platform is either **failing to see a problem affecting millions of users or choosing not to enforce its policies** on the violating accounts. Any of the options have significant repercussions when assessing TikTok's compliance with the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA).

According to the regulation, as a designated Very Large Online Platform, TikTok must have effective measures in place to prevent its services from being used to spread content that has or could have negative effects on "civic discourse and electoral processes". Far from that, this investigation shows that **TikTok is actually offering an economic incentive for users engaging in large-scale political manipulation** through its "Creator Rewards" program.

In addition to that, the platform itself is contributing to those manipulative accounts having more reach by granting algorithmic amplification to their content, in direct violation of its Community Guidelines. Rather than mitigating systemic reach, **TikTok is allowing its service to be abused** by not having the proper measures in place.

In the context of crises and elections, it seems particularly concerning that accounts that have been allowed to grow a massive audience of politically-segmented users through posting violative content, are then put up for sale. Those accounts are the equivalent of **an existing infrastructure for large-scale information interference that might be activated on a moment's notice** by foreign or domestic actors without the need for much resources.

The risk is actually not limited to those accounts or to TikTok alone, as the content produced for the platform is often reposted by large, even verified accounts, and we have documented how **they reach a wider audience after being translated into different languages and when shared on other platforms** including Facebook, Instagram, X, or YouTube.

Taking measures to end this TikTok-financed industry of polarization and disinformation deserves the attention of every user and regulator, as it is a textbook example of **a very harmful, highly impactful scheme that could not exist if not for the support it receives from a very large online platform**, and that it only persist because of that platform's failure to apply its own policies.

About Fundación Maldita.es

Maldita.es is a non-profit foundation that builds public trust by defending information integrity through journalism, education, technology, research, and advocacy in public policy. It brings together specialized teams, innovative technological tools, and a wide community of citizens who collaborate with the organization in the fight against disinformation. Its mission is to provide all affected and involved actors with tools, skills, and evidence-based content so that they can make informed decisions and help build a more resilient, accessible, and trustworthy information and media ecosystem.

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