

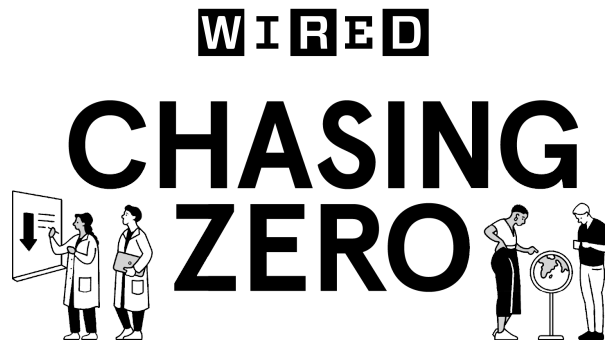


TikTok climate activists are here and they're going viral

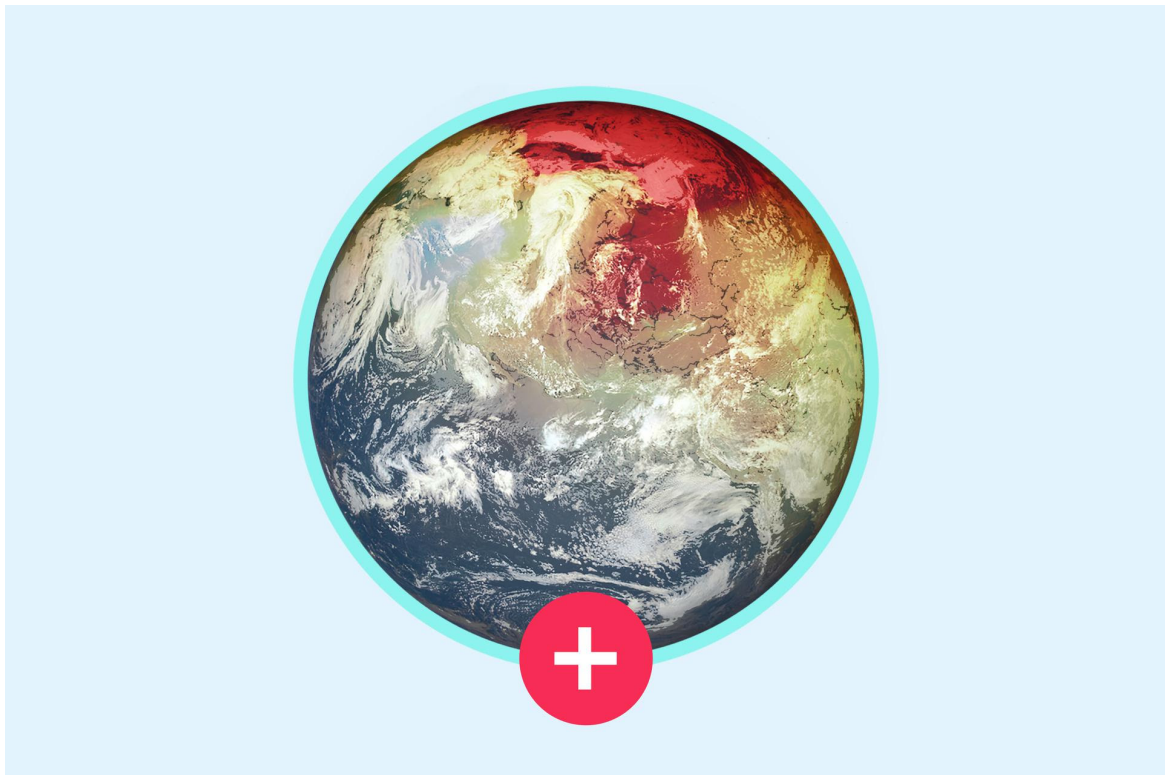
1 Nachricht

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“Guys, I’ve found this slot canyon, and I’ve heard that if you shout an echo down it, it tells you what you’re supposed to do next... Let’s try it out.”

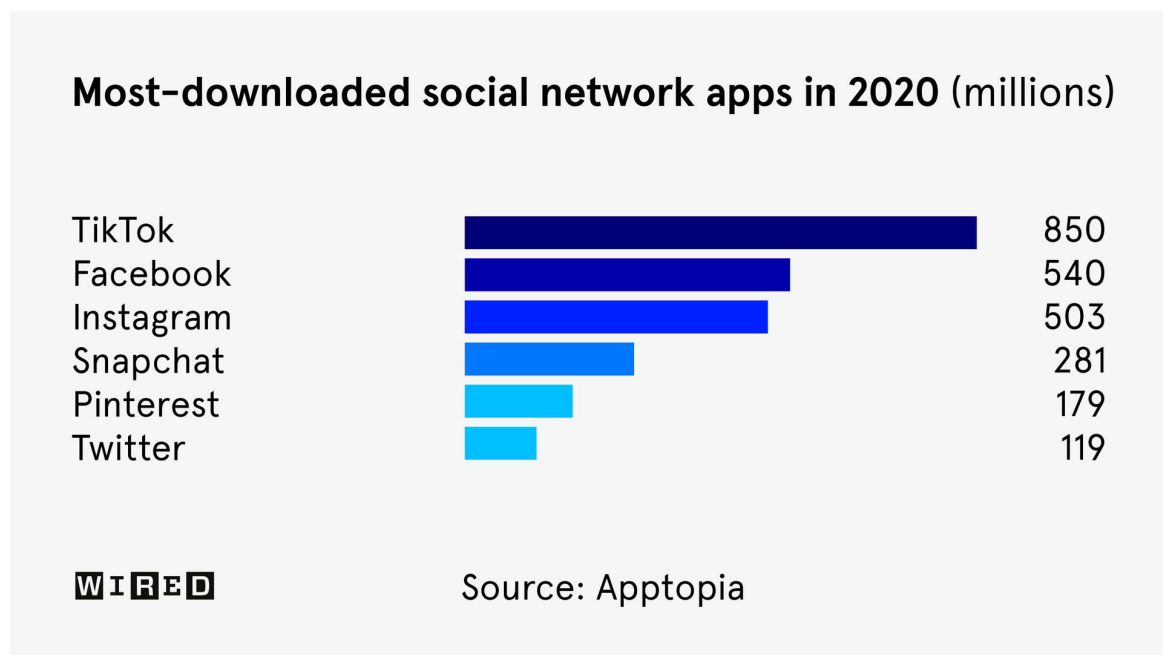
The camera jumps to a new shot. Alex Haraus, a 23-year-old photographer and climate activist, cups his hand to his face and shouts “ECHO” down the shadowy canyon. He swivels the camera to follow the sound. A second pass, then the 'echo' comes back, quieter but still distinctive:

“Take climate change more seriously.”

After the camera pivots back to show Haraus’s face in a mock-gasp, the video ends. It’s clever, it’s simple, it lasts all of 12 seconds, and has been viewed 419,000 times. Since Haraus posted it on TikTok last November, he’s kicked off a viral TikTok campaign opposing oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve. Some of his videos have been seen by millions of people.

Haraus is part of a rising wave of climate activists using TikTok to get their messages to millions of other young people. TikTok is one of the fastest growing social media platforms in the world, now claiming some 700 million monthly users – more than Snapchat or Twitter. Its audience is overwhelmingly younger: a quarter of US users are 19 or younger; just 11 per cent are over 50.

The next generation of climate activists are on TikTok and they’re not afraid to do things differently.



Twenty-two year old TikToker Tara Bellerose, makes videos about wildlife conservation, climate change and other environmental issues, mixed in with clips about her life as a farmer. Her popular one-minute videos have included an attack on Trump’s policies to remove protections for endangered species (2.9 million views) and a plea to stop shark deaths (1.5 million views).

“Being a farmer in Australia, I see climate change every day. I can see that it’s a problem and I want big industry and government to actually start taking it seriously, because no other issues actually matter if we don’t have a planet to live on,” Bellerose says. “I want to live past, like, 2050. That would be pretty great.”

Bellerose has half-a-million followers on the app and says the biggest appeal of the platform for her is the huge audience of young people. “Older people, boomers, they’re not gonna believe in climate change. So there’s no

point getting to that audience. The audience that is going to care is on TikTok.”

Other campaigners focus on specific environmental issues. Abbie Richards, a 24-year old American comedian with a bachelor's degree in environmental science, went viral last year for her stream of videos criticising the environmental impact of golf courses. ‘EAT THE RICH AND CANCEL GOLF 2020’ reads the caption on one of her videos, viewed two million times, which features her announcing her presidency campaign as a single issue candidate (‘make golf illegal’) while cutting up a lettuce. She eventually announces, with perfect comedic timing, that she’s making a simple caesar salad garnished with “the rich on top”. Golf magazines have not reacted particularly well to her campaign.

TikTok is no longer a platform that can be ignored. In 2020, TikTok users and K-pop fans registered en masse to a Trump campaign rally as a prank, leaving the then-president hosting a rally in a sparsely-populated arena. But climate campaigns are also gaining ground. Haraus’s viral Arctic oil videos, which amplified the messages of other people already campaigning on the issue, saw some six million people sending letters to the US Fish and Wildlife service about the issue in just three weeks. Joachim Allgaier, a professor of communication and digital society at the University of Applied Sciences Fulda in Germany says politicians may be beginning to realise they are underestimating the influence of TikTokers, as previously happened with YouTube.



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If you want to reach young people, this is the right forum because “this is really basically their home”, says Allgaier. Not every big brand is getting this message, however.

On TikTok there’s a noticeable absence of larger institutions such as big environmental non-profits or green brands. Organisations seem to struggle to adapt to its ironic and overtly comedic tone. Friends of the Earth, for example, consistently posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, but doesn’t even have a TikTok account. Patagonia’s 4.6 million Instagram followers see regular posts on its green ventures and campaigns; its TikTok account has a single video.

“One really powerful thing about TikTok is that the audience isn't very kind to the type of commercial content that exists on other platforms,” says Eva Rozsa, a masters student at Lund University in Sweden who is researching

how young people use TikTok for environmental activism. “TikTok as a platform isn't one that you can benefit from if you're not also showing up quite vulnerably.”

But the chaotic nature of TikTok is also allowing problematic content to flourish. Outlandish [conspiracy theories](#) and [hate speech](#) have found new life on the app. The easy ability to go viral has led to [inaccurate science videos](#) being viewed by millions.

The playfulness of TikTok can contribute to this, says Allgaier. “Something can be presented as science, and it's actually a joke, or makeup artists [use their bodies as a canvas](#) for protesting against climate change, and pollution and so on. So things are a little bit different than they seem.” The short length of TikTok videos also means there's less scope for citing sources, he adds. “You simply don't have the time [to cite research and sources], so you can basically pick a fact and make a joke about it or something.”

Bellarose agrees there is a lot of blatant misinformation on TikTok “that's just wrong”. Everything in her own climate videos she finds from at least three different sources, she says, and won't put in if she can find a credible source disputing it. “The good thing about TikTok is everyone can have a voice,” says Bellarose. “But the bad thing about TikTok is everyone can have a voice.”



Do you have a favourite climate TikToker, or is climate LinkedIn really where it's at? Get in touch with your thoughts at chasingzero@wired.co.uk or on Twitter [@jloistf](https://twitter.com/jloistf)

Keep chasing,
Jocelyn Timperley

On another note

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