



The University of Hohenheim provides information on the use of TikTok.

Assessment of the consequences of TikTok use by the University of Hohenheim

According to the general rule of Art. 35(1) of the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a privacy and data protection impact assessment (PIA) must be carried out if a form of processing, in particular when using new technologies, is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of natural persons due to the nature, scope, circumstances, and purposes of the processing. [The guideline of the State Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information \(LfDI\) on the use of social networks by public bodies](#) makes it mandatory to assess the consequences of the intended processing operations for the protection of personal data in accordance with the GDPR.

The **University of Hohenheim's TikTok site itself** does not trigger this consequence due to the very small scope of its own data processing (see the [TikTok Privacy Policy](#) in this regard). However, the postings often have a direct personal reference. When creating and publishing its own content, the University of Hohenheim therefore ensures that, in addition to the copyright of the photos, the image rights of those depicted are also taken into account and that the relevant consent is obtained. If reference is made to other TikTok users in the University of Hohenheim's posts (by sharing or mentioning), only the data that they have voluntarily provided themselves (user name and posts) will be processed. However, from the point of view of the University of Hohenheim, the **use of TikTok itself** represents a high-risk processing operation due to its far-reaching effects with regard to the evaluation of the data by TikTok Technology Limited for advertising purposes among others, for which a data protection impact assessment must be carried out by the page operator (University of Hohenheim) and service provider (TikTok) due to the joint controllership.

By using a TikTok account, the respective user comes under the systematic observation of TikTok Technology Limited. This can also reveal sensitive data such as political views, sexual orientation, or health problems, which can be linked together and used to create a personality profile. People who are particularly vulnerable, such as young people, can also be TikTok users and therefore data subjects. Even if the user only passively reads TikTok without an account, sensitive data can be collected through the collection of log data, such as the websites previously visited or the user's location data.

This is all the more true as TikTok Technology Limited cannot be audited or can only be audited to a limited extent. Since the data of users based in Germany are not

processed within Germany, but in Ireland, there are higher hurdles for access to (judicial) legal protection than for a company based in Germany.

In this respect, the University of Hohenheim assumes that public bodies using a social network for public relations work and providing general information have co-responsibility.

Co-responsibility does not mean that the University of Hohenheim confirms or guarantees the data protection compliance of TikTok Technology Limited's products. The university cannot do this under the prevailing circumstances. Rather, co-responsibility means that the University of Hohenheim makes itself and others aware of the risks of social networks. Social networks are currently in need of improvement in many areas from a data protection perspective. For this reason, TikTok users are shown alternative, more data protection-friendly communication channels via links to the University of Hohenheim's homepage.

Users are also made aware of the risks generally associated with the use of social media in the [Privacy Policy](#) of the University of Hohenheim's TikTok account.

The University of Hohenheim has committed itself to these measures in its [Use Concept](#). The advantages and disadvantages of using TikTok are then regularly evaluated, taking into account the terms of use of TikTok Technology Limited. This evaluation of the use concept is carried out annually and takes into account the use figures and reach, as well as the target group structure and use patterns of the networks.

The use of TikTok is thus embedded in a **package of measures**. Against this background, the assessment of the consequences of TikTok use at the University of Hohenheim is as follows:

Risk identification

The risks described above associated with the use of TikTok exist independently of the University of Hohenheim's own use of TikTok. In the vast majority of cases, the University of Hohenheim's posts themselves do not make any reference to sensitive personal data, but instead disseminate their own factual content.

After all, the data processed through interaction with the TikTok fan page of the University of Hohenheim or other accounts – namely the posts and/or the account name of a TikTok user – are already public / generally accessible / freely available on the internet. However, by appearing on the TikTok fan page of the university and the interaction with such, the data are made available and may thus achieve greater attention and wider dissemination than without this interaction. Interest in the University of Hohenheim can also be gauged by fan or subscriber status or regular contributions. Finally, TikTok also collects log data when users passively read the fan

page. By using TikTok itself, the University of Hohenheim is therefore increasing the amount of data used and analyzed by TikTok Technology Limited.

Risk analysis

The expansion of the dissemination group and the increase in linking possibilities will facilitate the processing of data for other purposes by TikTok Technology Limited and secret profiling. Openness to visitor contributions can also lead to negative social consequences such as inappropriate or discriminatory comments or the dissemination of sensitive data. While this damage may be significant if caused by TikTok Technology Limited itself, this is increased only to a very limited extent by the TikTok fan page of the University of Hohenheim. This is because a significant proportion of the data is already available to TikTok Technology Limited. In particular, there is no obligation to create a TikTok account due to the University of Hohenheim's social media site, as there are sufficient alternative contact and information options for the University of Hohenheim. The topics of science, teaching, research, etc. are also only suitable for triggering hate-filled debates to a limited extent, meaning that the probability of damage occurring is very limited.

Risk assessment

Overall, the additional risk caused by the University of Hohenheim's TikTok profile can therefore be classified as low to medium.

It is also possible to implement remedial measures which further reduce the risk. The majority of these measures are within the sphere of the user: Users can also protect themselves to a certain extent by making various settings, such as erasing their browser history, deactivating cookies, or not sharing their location when using photos.

In addition, continuous editorial support enables us to intervene in the event of comments that are defamatory or violating personal rights, up to and including blocking the account. The University of Hohenheim has compiled a [Netiquette](#) for the use of its social media sites, which the university will ensure is adhered to when maintaining the page.

Results

The use of TikTok by the University of Hohenheim is justifiable in view of the risks described and the binding measures planned. The University of Hohenheim undertakes to monitor further developments and to regularly repeat and, if necessary, further develop the review carried out here.

Last updated: December 2024