

MEET THE TIKTOK RIVAL THAT GAINED MOST FROM U.S. BAN – AND IT'S NOT REDNOTE

By Robert Steiner ▾

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ILLUSTRATION: VARIETY/VIP+

In this article

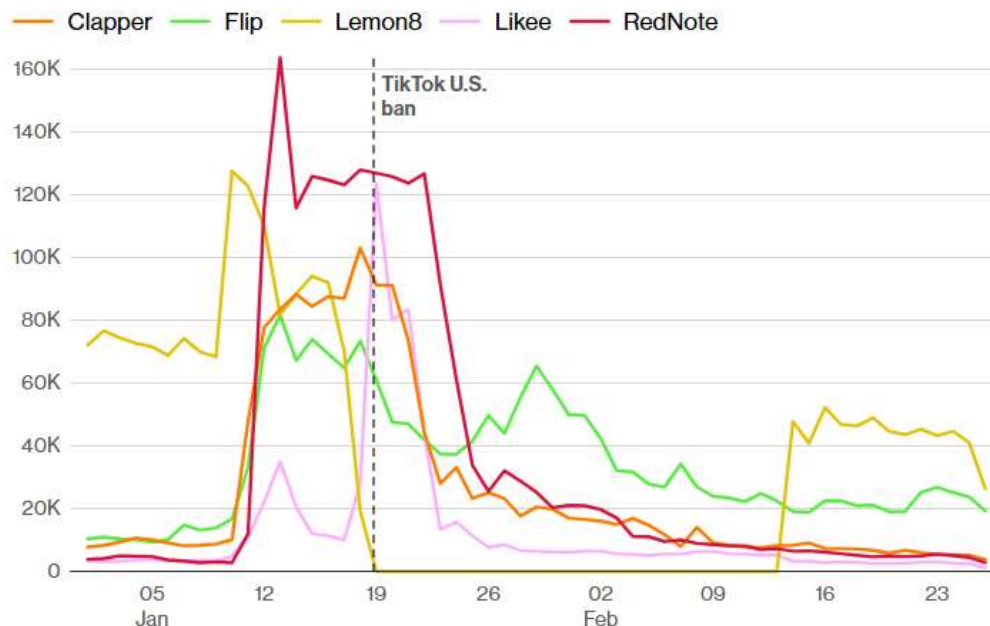
- » Following TikTok's U.S. ban (and un-ban), RedNote and other rivals didn't catch on with consumers in the long term
- » The only app that has sustained post-ban growth is Flip, an emerging platform in the growing social commerce world
- » While others have fallen back to pre-ban numbers, Flip racked up an average usership 119% higher than this time last year

It's been over a month since TikTok's short-lived government-mandated ban cleared a path for a crop of would-be rival apps to pop up on the radar of U.S. consumers. But with an extension deadline on the ban looming in early April, the data shows they've all since come and gone — except for one dark horse alternative.

Chinese social video platform RedNote, TikTok owner ByteDance's other video platform Lemon8 (which was also banned), slightly tweaked takes on TikTok-like Clapper and Likee and social commerce app Flip — more akin to TikTok Shop or LTK — greatly benefited from TikTok's 14-hour shutdown on Jan. 19, according to app download data via Appfigures. But all their growth failed to sustain through February.

U.S. Downloads of Select TikTok Competitors

Data spans Jan. 1 - Feb. 26, 2025



Source: Appfigures; chart: Variety Intelligence Platform
Note: Daily totals include App Store and Google Play downloads

Of course, TikTok's banishment didn't even last a full day, but that didn't result in the other apps immediately plummeting in downloads. RedNote, which gained media attention in particular as American TikTok refugees started joining the app in droves, saw daily downloads in the 120K range for a few days post-unbanning, before plummeting from 126.7K on Jan. 22 to 25.5K four days later, a 79.9% decrease.

The TikTok clones saw a similar pattern of a delayed decrease following the ban reversal, whether that be due to word of TikTok's return still getting out, people being put off by TikTok praising President Trump in its return announcement or a mixture of both.

The one "winner," if going by the virtue of ending February with higher daily downloads than the start of the January, is Flip. After the initial ban-fueled surge and lull, the app's downloads started trending upward again in late January, giving it some of the highest daily downloads of the bunch for February.

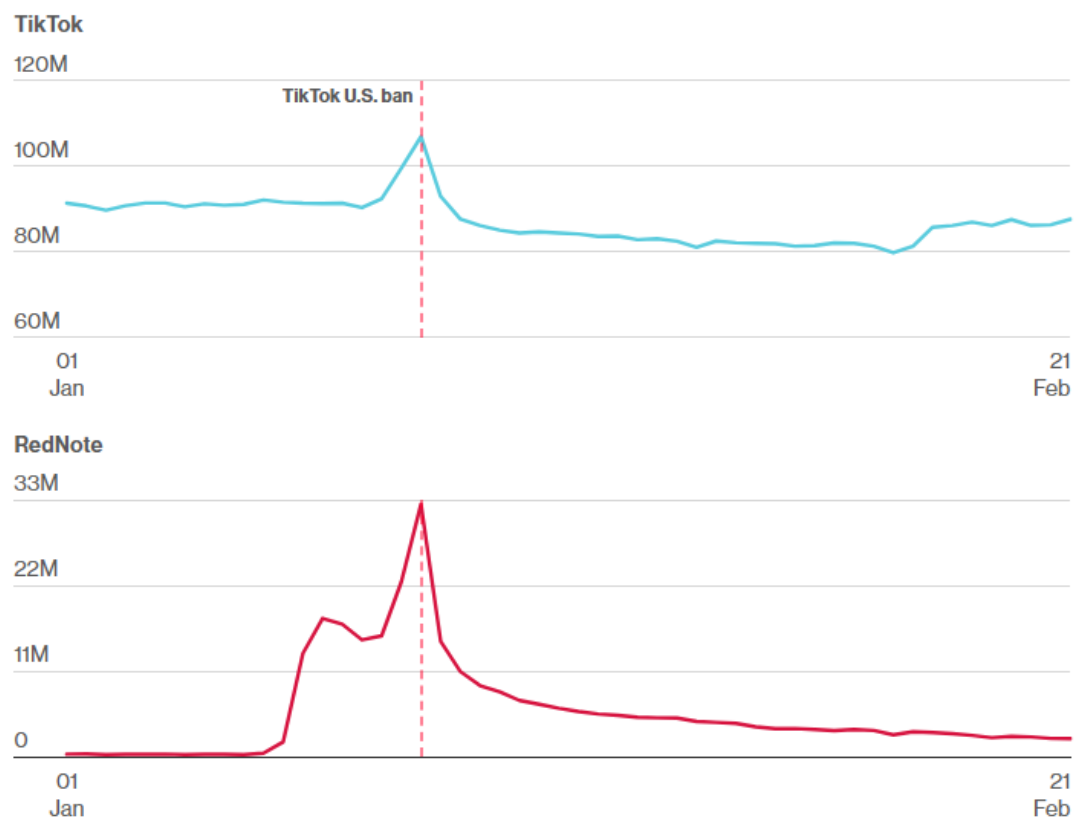
Flip is currently drawing around 20K daily U.S. downloads into late February, after starting the year in the 10K range. Still, its trajectory is still trending downward like the other TikTok copies, if at a slightly slower rate.

Of course, app downloads don't necessarily translate into usership — for instance, a good amount of people may have downloaded RedNote in anticipation of TikTok's ban but haven't used it since.

Thankfully, U.S. daily active user data courtesy of digital market intelligence company Similarweb shows that, like downloads, much of the TikTok competitors' January momentum didn't carry on through February.

U.S. Daily Active Users: TikTok vs. Competitors

Data spans Jan. 1-Feb. 21, 2025



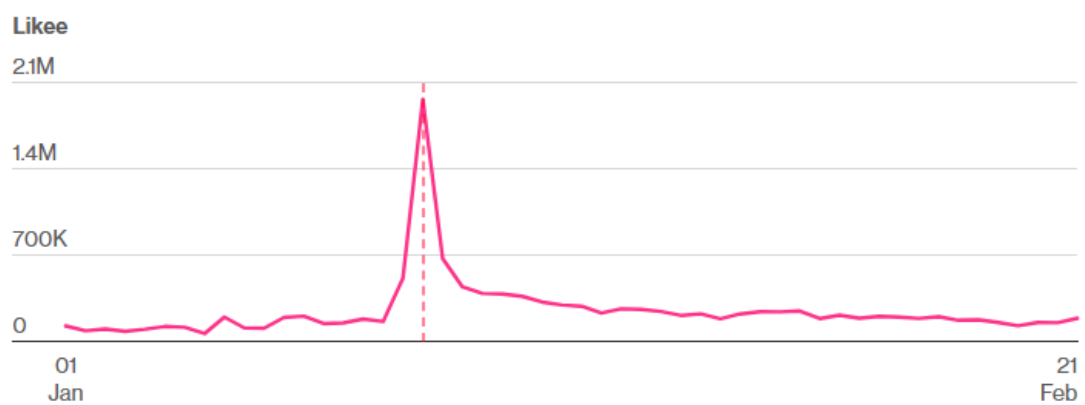
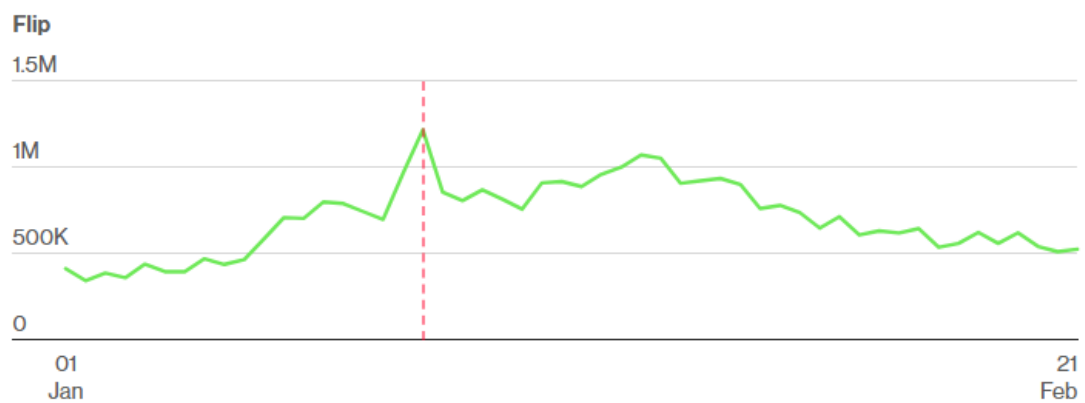
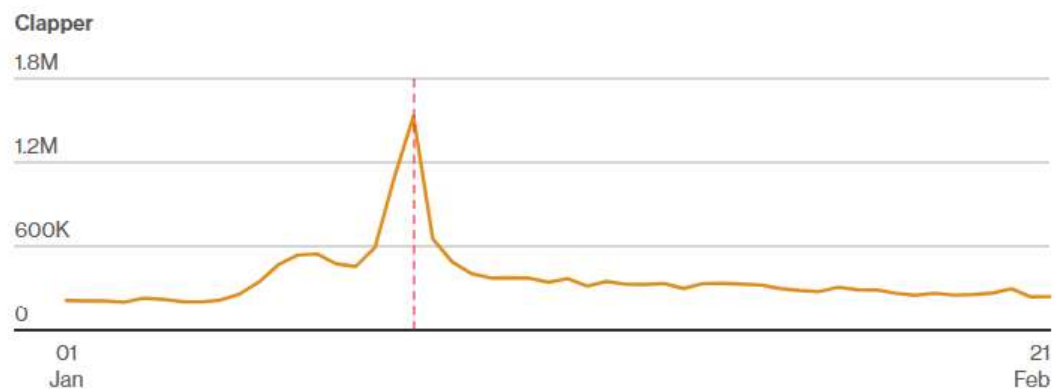
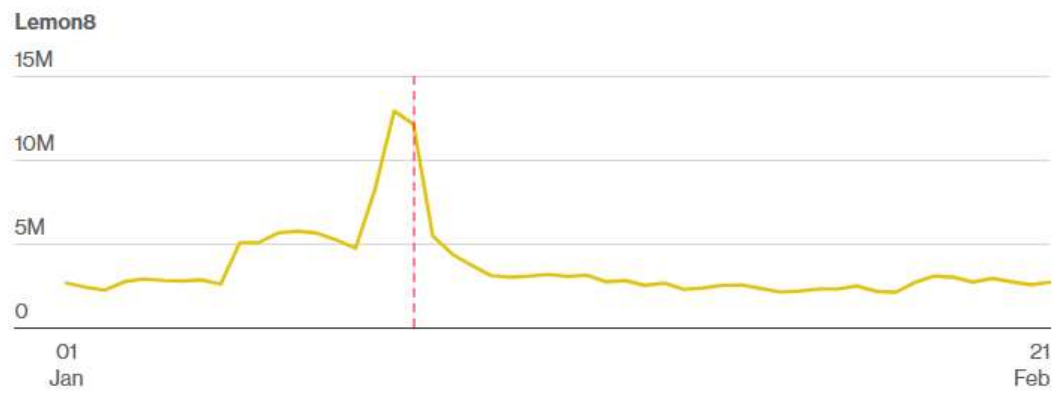


Chart: Variety Intelligence Platform ; Source: Similarweb
For more data, visit [VIP+](#)

As Similarweb noted in its own analysis, RedNote active users fell by 54% Jan. 19-20, although usership by the end of the month was still higher than at the start despite the drop (1,162.6% increase from Jan. 1 to Feb. 1). Likee, Clapper and Lemon8 concurrently saw similar drops on Jan. 20, but their DAUs fell back to around the same levels as the start of the year.

But once again, it seems Flip is walking away from this race somewhat of a winner. While its regular daily usership and spike on Jan. 19 are both the smallest of the group, it's the only non-TikTok platform whose DAUs were trending upward going into February and is ending the month with higher usership than pre-ban levels.

Flip saw 907K active users on Feb. 1, a 119% increase from the 413K users it had on Jan. 1. While that petered off as February went on, it's still holding strong above 500K DAUs heading into March.

There may be a few reasons behind Flip's stronger performance despite not getting the same press as RedNote. Founded in 2019 by tech entrepreneurs Noor Agha and Jonathan Ellman, the Los Angeles-based platform was already gaining attention before the ban (and predates TikTok Shop by a few years) in the rapidly growing world of social commerce.

Its premise is straightforward but effective: Instead of users making short videos about anything, Flip users can upload video reviews of products they buy through the app and earn money through said content. The platform has a strong vetting process for merchants on the app, places greater emphasis on video review content from actual customers and outright prohibits paid influencer content from companies, all of which address common criticisms of TikTok Shop.

The hype surrounding the TikTok ban may have made more people aware of alternatives, and Flip's improvements on the shopping aspect of TikTok may have convinced some to stick around compared with the more one-to-one TikTok clones. But while Flip still has to contend with the post-ban declines as the other TikTok clones, it so far has more time to turn around the momentum.

Ironically, the biggest winner of all from all the ban was TikTok itself, which saw a year-long high of 107 million active users on the day of its ban, before seeing DAUs adjust back to roughly the same levels as before the ban.

Ultimately, as long as TikTok's lights stay on stateside, those that want to compete with the app (and already aren't social media giants à la Meta and YouTube) will have to take Flip's lead and find genuine ways to innovate and improve upon the formula. But even then, it's unlikely that any new platform will encroach on TikTok's massive reach anytime soon without intervention — government, divine or otherwise.