

Rae Henry
Dr. Ramsdell
WRIT 345 – Convergent Journalism
February 7, 2022

The Headway Project – TikTok Digital Expansion Proposal

Executive Summary

As The Headway Project continues building momentum, it must expand to increase the assurance that targeted audiences are reached, specifically Generation Z. This proposal advocates that Headway expand into TikTok because of the application’s advanced algorithms (improves audience reach), educational platforms (supports Headway’s mission), and its nature as a “hot spot” for younger people to come together and bond over mental health issues (spreading the word). This expansion can be supported by Headway’s current creative team.

Headway Overview

In the early 2000s, The Headway Project began as a nonprofit organization run by two experts in mental health and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), psychologist Richard Dismukes and Dr. Fred George. Now, it’s the seed of a corporation dedicated bringing together a variety of resources in one location—based in positive psychology—to help people learn and practice skills to manage their lives more effectively.

Instead of focusing on individual problems and conditions, Headway focuses on positive steps everyone can do to improve their physical health, happiness, and wellbeing, since we all struggle in life. Headway is for all audiences and all states of mental health. Whether clients have ADHD, other illnesses (diagnosed or undiagnosed), or labor in stressful student/working environments, Headway provides strategies to help people understand themselves and live more wholesome lives.

Problem Statement

Headway is expanding but is not leveraging digital technology to reach younger audiences like Generation Z (Gen Z). The staff consensus: Headway works wonders when users actively seek it out for their own benefit. However, we have difficulty generating Gen Z interest. How can this be improved?

This can be improved by Headway’s current creative team (e.g., designers, videographers, creative director, content specialist, etc.). I propose the Headway team comes together to run a TikTok account, aided as necessary by Headway’s founders. This account will provide an authentic, interesting, and engaging experience to hook Gen Z audiences where they spend much of their time—on the incredibly popular social media app prolifically used by their generation.

TikTok

Popularity

When a user opens TikTok for the first time, there is no sign up or tutorial—the app takes you straight to the content. TikTok’s interface is a simple one with the main page having two viewing options: “Following”, which shows you videos only from the accounts you follow, and “For You”, which shows you any viral videos in the world, but also specific viral videos based on your interests, gathered from intuitive algorithms running TikTok. The videos range from 1 second to 3 minutes in length, with the majority ranging around 5 to 60 seconds.

This simple platform skyrocketed TikTok into being the 7th most used social network in the world in only a few years, with nearly 80 million active users in the U.S. in 2021 (see **Fig. 1** and **Fig. 2**, sourced from *Statista*), and its use is only projected to grow.

Top 10 most used social networks in the U.S.

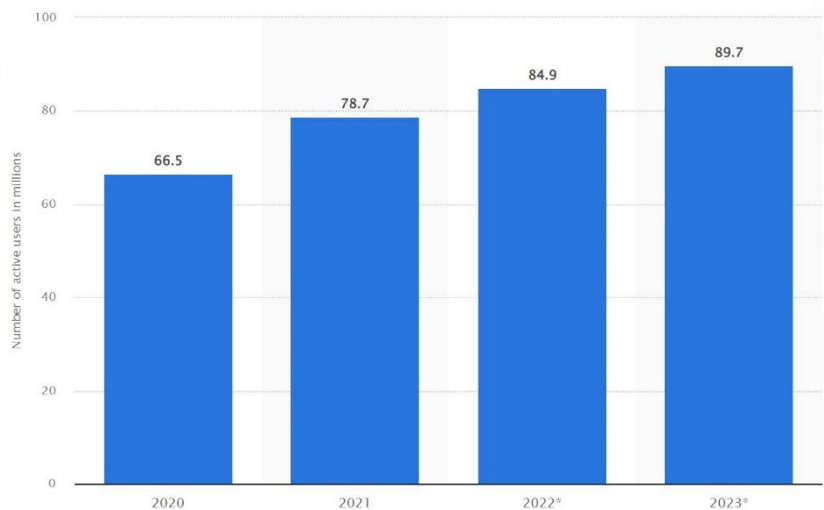
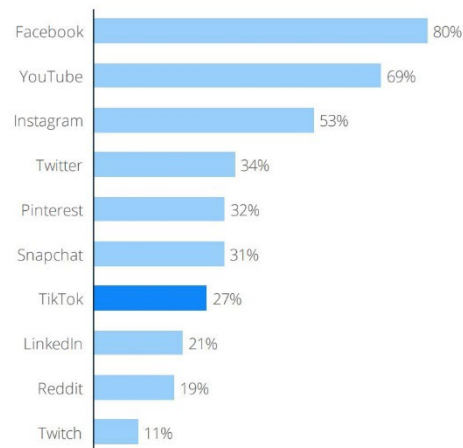


Fig. 1: Top 10 most used social networks Fig. 2: Number of U.S. TikTok users (millions), current and projected

[Kenny Trinh](#), the managing editor of Netbooknews, [summed up](#) TikTok’s convenience like this: “It’s far easier to edit and upload content in TikTok than in other apps such as Instagram or Snapchat... [It’s] seemingly made for today’s younger generation...appealing to their short attention span, plus the short comedy video clips are comfortingly familiar as it’s the same type of content all throughout the app.”

[John Lincoln](#), CEO of Ignite Visibility, says TikTok gained such explosive success because it was [modeled after Vine](#), the social media app that took over the world’s younger generation in the early 2010s, capturing attention with its unique 6 second video limits. TikTok began using the same concept with 15 second limits but has since expanded to 3 minutes.

[John Holdridge](#), previous General Manager of Fullscreen, adds to this idea, [saying](#), “TikTok’s success can simply be attributed to how it flips what we think of social media on its head, while at the same time returning us to all the roots of the original appeal—the ability to go viral.”

TikTok combines users' love of music with seemingly random viral "sounds" (audios sourced from one account that are available to all other TikTok users), to create a massive social platform for a customized experience. The app's algorithms make it simple to come together and make connections with others, laugh, be emotional, dance, and express themselves.

The Magic of "For You"

With a world of opportunity and a social platform making it easy for millions to hear everyone's voice, many people "go viral" for different reasons. Some people may get on TikTok and see the latest dancing trend, with an influencer dancing choreography along to a viral sound. Others may get on TikTok and see videos of cats, fitness videos, skincare, or fashion. Whatever their preferences, TikTok's internal algorithm will use videos they've liked, watched multiple times, or interacted with in some way, eventually filtering out other kinds of viral videos to create a truly "For You" browsing screen. This is where TikTok users spend their time unlike on other apps such as Instagram, where users typically only view what's posted by the people they follow. Despite TikTok being so personalized, users will still see viral videos outside of their interests every few minutes while scrolling. There is a chance to see anything on the "For You" page.

Where Headway and TikTok Meet

Mental Health in the United States

In 2020, Mental health was [voted](#) the most detrimental issue in the United States by 13% of American adults, and health professionals around the country are seeing a variety of concerns in young people especially (see **Fig. 3**).

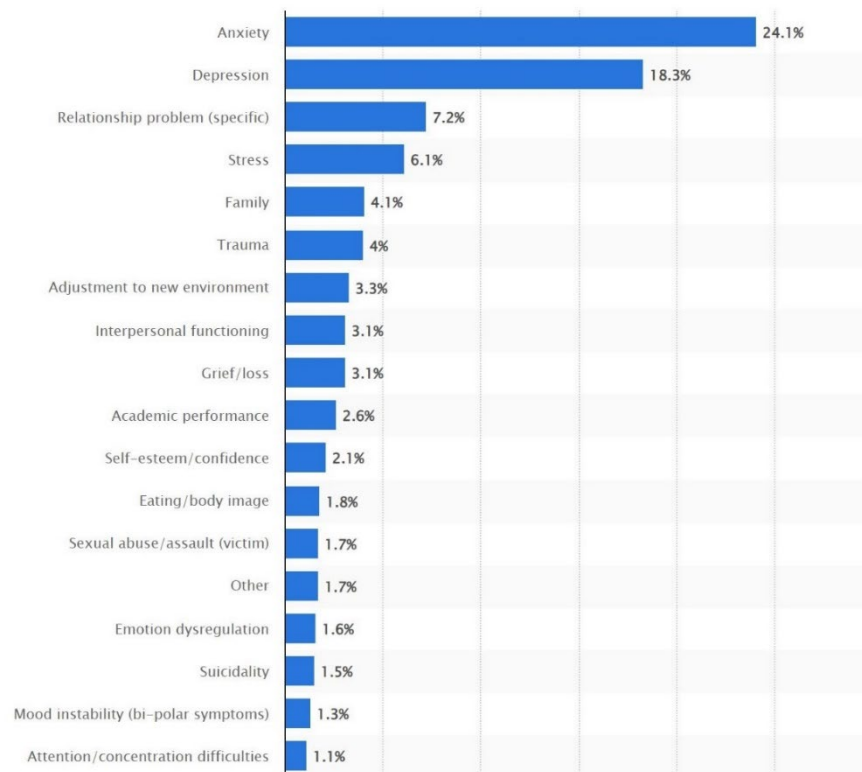


Fig. 3: Percentage of U.S. mental health professionals who stated select issues were the top concern of their college student patients from 2019 to 2020, via Statista.

It appears the more technology grows and newer generations journey through life with it, mental health professionals have trouble keeping up. We have seen trends in more serious topics being adapted for younger audiences. We know what platforms those younger audiences like to use and why (see **Fig. 4**). Headway must catch the attention of younger audiences by moving to where they are. There is no time to waste—if anyone can find solace through Headway’s strategies, even one person, then it’s worth the investment.

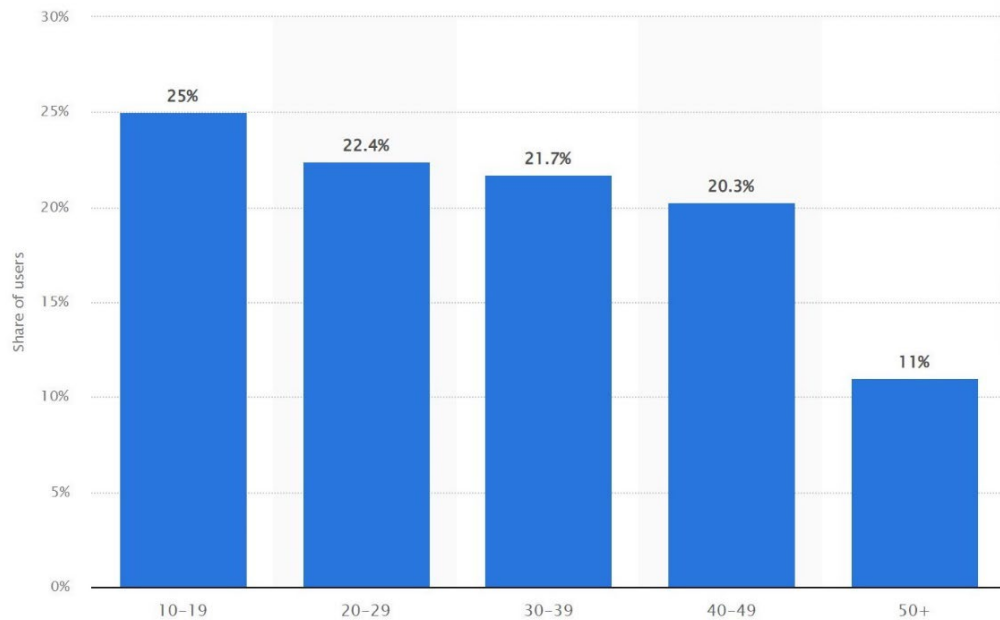


Fig. 4: TikTok users by age group, via Statista

The Convergence

TikTok is the perfect platform to support Headway’s expansion because of its simplicity, popularity with Gen Z, and effective algorithms. If Headway pre-plans and organizes its TikTok account, viewers will see the videos Headway produces and will likely be enticed into reading more content on Headway’s website. Additionally, based on personal exploration, not many mental health/ADHD specializing organizations have content on TikTok. We can be an industry leader employing a digital platform to help others.

The social media app serves as more than just an entertainment hot spot, much of TikTok is about educating others, and the academic world has taken notice of audience’s interest in becoming more educated, especially on health. A recent [study](#) done shows TikTok serving as an educational platform for head injuries and concussions, which have become popular in younger audiences. The study looks at what this might mean for the education of younger individuals, especially since the format of said videos are all below 3 minutes (usually 1 minute long), often acted out in skits or displaying a form of humor.

Some Headway TikTok viewers may simply want to know more. Some know someone affected by their mental health. Some may have been affected and take pleasure in awareness being spread about something they have experienced. Any time a person watches one of those videos, TikTok’s algorithms pick it up and spread it to more viewers on their “For You” page. As a

result, educational videos sourced from doctors, health professionals, and people with first-hand experience, go viral.

Younger audiences may not be the first to come to Headway for help with mental health, but they do take to social platforms to connect with others or find tools to cope with what they are dealing with. In fact, the advice hashtag on TikTok was one of the highest ranking on the app in 2020, bringing in 13 billion views (see **Fig. 5**).

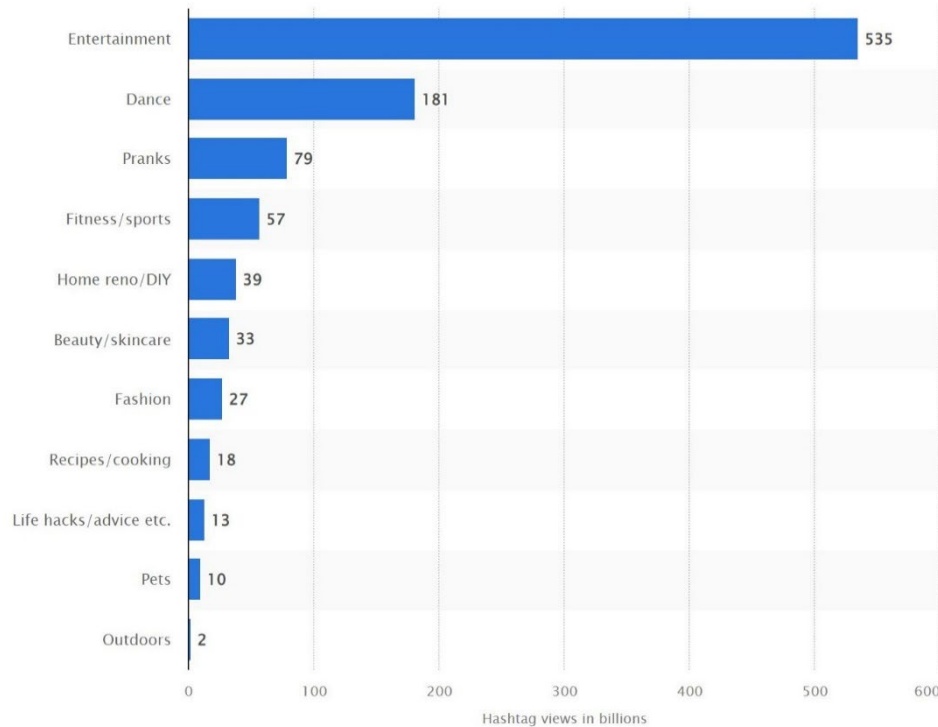


Fig. 5: Most popular hashtags on TikTok by views (billions), via Statista

By inference, if there is already a focal point for the topic, Headway can build a platform alongside what is already there. This could be topical advice where mental health might be categorized (but may also be tagged with more specific terms, which Headway can utilize). In this way it is almost certain Headway will reach additional audiences. The most challenging part will be to get people to watch the video.

This is where Headway’s specific strategy of using TikTok for reaching audiences of all ages comes in.

Strategy and Organization

By using TikTok, Headway can extend their outreach to additional audiences. Instead of asking viewers to come to Headway, Headway will go to them. The idea is to play to younger audiences who congregate on Tiktok while also being accessible to older audiences on the app. To do this, Headway will have a specific set of videos to release multiple times a week.

Schedule:

Mondays/Tuesdays – Conversations ft. Headway founders

Wednesdays/Thursdays – Comedy or skit

Fridays/Saturdays – Meditation

Sundays – “Strategies for _____”

This schedule is meant to maximize audiences reached using TikTok’s algorithms without having to post in an exhaustive manner. A variety of content ranging from fun to relaxing to serious will build up the account. Conversations with Headway founders allows for a direct discussion between viewers and experts through TikTok’s comment section and adds authenticity—viewers can see the founder’s passion for the subject, but also don’t shy away from the heavier content. Comedy or skits are a way to hook younger audiences by making serious topics fun to learn or think about, allowing for viewers to search for more on their own after they become interested. Meditation and strategies are both on-brand for Headway, taking tools to audience’s hands in interesting or easy-to-digest ways.

The Cost

As of today, Headway would need to start spending 10 hours per week developing, filming, and editing content for TikTok. These hours would split equally between each section of the creative team with overall appraisal and approval given by the creative director before posting each week’s set of videos.

To ease into this cost, Headway may start out with a few weeks of brainstorming and researching popular TikTok videos for 2 hours a week, and gradually move toward the proposed schedule.

Overview

Using TikTok allows for a bridged connection on a platform where audiences come together to bond over their struggles with mental health. The founders of Headway have interests in making videos like this, so it’s just a matter of where to put them. While the meditation and strategy videos may be run by a creative team, the comedy and skit videos can feature Headway’s younger employees, many of which are neurodivergent or struggling with mental health themselves.

Utilizing TikTok will expand Headway’s audience reach immensely. Headway strives to provide tools for as many people as possible, and TikTok’s platform allows for this.

Sample TikToks

TikTok #1 – “LSP can of beans” sound

- *Description of Sound:* Lumpy Space Princess from Adventure Time speaks about having a good time being alone and finding a can of beans (sarcastically, spitefully, insecurely). A group of people react in awe.
- *Captions:* “I’m doing so awesome on my own. Like, right now I found this can of beans.”
- *Video Description:* A young woman mouths the words to “LSP can of beans” sound in a manner appearing lighthearted. She shows a can of beans when appropriate during the audio and nods along with the group of people’s reactions.

- *Video Text:* Floating above the young woman's head are words reading, "Getting better at finding gratitude about the *starburst emoji* little things *starburst emoji*"
- *Video Caption:* Any amount of positivity is good for you in your daily life. Find out more at [headwayproject.com](https://www.headwayproject.com)

TikTok #2 – Meditation/Relaxation with "Weightless" sound

- *Description of Sound:* A calming instrumental song with an underlying beat matching that of a steady heart.
- *Video Description:* A 4K quality walkthrough of a forest in winter.
- *Video Text:* On-screen text reads, "This is "Weightless" by Marconi Union, one of the world's most calming songs. It has been proven to decrease stress hormones up to 65%, allowing the heartrate to slow. Save this sound and listen when needed."
- *Video Caption:* Find more calming sounds at the link in our bio

Sources

Specific Links

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomtaulli/2020/01/31/tiktok-why-the-enormous-success/?sh=6666e68965d1>

<https://0-www-statista-com.library.scad.edu/statistics/986209/most-important-health-issues-facing-america-us/>

Other

Statista.com

Lupton, Deborah. “Young People’s Use of Digital Health Technologies in the Global North: Narrative Review.” *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, Vol 23, Iss 1, p E18286 (2021), Jan. 2021, doi:10.2196/18286.