

TITLE: How the Brief TikTok Ban Shaped Social Media Habits Across Ages

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WC: <800

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On Jan. 19, users of the popular social media platform TikTok were surprised as the app faced a 14-hour ban. While brief, the ban profoundly impacted users of all ages.

Due to data privacy and national security concerns, over 150 million Americans – almost half of the United States’ entire population – lost a form of entertainment or income from the ban. However, after just 14 hours, the app “revived” and was “back in action” again. While some users may find it funny, others may have noticed how it drew attention to social media addiction across all ages.

Although many users took the ban seriously, Generation Z students from Arcadia High School knew it wasn’t permanent. Two students in particular, Serena Guo ’26 and Samantha Zaifman ’26, believed so.

“I would be very surprised if TikTok got banned permanently. Even during the 14-hour ban, I was still certain it would return,” Guo ’26 said.

“I thought it was just something people were saying and it would never actually happen,” Zaifman ’26 added.

On the other hand, content creators who earned income from posting on the app had a different view of the situation. Katie Anne Fang is a Gen Z content creator who gained over 1M followers in 1 month and now has over 5M followers. She has a major influence on her audience and has earned money from posting consistently since 2023.

In a video posted on Jan. 18, she mentioned that she had “mixed feelings” about the ban.

“One minute I’m super upset about it, then the next I’m like ‘so be it’. I’m just gonna miss you guys so much since there’s no other app like TikTok,” Fang said.

And it wasn’t just Gen Z that had mixed feelings; millennials felt the same way. Haley Kalil (who goes by @haleyybaylee on social media) gained attention for posting humorous videos on TikTok. She, too, earns income from consistently posting on the app, and so the ban had a significant impact on her posting plans. In a video posted on Jan. 18, she stepped away from her usually comedic content to express how she felt.

“I love you guys so much. I hope you all stay in my family forever,” Kalil wrote in her caption.

She, like many other content creators, hoped that her large fanbase on TikTok would follow her to other platforms. And when the ban suddenly took place hours before anticipated, users finally felt a sense of loss. Ella Cheung '25, a student from Arcadia High School, truly felt it.

"I was devastated...because TikTok was a part of my daily routine for 6 years at that point," Cheung '25 said.

"My 'For You page' on TikTok can never be replicated by any other app; as many say, I built it 'brick by brick', meaning that it is the perfect blend of everything I like," Cheung added.

Furthermore, this situation surfaced the issue of social media dependency. The brief interruption of entertainment created an awareness of digital consumption across all ages. For Millennials, most of them didn't mind it. However, for Generation Z users, the impact was more immense than expected.

"Everyone around me seemed to be going insane...they were all in disbelief and didn't know what to do with themselves," Zaifman said.

"For me, the ban highlighted the habitual-ness I've created around TikTok — every night before bed, I would get on the app and scroll out of habit rather than addiction," Zaifman added.

This issue of social media "addiction" was not just apparent amongst Gen Z and Millennials, but even in Generation Alpha. Charlotte Wu '30 — a student from Roslyn Middle School — and Nathan Cao '32 — a student from First Avenue Middle School — express how they cope with the ban in a different way.

"I just went to Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts because a lot of people already post there. Maybe the other apps can upgrade so we can use them like TikTok," Wu said.

"I would probably play more Roblox and watch more YouTube Shorts. I usually would have 2 devices: one to watch TikTok, and the other to play games on. But since I didn't have TikTok anymore, I could just use one device," Cao added.

However, even though some users saw this as a "devastating event", others took it as an opportunity to connect with their other hobbies.

"I thought about the positive aspects of the ban and tried to focus on them. It was great because I would be on my phone less if there was no TikTok," Zaifman said.

Across all age groups, the 14-hour TikTok ban had a psychological and social impact. The fear of missing out (FOMO) surfaced as many users felt disconnected from the global digital conversation.

However, this was also an opportunity to engage in offline activities and step away from our digitally dependent society. It is a reminder of the incredible grip social media holds over our

daily lives and a nudge on the shoulder to have digital mindfulness by balancing online and offline experiences.

TITLE: 'It was surreal, but we can help': Local High School Students Taking Action to Mitigate the Effects of the Eaton Fire

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Mountains were “completely red” and residents “could see the flames.” Rapid winds struck Los Angeles on Jan. 7, causing a rapidly growing fire in the Pacific Palisades to spread across the county.

But as fires continued to burn across Southern California, some students — who were stuck at home — decided to step up for their hometowns. Students became leaders and volunteers, while spreading positivity throughout their neighborhoods. Even when tragedy strikes their homes, students don't give up.

Amongst several fires, the second largest one was in Eaton Canyon. When it rose to flames, more than 170,000 people in Altadena and Pasadena were asked to evacuate.

Two students from Arcadia took matters into their own hands. Kaeden De Leon '26 — a junior from Arcadia High School — became a leader to help Altadena recover. Ireland Covey '26, was her “partner in crime” during their project.

Since both De Leon and Covey grew up in Arcadia, watching their nearby hometown burn down in flames was not easy, De Leon said.

“Especially having so many friends living in Altadena and going to Eaton Canyon months before the fire, it was so crazy to see how things could change so fast. It was just so shocking to see,” De Leon said.

“To see the stories and videos of people's houses being burned down and their reactions, it was genuinely heartbreaking because nothing like this has ever happened,” she added.

De Leon and Covey “didn't wanna sit back and watch things happen,” De Leon said. Instead, they created the Eaton Fire Aid Instagram account — alongside a few peers from their church group — to raise funds, start donation drives, and provide information for their communities. They started a GoFundMe to provide necessities for families affected and designed care packages for individuals with specific needs. As of Feb. 5, the GoFundMe has raised \$1418.

“If a teenage girl lost stuff, we had a care package designed for her. The same goes for any other individual — we designed care packages exclusively for each person,” Covey said.

The two received an overwhelming amount of donations, which they did not expect.

“It got to a point where we had to drive all the donations to Ireland’s house, and by the time her garage was filled, we just had to send everything else to a bigger donation center,” De Leon said.

“We were so overly successful that we were not prepared for the amount of donations we received,” Covey said.

After a week of hard work, the two were still very successful.

“It was an entire school parking lot full of our donations. It was amazing!” Covey said.

De Leon and Covey were not the only students to take the initiative. When Emmanuel Rae Manzone ’25 saw videos of the fires online, she wanted to get involved.

“When I saw my friends posting about it on social media and going out to volunteer, that’s when I really realized the gravity of the situation,” Manzone said.

She began volunteering at Halfsies Empanada Snack Shack — a small business in Azusa, California — packaging and organizing clothing for families in need. After getting the hang of the volunteer tasks, she took a step further and began to train new volunteers.

“My first day there, I didn’t really have a say in anything quite yet,” said Manzone. “But as I got more comfortable throughout the week, I became the head of the group.”

Manzone also held donation drives, organized supplies for victims, and remained active with updates on her social media pages.

“The biggest thing you can do is to just put yourself out there,” she said, “I would say although sharing information on social media and sharing resources is a good thing, but for me personally, I like putting it into action.”

Though all of these high school students were not personally affected by the destruction of the Eaton Fire, their endless love for their nearby neighborhoods drove them to act. And in the midst of devastation, they found hope amongst the rubble in search of a way to mitigate the effects of the fire.

“As devastating as it is, we can see the humanity in people coming together and wanting to help,” De Leon said.