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Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

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What we're thinking about

Twitter. Big Tech Layoffs. FTX collapse. Election aftermath. It's been another full week of nonstop news 😓. While much of the social media conversation centers on Twitter these days, one platform is quickly overtaking all the others: TikTok.

In the U.S. midterms last week, young voters played an important role in elections in every state. In many races, it was the support of young voters that determined the outcome. Democratic House candidates [won voters under the age of 45 by 13 points](#), while losing voters age 45 and older by 10 points.

As younger generations reach voting age, they're relying on TikTok as a source for news and information about political candidates. The problem is that across all social media platforms, TikTok has performed the worst in filtering misinformation about elections.

Beneath the misinformation, a bigger problem lurks: TikTok's platform is extremely difficult for researchers to study. So we sat down with [John Bracken](#) and [Michael Della Bitta](#) of the [Digital Public Library of America](#) (DPLA), an Unfinished [Network Partner](#) that—with support from Unfinished—is building archives and tools to help social media researchers better understand and analyze how TikTok is influencing everything from elections to society.

TikTok's Meteoric Rise

Americans spend as much time on TikTok as they do on [Facebook and Instagram combined](#). TikTok is the sixth largest social media platform in the

world, but what's remarkable is its rate of adoption: in the last five years, it's grown **faster than any other platform**, and **advertisers are flocking to it**.

TikTok's influence permeates everything from pop culture to shopping to politics in America and globally. **Recent research** has shown that election misinformation flows freely across the platform (in part because its AI-powered content moderation system **only catches 40% of the videos** that need to be taken down). According to internal TikTok documents obtained in 2020, TikTok advised its moderators to **suppress posts by “ugly” people** and the poor to attract new users.

In our conversation with Bracken and Della Bitta, they shared just how challenging it is for researchers to study TikTok. The short-form video format makes it harder to download and search through vast amounts of content (Twitter is an easier platform to search and study), and as of now, if researchers want to engage with TikTok, they have to pretend to be an individual user, experiencing the platform from that singular vantage point.

More research, more accountability

So why is an organization focused on libraries helping researchers to better understand TikTok?

Grounded in neighborhoods and communities across the country, there are seven times as many libraries in the United States as there are McDonalds. Libraries are pillars of our civic infrastructure, playing an important role in both ensuring the validity of facts and in creating tools and resources for researchers.

DPLA is on a mission to help adapt libraries to a digitally-driven 21st century, and they have been using the vast archives of libraries to fight misinformation online for years. They partnered with Wikipedia (which is the most trafficked website on the internet) to complete Wikipedia's single largest upload of media by sourcing content from library archives across the United States.

"Part of the library approach is nonjudgmental. It is about increasing access to knowledge and information," says John Bracken. "If you show up to us and TikTok is how you are using news and information, then it is incumbent on us in our information-curation and civil dialogue roles to work with folks where they are."


DPLA has launched a new project to specifically improve the ability for researchers to study social media's impact on society. For TikTok, they're focused on two areas:


- Capturing and archiving data from public figures across TikTok
- Using that archive to give researchers studying misinformation and disinformation the resources they need to better conduct their research


Improving the ability for researchers to study culturally and civically important platforms like TikTok will lead to greater insights into the way users shape the platform and the platform shapes users — and our democracy.



Other notable headlines

 For the last 20 years, the tech industry has benefited from the rapid adoption of new technologies. But the era of growth-at-all-costs might be coming to an end as we observe many tech companies embarking on significant layoffs, writes Timothy Lee in [an article from Slate](#). As interest rates rise and advertising revenue declines, tech companies are focusing more on profit than growth, forcing them to cut costs and reduce staff.

 Once FTX collapsed, the hackers moved in and stole \$338 million worth of cryptocurrency. Now the hunt is on to find them. Visibility into the blockchain allows anyone to observe the specific anonymized wallets where the stolen currencies are held, and it also makes it harder for thieves to actually use their stolen funds. As [WIRED](#) reports, the biggest question right now is if any FTX staff or owners were responsible for the theft, which would add an additional layer of drama to the ongoing saga of the FTX collapse.

 Two decades ago, the term *social media* didn't exist. Today, according to Ian Bogost in [The Atlantic](#), the age of social media is ending. What happened? How did we go wrong? What started out as social software for connections turned into a constant broadcast channel. From organizing in-person gatherings to considering ourselves celebrities and pundits, social media transitioned from connecting to publishing. When the purpose of social networking was replaced by social media, advertisers and polarizing content reigned. With major social media platforms teetering, are we at the end of an era, or at the dawn of social media's next iteration? Bogost suggests we should do our part to abandon it entirely.

 Whether or not Twitter is actually a digital public square is up for debate, but it's hard to dispute that it has captured major world events — from the Arab Spring in 2011 to the war in Ukraine earlier this year. With Elon Musk signaling that Twitter could face bankruptcy, a Twitter collapse could erase vast records of recent human history. In an article by Chris Stokel-Walker in [MIT Technology Review](#), he writes that Twitter is “a living, breathing historical document.” The deeper challenge is that all of Twitter lives on private servers, owned and controlled by a private company.



Unfinished Network Partner News

Unfinished Network Partner [All Tech is Human](#) just released a new report called “[Co-Creating a Better Tech Future](#)” that is focused on interviews and insights around how to co-create a tech future aligned with public interest and values.

Earlier this week, the [Aspen Institute](#) hosted its 2022 [Aspen Cyber Summit](#) in New York. It brought together top leaders from business, government, academia, and civil society to discuss the world's urgent cyber issues. You can watch videos from the summit [here](#).

Thank you for reading.

Follow Unfinished ([@byUnfinished](#) on Twitter and [@thisisunfinished](#) on IG) for ongoing chitchat on the changing web.

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team

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