

TikTok

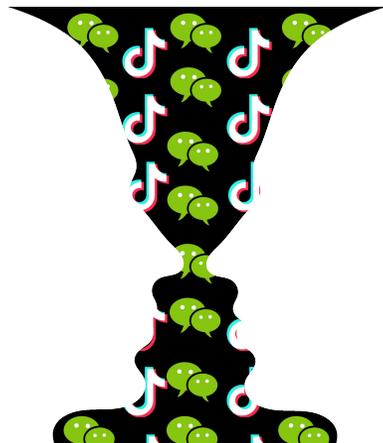
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Trump to ban US downloads of TikTok and WeChat

Government to ban WeChat on Sunday to 'safeguard national security of the US', while TikTok to be banned by 12 November



▲ ByteDance has been talks with Oracle Corp and others to create a new company, TikTok Global. Photograph: China Stringer Network/Reuters

Before the story

- ◆ TRADE WARRRRRRR
 - Remember Huawei?
 - US has an ongoing trade blacklist of Chinese technology companies
- ◆ Tencent owns WeChat, but also owns:
 - Riot Games (League of Legends)
 - 40% of Epic Games (Fortnite)
 - 12% of Snap Inc. (Snapchat)
 - 11.5% of Bluehole (PUBG)
 - 5% of Tesla, Activision Blizzard (Call of Duty) & Ubisoft
 - However much stake \$150 million buys in Reddit
 - Undisclosed amount of Discord



WeChat

- ◆ Google Translate, “Facebook, Instagram, Zoom, Venmo, bill pay, and online banking all rolled into one app”
- ◆ And more!
 - Translation function
 - Mutual aid groups
 - Mental health provision
 - Activism i.e. WeChat Project to organize Chinese Americans to vote and support Black Lives Matter.
 - International students’ lifeline



Background



- ◆ ByteDance owns TikTok w/ For You page
- ◆ Trump's rally was foiled and had very low attendance (~6k vs 19k capacity + outdoors) probably due to TikTok teens i.e “radical protestors” - Trump

Trump 'played' by K-pop fans and TikTok users who disrupted Tulsa rally

Claimed tickets to rally were not used, which helped leave hundreds of seats empty at venue



The story

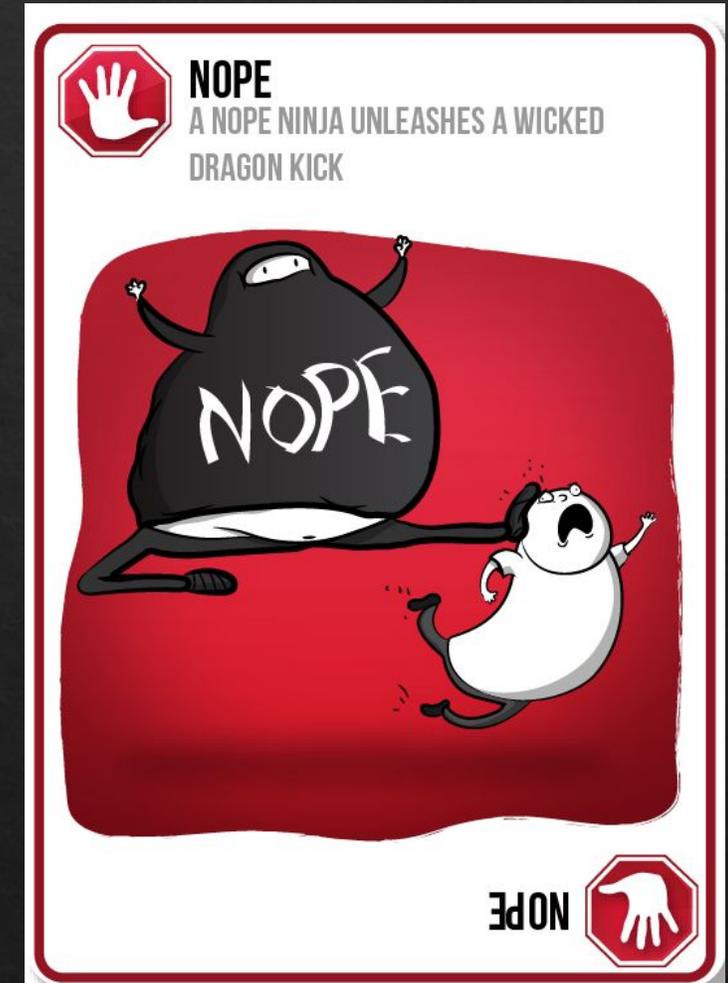
- ◆ Aug 6, Trump published executive orders to ban **downloads and transactions** of TikTok/WeChat by Sep 20 due to “security concerns” due to apparent connections between ByteDance, Tencent and the Chinese government.
- ◆ Aug 14, Trump ordered TikTok to sell to a US company or face a complete ban on Nov 12.
- ◆ Also Trump: “a very substantial portion of that price is going to have to come into the Treasury of the United States because we’re making it possible for this deal to happen.”
- ◆ Chinese government issued new regulations to bar sensitive technology export without the approval of the government i.e. TikTok’s recommendation algorithm.
- ◆ ByteDance agreed with the Chinese gov and did not wanna sell alg, “can sell the car but not the engine”

The story

- ◆ TikTok sued the US government. So did a non-profit for-WeChat group.
- ◆ “Sales” deal with Oracle and Walmart is being ironed out, with Oracle being a “Trusted Partner” and Walmart monies.
 - ByteDance still owns majority stakes □ not really a sale but a hosting deal
 - Oracle hosts TikTok’s US user data **without source code**, Walmart brings e-commerce to TikTok □ China can’t host data but TikTok already has a US headquarters & backup in Singapore so...
 - No source code/alg ownership □ data siphoning backdoor/propaganda push potential is intact
 - Oracle CEO @ Trump - “I support him and I want him to do well.”
 - “TikTok Global said it will develop an educational curriculum driven by artificial intelligence to teach children basic reading, history and other subjects. It comes just days after Trump said he is creating a commission to promote "patriotic education" to counter the teaching of American slavery and racism in classrooms.”

The story

- ◆ TikTok discussed sales with Microsoft or Oracle & Walmart.
 - “Microsoft’s version of the deal would have severed American TikTok from Europe and Asia entirely, but Oracle’s version of the deal leaves it mostly intact.”
 - “We would have made significant changes to ensure the service met the highest standards for security, privacy, online safety, and combatting misinformation” □ we would have made TikTok safer by modifying alg & have source code access but TikTok said NOPE
- ◆ Sep 19, a judge in NorCal blocked the WeChat ban, with an appeal hearing happening Oct 15.
- ◆ Sep 27, a judge in DC blocked the TikTok ban.



Is China really spreading propaganda/surveilling WeChat & TikTok?

- ◇ On WeChat, legends says yes (from [Vox article](#)) and they're mostly okay with it.

I understand that Chinese-owned apps like WeChat come with privacy concerns because of government monitoring. I have concerns, too. I notice if I try to send a meme with Xi Jinping's face over WeChat it "mysteriously" does not get sent to the receiver, and I know that my metadata — the call length, the location of the user — and the content I talk about is being monitored and saved.

- ◇ Actually so does independent research [reports](#)

that files and images shared by WeChat users with accounts outside of China are subject to political surveillance, and this content is used to train and build up the censorship system that WeChat uses to censor China-registered users. Our technical methods can only tell us if files and images shared on WeChat are under surveillance. We don't know yet if chat message text is under similar surveillance. In the meantime, users should be aware that this is a possibility.

- ◇ But NATIONAL SECURITY?? Judge said "the specific evidence about WeChat is modest".

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- ◇ On TikTok though? It's not collecting more than the usual diagnostic data while open (i.e. keystroke, message content, location data, screen size)
 - There was a debunked Reddit thread that claimed it did.
 - Security researchers weren't finding much.
- ◇ Concerns are still valid though. On a phone, TikTok has same data access permissions as other social media apps i.e. like everything

Implications

- ◆ Cutting downloads will reduce functions & kill the apps with lack of updates.
- ◆ Can you just amputate apps from its Chinese companies? Technically yes, really... uh...
 - Force Tencent to divest from all of its online gaming investments? Buy PUBG Mobile (made by Tencent)?
 - Buy all Chinese social media?
 - Chop off WeChat from China and like, why would anyone use WeChat anymore???
 - Internet Balkanization mmmmmm ▫ limited data access for algs, difficulty for US companies to go global.
 - Free expression? Open market?
- ◆ Did anybody wonder where Russia has been all this time?

The Russian Trolls Have a Simpler Job Today. Quote Trump.

As part of their attempt to interfere with the 2020 election, Russians are grabbing screenshots of President Trump's tweets, or quoting his own misleading statements, analysts and officials say.



President Trump's attacks on states sending mail-in ballots to all voters are being amplified by Russian actors. Oliver Contreras for The New York Times