Original Article

The Psychological Effects of TikTok: Examining Youth Mental Health and Social Media Engagement

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Abstract

As the popularity of TikTok is increasing and it staking the position of one of the most used social media platforms, this study assess the psychological impact of this platform on young people. The present research is devoted to studying the repercussions of TikTok utilization on youths' and young-adults' psychological health. The research employed a quantitative survey approach to acquire data from the tiktok app users represented across the age of 13-24 years. According to the findings, it is evident that the longer time spent on TikTok leads to an increase in the symptoms of anxiety and depression, meaning that the app has a negative impact on mental health. Additionally, both passive and active use of social networking site involved in the study was also associated with low self-esteem and negative body image perceptions defined by increased liking, sharing as well as commenting. The findings also established that the ANA had a negative impact on mental health, which necessitates intervention to counter the effect created by appearance-focused media consumption. Theoretical analysis is based on the Social Media Effects Theory and Social Comparison Theory; methodological considerations for educators, mental health workers, policymakers, and social media outlet are made as to how to lessen the negative repercussions of the TikTok app on the young.

Keywords: Social media, Tik tok, mental health

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a defining aspect of modern communication, influencing how individuals interact, share information, and perceive themselves. Among the many platforms that have gained widespread popularity, TikTok has emerged as one of the most dominant social media applications, particularly among adolescents and young adults (McCashin etal., 2023). Since its launch in 2016, TikTok has attracted over one billion active users globally, offering an engaging and highly interactive experience through its short-form video format and algorithm-driven content recommendations. Through the platform users can build videos and handle them for sharing and react to content through liking and commenting and sharing. TikTok's entertainment features combined with simple accessibility has led to its quick expansion which now serves as a regular digital platform for many millions of users (Boothroyd et al., 2021). The wide adoption of TikTok usage has raised serious questions about how it affects youth mental health psychology. The long periods of TikTok usage continue to spark academic concerns regarding its effects on young people's mental health indicators for anxiety alongside depression along with self-esteem and body image (Pruett et al., 2024). The user opportunities for creativity and community connections on the platform have led to rising scientific data showing that long-term TikTok use could cause negative mental health results.

The core problem with TikTok centers on its negative impact on user mental health that produces anxiety together with depression. Research data reveals that extreme social media use creates obvious correlations between mental difficulties among teenage individuals and young adults (Chao et al 2023). TikTok endless algorithm-driven stream and continuous

scrolling mechanism creates addictive user experiences which cause people to lose track of time while using the platform. TikTok provides an endless sequence of customized videos which creates difficulties for users to break their platform usage (Geisel-Zamora et al., 2023). Digital stimulation exposure creates cognitive fatigue which combines with the development of digital addiction traits while causing emotional instability in people. Long screen use has been proven to increase stress levels and produce mood disturbances together with concentration problems and these factors produce greater anxiety and depression symptoms (Abro et al., 2024). Because of interaction-triggered dopamine systems users find it challenging to restrict their screen time therefore they develop behavioral addictions. Users who complete lengthy periods on the app develop emotional states of loneliness and doubt and sadness that establish a direct link between their digital contacts (Akhtar et al., 2025). Investigators need to conduct detailed research about the powerful destructive consequences that long-term TikTok engagement produces on youth mental health conditions together with depression and anxiety symptoms.

TikTok addiction produces severe detrimental effects on users' self-esteem together with their body image representations which represent major health risks. The visual structure of TikTok drives users to view content about beauty and fitness and lifestyle but it shows unrealistically beautiful body standards to its youthful audience (Mahlakaarto et al., 2024). The phenomenon of Social Comparison Theory markets itself through social media platforms by posting altered or perfectified content that induces people to assess their worth relative to others (Kearney et al., 2023). Most TikTok users watch content featuring weight loss speedups and fitness and muscular transformation posts from influencers and celebrities who make their viewers compare unfavorably with their own body features. Statistical research shows that repetitive encounters with filtered images cause people to experience reduced self-esteem and body dissatisfaction as well as eating disorder symptoms. Unreasonable standards regarding physical looks generate substantial pressure on teenagers which intensifies when users modify their natural appearances through digital filters (Re et al., 2024). The beauty standards get increasingly distorted due to fitness challenges and dietary fads and the rising number of cosmetic treatments on TikTok. Sadagheyani

et al., (2021) provided the basis for this investigation which examines how young users develop negative body image dissatisfaction due to TikTok beauty and fitness content exposure.

Users who use TikTok face emotional and mental effects from how they interact with the platform together with what content they consume. Research shows that active TikTok participation which includes liking and commenting and sharing leads users to more social comparison activities that result in decreasing self-esteem (Adams et al., 2024). Users mostly from the adolescent demographic segment seek social validation through the tracking of like counts and follower numbers as well as comment interactions thus establishing a competitive framework where users seek constant approval. Users who get positive reinforcement experience short-term confidence increases while negative reactions to their content may lead to feelings of rejection alongside inadequacy and social isolation (Kourkoulou et al., 2023). External validation shapes a weak identity value system for people who base their personal worth on their online success instead of inner abilities. Social media's anonymous environment allows users to engage in cyberbullying practices which results in additional declines of self-esteem among users. TikTok users among the young population encounter harassment and negative comments and body-shaming on the platform that leads to anxiety and self-doubt (Littlejohn et al., 2024). The research explores how extreme TikTok usage forms a direct negative connection with self-esteem and how social validation-seeking conducts cause damaging results.

The rising concerns about negative psychological consequences on social media platforms has led TikTok and its peers to implement protective features according to Ebert et al. (2023). The platform added functionality that includes time management settings alongside tailored search restriction options along with monitoring tools so users can establish usage boundaries while shielding against unwanted material. These protective measures have not been sufficiently proven as effective solutions. Research demonstrates mixed results about the effectiveness of screen time limitations with content filters as measures to prevent mental health decline since they fail to reach the root causes of social media addiction (Slongo et al., 2024). The need to check the application frequently persists even when users

implement screen time restrictions. The security measures writers select for content filtering fail to eliminate entirely threats from fitness and beauty material because algorithms focus on pursuits of engagement. The overall performance of these protective measures is reduced since most young users either do not activate them or remain oblivious to their existence (Mink & Szymanski et al., 2022). This investigation evaluates the relationship between TikTok protection features which leads to reduced mental health problems and tests if these safeguards effectively combat depression and anxiety concerns and body image dissatisfaction for adolescent users.

Understanding how TikTok affects youth culture and digital interactions becomes crucial because it impacts their mental health alongside their body image and self-esteem development. Although TikTok brings entertainment together with creativity and social connection users should be aware of its psychological risks (Fatima et al., 2024). Current research shows that anxiety, depression and body dissatisfaction growth among young social media users calls for quick research-based solutions. The results from this research help expand the current discussion through analysis of the relationship between TikTok usage habits and exposed content and user participation with mental health responses (Conte et al., 2024). Researchers and educators together with policymakers must work on designing effective solutions because when combined with digital literacy programs these measures will foster better social media practices among young users.

This research investigates TikTok content and its algorithmic system of engagement regarding youth mental health by connecting screen time with content format against psychological measures while referring to Cardillo et al., (2025) who studied digital media consumption patterns alongside psychological outcomes. The study seeks to read and identify mood disorders symptoms and behavioral modifications linked to TikTok overuse in teenage and young adult demographics as described in Xie et al., (2024). The research investigates protective elements and therapeutic interventions that could safeguard mental health outcomes during TikTok usage by combining platform-based solutions with user-specific techniques based on Taylor et al. (2024) preventive frameworks. The study will enhance knowledge about social media impacts on mental health through its evaluation of these research targets while presenting actionable strategies to

care for TikTok-induced psychological outcomes. Academic knowledge becomes stronger because of these research findings while policy decisions and parental instruction and mental health interventions develop through their findings to support responsible youth digital consumption (McCashin et al., 2023).

The remainder of this research presents a literature review of TikTok psychological studies followed by methodology and data collection methods and key results along with their interpretation and a concluding summary with recommendations for improved social media use.

Theoretical framework

Social Media Effects Theory

The Social Media Effects Theory helps explain all the ways social media influences people at individual and community levels. Social media functions as an instrument that influences how people perceive things and behave and feel according to this theory. Social media influences users through three key mechanisms which include increased interactions and possible identity confirmations as well as various types of information according to Kopald et al., (2024). Social media mechanisms create a range of positive and negative outcomes such as enhanced social relationships plus raised self-esteem combined with cyberbullying risks although users learn to expect negative experiences. The characteristics of TikTok including the algorithm-based feed with comments and likes can be evaluated utilizing this theory (Mousavi et al., 2024). Users can experience psychological health improvements through TikTok encounters that generate social fit and sense of belonging because these elements represent core human health elements. Users experience decreased self-esteem as well as cyber bullying from social media interactions which have negative or excessive use. The Social Media Effects Theory works as an initial theory to examine both positive and negative TikTok usage effects by understanding diverse social interaction patterns (Chu et al., 2021).

Social Comparison Theory

Festinger introduced the Social Comparison Theory in the 1950s to explain how seeing what others have enables people to evaluate themselves by using these references during normal social comparison processes. The Social Comparison Theory demonstrates particular relevance to

the practices of social media applications. The steady availability of peer information on social media increases social comparison according to Savoy (2023) since this level of access would not exist in traditional face-to-face interactions. Individuals make either upward comparisons when they evaluate themselves in reference to superior others or downward comparisons when they evaluate themselves in reference to inferior others. The aesthetic-focused nature and popularity-dependent indicators on TikTok generate social comparison contexts. People end up concluding that their own life, appearance, and achievements fall short when compared to TikTok content despite not understanding what challenges creators endured along the way (DeFilippo et al., 2024). People start to feel envious alongside self-doubts about their worth while becoming unfulfilled because they only compare themselves to totally flawless social media content produced by others. Mental health outcomes resulting from TikTok usage become more understandable through the application of the Social Comparison Theory particularly regarding body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among developing young people constructing their identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review, the hypotheses are compared and contrasted with prior research. The assumptions of hypotheses are supported by the studies conducted by Anderson and Jiang (2020) as well as Brasil et al., (2024) which explore the connection between social media use and mental health consequences. This enables the development of a theoretical framework of the anticipated relationship between TikTok usage patterns and their psychological consequences, which underlines the significance of studying these phenomena.

Influence of Social Media on Youth

Social media creates essential changes that affect the psychological development along with social aspects and physical health of young individuals. Social media serves as an interactive platform according to Sadagheyani (2021) where young people connect to build friendships as they share information maintaining their personal identity while their mental and psychological advancement is affected. Schreurs (2021) explains how social media have positive and negative effects on adolescent self-esteem alongside peer relations and identity development. Studies on Facebook

and Instagram are abundant but the analysis of TikTok introduces distinctive features into these relationships. The immediate feedback systems together with visual content focus of social media sites potentially help build the mood disorders and social evaluation issues that adolescents face during adolescence. Young adults exhibit a higher risk for mental disorders and depressive conditions and suicidal behaviors during their developmental phases. According to Chu et al., (2021) university students experienced one-fourth of all mental health disorder diagnoses throughout the last twelve months. According to Giordano et al., (2021) suicide preoccupations appeared in one fifth of students and twenty percent of students self-injured themselves even though 9% tried to commit suicide. Social exclusion and negative social comparisons can occur through social media platforms where cyber bullying takes place (Schreurs et al., 2021). The combination of depression with anxiety develops along with suicide attempts because loneliness and social anxiety disorder and body image issues emerge from these risk factors (DeFilippo et al., 2024). Work completion delays occur because social media notifications interrupt people in their workflow leading to work procrastination and distraction-related distress. Student performance in academic studies stands out as the main concern for university-level students since they dedicate long periods to their academic tasks (Li et al., 2023).

Impact of TikTok Usage on Mental Health

Analyzing the specific effects of TikTok on psychology, McCashin et al. (2023) state that the app may pose a risk to users' mental health due to the content that causes anxiety related to body image and social comparison. The overall layout of the site promotes extended scrolling that may result in extended screen time that is directly linked with poor sleep quality, increased rates of depression, and anxiety. Besides, research by Yao et al., (2023) reveal that such effects are more apparent in TikTok given the extensive and addictive content as well as the pressure to conform to trends where users are likely to be judged publicly. Further research by Marin-Dragu et al., (2022) notes that while TikTok offers an opportunity to be creative and can be a source of support, it also makes users vulnerable to cyberbullying and online harassment, which are positively associated with depressive symptoms and social anxiety.

The study of TikTok psychological effects remains limited in comparison to studies of other traditional social media platforms since this platform has recently gained popularity among adolescent users. The unique features of TikTok require investigate separately because they produce distinctive psychological effects on users. One of the most referenced studies on TikTok addiction as well as user well-being effects came from Montag et al. (2021). The research involved recruiting 1,500 adolescents to confirm that regular TikTok use directly leads to anxiety and depressive symptoms. Users spend excessive time viewing content on TikTok because the platform serves personalized recommendations based on their behavior therefore causing mental health issues. The study pointed out that addictive behavior leads users to develop psychological problems. DeLeon et al., (2024) executed a combined research approach to study TikTok effects on teen self-esteem together with their perceptions of their bodies. The authors conducting both surveys and interviews found that users experience negative body image and self-doubts because of the perfect lifestyle images present on TikTok. The surveyed teenagers reported feeling compelled to acquire the advertised beauty standards and luxurious lifestyles on TikTok because of this pressure which resulted in decreased self-esteem and body image. For this paper the Social Comparison Theory applies because TikTok encourages excessive unhealthy self-assessments that lead to negative self-perceptions (Carpenter et al., 2023).

Another study that deserves attention is the work by (Kolas et al., 2024) who focused on the social reinforcement processes within TikTok and their effects on the psyche. The study employed behavioral data analysis and psychological tests to examine the impact of likes, comments, and shares on the emotional health of the users. The study showed that positive reinforcement through likes and comments boosts self-esteem as well as mood while developing dependence which leads to anxiety and depression once the reinforcement stops. Similar to other social media platforms TikTok generates a loop of negative impacts on mental health which becomes noticeable over time. Interactions between heavy TikTok users were evaluated during a six-month period according to Kurnialandi et al.'s (2023) cross-sectional study. The authors discovered that individuals who spent excessive time on TikTok demonstrated elevated depression symptoms together with feelings of social isolation. Users who became addicted to TikTok reported having reduced real-life social interactions which researchers equate to a potential TikTok addiction exploiting human connection leading to feelings of depression alongside loneliness. Caponnetto et al. (2025) enlarged the study scope to comprehend how psychological effects of TikTok influence Instagram and Snapchat users. The study investigated adolescents throughout the United States and measured their depression and anxiety levels. TikTok users showed higher scores than users of different social media platforms. Young people develop feelings of inadequacy and competitiveness due to TikTok's tendency to promote popular content and its way of sharing material.

The analysis presented by Kopald (2024) focused on the social effects of TikTok on modern youth conduct. Through their surveys and content analysis the researchers discovered TikTok drives changes in social interactions and social standards associated with fashion preferences and linguistic patterns and conduct norms (Kurnialandi et al., 2023). Additionally the application affects users' psychological state through anxiety development as users adhere to its newly established guidelines.

H_1: There is a significant relationship between time spent on TikTok and levels of anxiety and depression among young users.

Impact of Beauty and Fitness Content on Body Image and Self-Esteem

Body image evolves as a multifaceted experience which involves the human processing of personal bodily perspectives and emotional responses and psychological thoughts about both physical looks and body shape. People engage in subjective perceptual work to interpret beauty standards and biological factors instead of simply letting these criteria affect them (Merino et al., 2024).

Several studies conducted by researchers focus on understanding how TikTok as a social media portal shapes body image perceptions of its users. Data indicates TikTok shares parallel features with other social media networks because they both influence body image through social comparison and standard beauty internalization. Body Image Journal reported that brief interaction with unattainable beauty standard content in short social media videos results in negative body image effects. A research study

demonstrated that using TikTok creates links between body dissatisfaction and appearance comparison together with body surveillance. A study of Chinese TikTok (Douyin) detected new trends where users prove their thinness by joining 'body challenges' which generate worry about negative body image situations (Hu et al., 2023). Research on TikTok's body image effects requires further investigation to discover exact behavioral patterns. The future investigation should develop tactics to prevent TikTok from producing harmful impacts on users' perceptions of their body image. In order to improve media literacy and reduce body dissatisfaction schools might implement preventive interventions as a means for promoting a positive body image (Samari et al., 2022).

Maes and Vandenbosch (2022) emphasize that TikTok, as a video platform, brings the body to the forefront by displaying its movement, particularly in choreography videos. Characteristic dance moves have emerged on TikTok, predominantly sexualized and executed in provocative clothing. This normalizes certain body types, gestures, and expressions, and also promotes self-objectification (Mink & Szymanski et al., 2022). There is relevant literature about specific TikTok trends and their relation to body image and self-esteem. Authors highlight the lack of diversity in bodies and beauty standards portrayed on TikTok, noting that these are often self-objectified and generally associated with thinness, which, according to (FCH et al., 2024), is harmful to the body image and satisfaction of girls. Mink & Szymanski (2022) studied videos tagged as #thinspiration, concluding that they normalize body checking. sleeping, and socializing, thereby hindering the development and practice of social skills. A significant body of research examines toxic content, ranging from negative comments from followers and cyberbullying to sexual harassment, fake news, and misinformation in general, as well as violence, racism, sexism, and dangerous challenges (Zartaloudi et al., 2023). Several authors identify low self-esteem and increased loneliness as effects of TikTok's excessive use.

H_2: There is a significant association between exposure to beauty and fitness content on TikTok and increased body image dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem.

Impact of Social Media Engagement on Self-Perception and Psychological Well-Being

TikTok, differentiated by an algorithm-oriented strategy for sharing content, focuses on short, stimulating videos that match the consumers' interests, which makes it extraordinarily participatory. As studied by Barry (2024), Tiktok has developed an efficient way of engaging users by a mechanism that predicts the users' preferences with a very high degree of accuracy. This individualized content feed, dubbed the "Discover" feed, not only encourages a longer user session but may also deepen the echo chamber phenomenon, exposing users to only similar opinions and behaviors. This can result in more vulnerability to peer pressure and more pressure to fit in certain perceivable social standards and beauty, which are unrealistic. According to Virós-Martín (2024), this high level of engagement may result in users developing behavioral addiction where they only spend time on the app without attending other important aspects of life such as school, physical health, and interpersonal relationships. The review by Kross et al., (2021) concluded that psychological processes involving upward social comparison and fear of missing out lead to negative affects which potentially affect the user experience of TikTok and the lives of its users. The psychological effect of TikTok seems probable because teenagers frequently mirror their role models within their "LipSync-Videos". The outcomes of these activities upon personal identity formation along with self-esteem (self-confidence) creation function as critical matter for psychological discussions.

H_3: There is a significant relationship between high engagement on TikTok (liking, commenting, and sharing) and self-esteem, with higher engagement leading to greater social comparison and lower self-worth.

Impact of Protective Measures on Reducing Negative Psychological Effects of TikTok

The widely used social media platform TikTok shapes user conduct and psychological welfare with negative effects that primarily affect teenagers and young adults. TikTok's combination of entertainment value along with social interaction and creative opportunities generates negative psychological consequences including addiction behavior and depression along with anxiety and short attention span among users (Ali et al., 2023). Multiple protective measures were developed by the platform to minimize adverse effects which include digital well-being features together with parental controls as well as content moderation and time management tools. Search

engines against mental health protection stand as defensive measures for safeguarding TikTok users from harmful behavioral effects. Scientific research demonstrates that protective measures implemented in TikTok effectively diminish mental damages caused by the platform (Akyil et al 2024).

Proof from recent studies demonstrates that TikTok overuse brings about addictive screen behavior along with reduced concentration abilities. An investigation revealed that TikTok's algorithm manages to display custom content streams that force users to stay on the platform repeatedly. The screen time mechanism drives addictive behaviors because users experience difficulties controlling themselves after using the application (Mastantuono et al., 2024). Some users have established better screen time behaviors after getting access to management features on their devices. Users who get alerts about their usage time or who can set usage limits demonstrate better control of their activity which minimizes potential addiction symptoms together with associated anxiety and disrupted sleep patterns.

The "flow experience" played an intermediate role for PTU according to Conte et al.'s (2023) research. The flow experience occurred on TikTok due to built-in features which created greater user concentration while disconnecting users from their sense of time. The research uncovered parental control as a protective element against PTU which stems from concentration issues and these findings led to the development of such associations. Qin et al. (2023) established that people who experienced TikTok use disorder exhibited increasing symptoms of stress and depression and memory degradation together with anxiety development. A study conducted by Ebert et al. (2023) explained their sample groups through their time spent on TikTok and applied psychosocial tests to show that these groups showed no differences in their psychosocial characteristics although one group used TikTok for two hours and another for nine hours.

TikTok safety measures that include parental controls with content moderation operations serve to reduce psychological risks that users face. A large number of young people encounter objectionable material which leads to adverse consequences for their self-image along with their emotional state. Through their "Restricted Mode" and "Family Pairing" features guardians can control what their kids see and track their activities which minimizes contact with distressing content (Taylor et al., 2024). Children monitored by parents on TikTok show lower rates of social comparison anxiety symptoms and stress from cyberbullying. The steps TikTok has taken to limit beauty filters for young users have received positive reviews as an approach to combat body image problems stemming from unrealistic social media beauty standards.

The main concern on TikTok involves users sharing inaccurate information with dangerous challenges which cause people to take high risks and sustain psychological harm. The platform fights misconceptions through platform fact-checking features and alert labels yet it additionally removes content from its platform. Ruak et al., (2023) conducted research which demonstrated that verified information warnings reduced unfavorable behavior responses and mental distress from incorrect data among viewers. The safety measures establish improved digital safety conditions because they reduce deceptive content psychological effects on users.

Protective features currently encounter numerous barriers when implementing delivery to every user base. Features in social media reach their best potential only when users become aware of them yet actively participate in implementing these features. Youth members along with other users tend to ignore or bypass digital well-being settings while disregarding their active screen time alerts. Major developments in awareness initiatives and potentially enhanced regulatory standards need to be implemented in order to achieve responsible use of TikTok. The effective reduction of psychological harm through protective measures requires continuous monitoring and enhancement to match users' digital tendencies and new dangers (Jerin et al., 2024). TikTok along with similar platforms should support responsible use practices and deploy protective measures to lessen negative psychological effects while keeping themselves as platforms for social entertainment.

H_4: There is a significant relationship between the use of protective measures and lower levels of anxiety, depression, and body image concerns.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a quantitative survey design to systematically obtain data related to how TikTok affects mental health among young people. A proper quantitative research design follows from theory-based hypotheses which this study uses Social Media Effects Theory together

with Social Comparison Theory. The research includes close-ended survey questions to test hypotheses about the truthfulness or falseness of the research statements. Large statistical data collection is feasible with this method which allows researchers to perform population-wide generalization through population-level response standardization.

Sampling Methodology

The sampling technique that was used in the study was the stratified random sampling to ensure that the survey covers a wider and diverse population of the youth using TikTok. Stratified sampling enables the use of different subgroups in the population, which may have a difference in the use of TikTok, including age, gender, and SES. This method improves the external validity of the study since it ensures that all segments of the youths are captured in the survey.

Participants Details

From an initial pool of applicants, 50 participants were chosen to ensure a diverse sample. This group reflects a variety of viewpoints.

Measuring Variables

The dependent variable is 'youth mental health,' and the independent variable is 'TikTok usage,' serving as the variable that influence changes in youth mental health outcomes. This section explains the variables' definitions, outlining how 'time spent on TikTok' is calculated and how 'anxiety and depression' are assessed using standard psychological tests. It justifies the manner of conducting the survey and the methods of hypothesis testing, including correlation and regression analyses, making the approach sound and reproducible.

Development and Validation of Survey Instruments

The creation of survey instruments starts with developing questionnaire design to evaluate mental health-related effects of TikTok usage. According to Sattora et al., (2024) survey questions should be written directly and should have both clarity and validity toward the defined construct. Scaled survey questions was appeared in the questionnaire to measure usage frequency together with the degree of participation and content reactions. Instruments gain credibility in their construct assessment through the validation process.

Data Collection Procedures

The research data came from an online survey distributed across Instagram and Snapchat and Facebook social media networks. The adopted platforms consist of popular social media sites because they serve our audience made up of Tiktok users. Additionally, the survey was circulated through direct email campaigns to university student mailing lists, with a focus on departments that study psychology and media studies. According to Mink & Szymanski (2022), online surveys are useful in reaching young people because they are comfortable with the use of technology. The survey will be administered through social media platforms and other online platforms that the youths are likely to visit. To encourage participation, the study will respect the ethic by not revealing the participant's identity, and by explaining the purpose of the study and how the data will be used.

Incentives: Participants were encouraged to complete the survey by offering a chance to win one of several small e-gift cards. This method was selected to increase participation rates while minimizing the influence of the incentive on the responses

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Analysis

Table 1

Demographic Profile

Category	Subcategory	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	52%
	Male	46%
	Non-binary/Prefer not to say	2%
Age Distribution	13-17 years	50%
	18-21 years	30%
	22-24 years	20%
Nationality	Germany	60%
	United States	20%
	Other European countries (France, UK)	10%
	Asia (China, India)	10%

The survey saw a balanced gender distribution with 52% female, 46% male, and 2% identifying

as non-binary or preferring not to say. The participants were predominantly young, with 50% aged between 13-17 years, 30% between 18-21 years, and 20% between 22-24 years. The majority of the participants were from Germany, accounting for 60% of the responses. The remaining participants were from the United States (20%), other European countries including France and the UK (10%), and Asia, mainly China and India (10%).

Survey results

## Quantitative Analysis of TikTok's Impact on Youth Mental Health

Table 2

Frequency of TikTok Usage and Reported Mental Health Symptoms

Usage Frequency	N= no. of participants	Reporting Anxiety %	Reporting Depression %	Reporting Sleep Issues %
Several times a day	50	60	55	50
Once a day	50	40	35	30
Few times a week	50	20	15	10
Rarely	50	5	3	2

This table details how different frequencies of TikTok usage correlate with reports of anxiety, depression, and sleep issues among youth, suggesting a higher prevalence of symptoms among more frequent users.
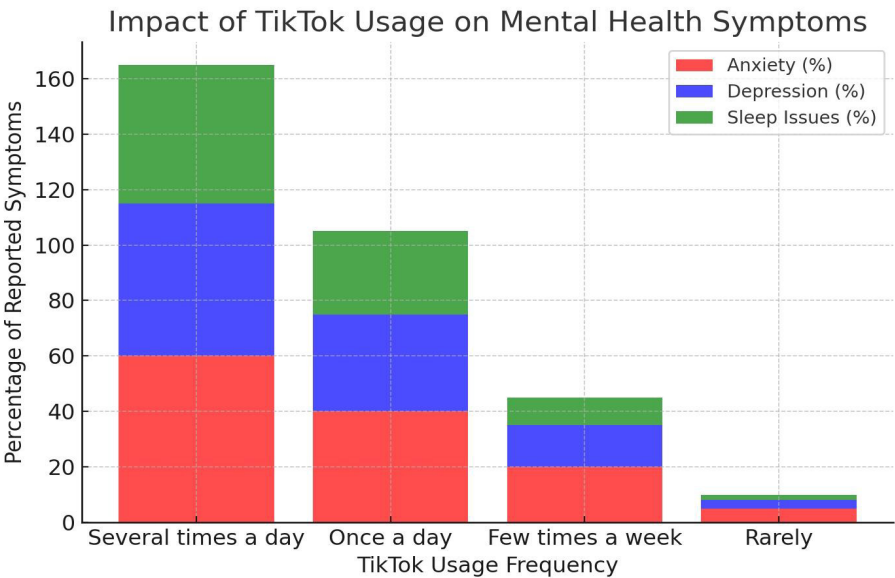
The graph clearly shows that frequent TikTok users experience higher mental health issues. 60% of those who use TikTok several times a day report anxiety, 55% report depression, and 50% face sleep disturbances. In contrast, users who engage occasionally or rarely report significantly fewer symptoms. This pattern suggests that excessive TikTok usage may contribute to mental health concerns, and limiting screen time could help reduce anxiety, depression, and sleep issues.

Table 3

Types of Content Consumed on TikTok and Psychological Impact

Content Type	N = no. of participants	Reporting Positive Mood %	Reporting Body Image Concerns %	Feeling Social Pressure %
Entertainment	50	70	40	45
Educational	50	65	15	20
Fitness	50	50	60	55
Beauty & Fashion	50	40	75	70

Here, explores the impact of various types of TikTok content on youth mental health, highlighting significant concerns related to body image and social pressure associated with beauty and fashion content.

Impact of TikTok Content Type on Psychological Well-being
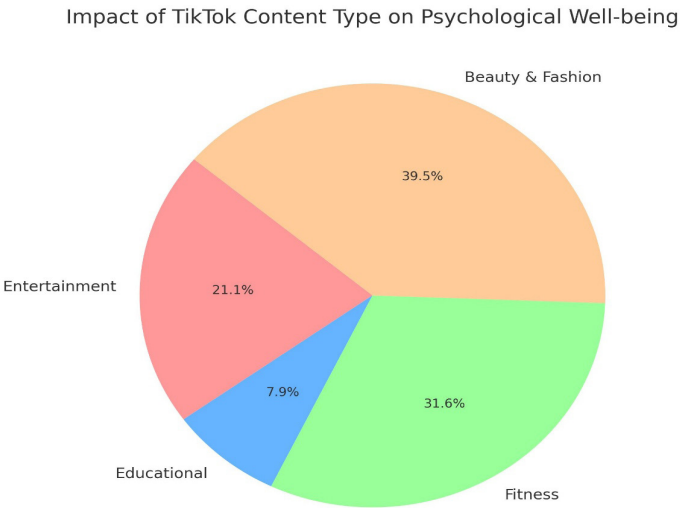
The graph shows that Entertainment and Educational content improve mood, while Beauty and Fitness content increase body image concerns and social pressure. 75% of beauty content viewers and 60% of fitness content viewers report negative body image. Social pressure is highest in beauty (70%) and fitness (55%) categories, making users feel judged. Reducing exposure to appearance-focused content may help protect self-esteem and mental well-being.

Table 4

TikTok Usage Duration and Mental Health Outcomes

Daily Usage (hrs)	Reduced Concentration %	Experiencing Mood Swings %	Average Stress Level (1-10) %	N = no. of participants
0-1	10	10	3	50
1-2	25	25	4	50
2-4	45	40	6	50
4+	65	60	8	50

This correlates the daily hours spent on TikTok with adverse mental health outcomes like reduced concentration, mood swings, and overall stress levels, indicating worsened conditions with increased usage.
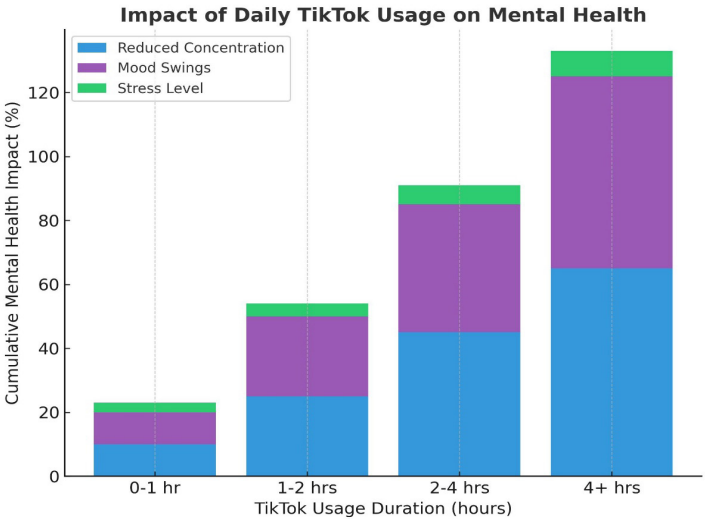
The graph shows that higher TikTok usage leads to more mental health issues. Users spending 4+ hours daily report the highest concentration issues (65%), mood swings (60%), and stress (8/10). In contrast, those using TikTok for less than an hour experience minimal negative effects. Increased screen time worsens focus, emotional stability, and stress levels, highlighting the need for usage limits to protect mental well-being.

Table 5

Protective Measures Used by TikTok Users

Users Implementing	N = no. of participants	Protective Measure %	Perceived Effectiveness %	Reduction in Negative Symptoms %
Screen Time Limitation	50	40	75	60
Curated Content Filters	50	35	70	55
Scheduled Breaks	50	25	65	50

This table presents the effectiveness of various protective measures employed by TikTok users to mitigate negative mental health effects, such as limiting screen time and using content filters.

Effectiveness of Protective Measures in Reducing Mental Health Issues
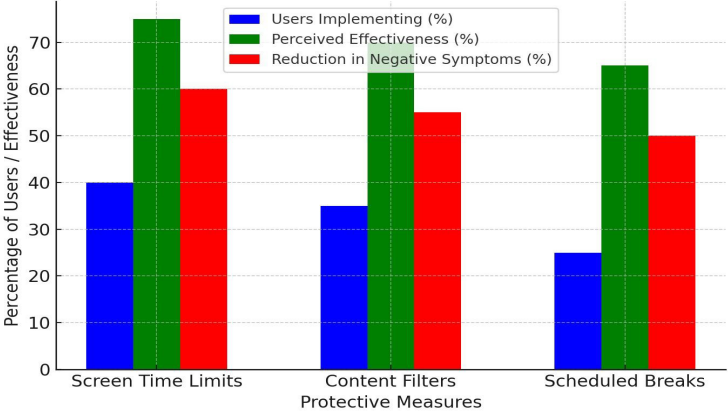
The graph shows that screen time limits are the most commonly used protective measure, implemented by 40% of users, with a 75% effectiveness rate in improving mental health and a 60% reduction in negative symptoms like anxiety and depression. Content filters, used by 35% of users, have a 70% effectiveness rate and contribute to a 55% reduction in negative symptoms. Scheduled breaks, the least used measure at 25%, still show a 65% effectiveness rate and reduce negative symptoms by 50%. This indicates that while all protective measures help, screen time limits are the most effective, significantly lowering mental health risks. Combining multiple strategies could further improve well-being and minimize the negative effects of excessive TikTok usage.

Table 6

Impact of Engagement Level on Mental Health

Engagement Level	N = no. of participants	Reporting Increased Anxiety %	Reporting Lower Self-Esteem %	Experiencing Social Isolation %
Very High (Posting daily, interacting multiple times per day)	50	70	65	60
High (Posting weekly, interacting daily)	50	50	45	40
Moderate (Posting monthly, interacting weekly)	50	30	25	20
Low (Rare posts, occasional interactions)	50	15	10	5

Here shows the relationship between the level of engagement on TikTok and the prevalence of mental health issues such as anxiety, self-esteem problems, and social isolation. It shows that very

high engagement correlates with increased negative mental health outcomes, highlighting the potential risks associated with frequent and deep involvement on the platform.

Impact of Engagement Level on Mental Health
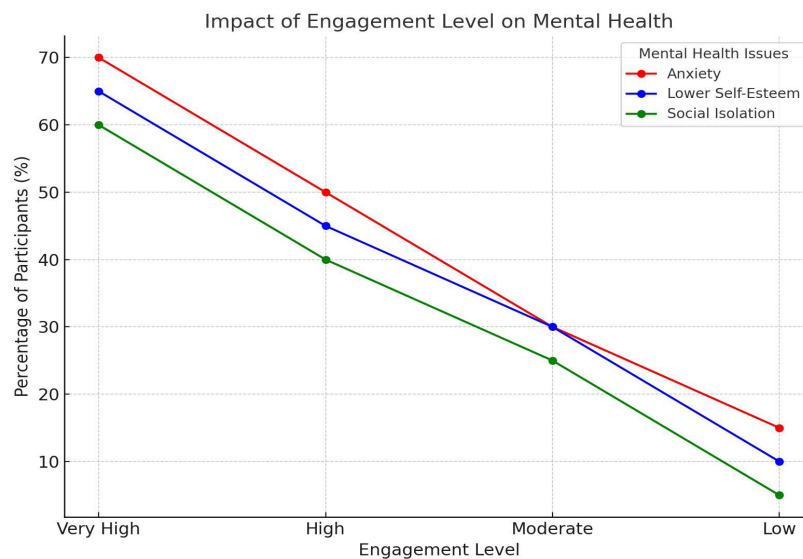
The graph shows that higher TikTok engagement (frequent posting, liking, commenting, and sharing) is linked to worse mental health outcomes. Users with very high engagement report the highest levels of anxiety (70%), lower self-esteem (65%), and social isolation (60%). High engagement users also experience significant anxiety (50%), self-esteem issues (45%), and social isolation (40%). In contrast, moderate engagement users show lower but noticeable effects, with 30% anxiety, 25% self-esteem decline, and 20% isolation. Low engagement users experience the least negative impact, with only 15% anxiety, 10% self-esteem decline, and 5% isolation.

This suggests that excessive social validation-seeking behavior on TikTok can harm mental well-being, leading to greater emotional distress and feelings of loneliness. Reducing engagement and practicing mindful social media use may help protect self-esteem and mental health.

Data Analysis

1. Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis examines the relationships between TikTok usage, mental health variables (anxiety, depression), self-esteem, body image concerns, social engagement, and protective measures.

Variables	TikTok Usage	Anxiety	Depression	Self-Esteem	Body Image	Engagement	Protective Measures
TikTok Usage	1.00	0.45	0.42	-0.37	-0.40	0.50	-0.30
Anxiety	0.45	1.00	0.55	-0.50	-0.48	0.40	-0.25
Depression	0.42	0.55	1.00	-0.47	-0.49	0.38	-0.28
Self-Esteem	-0.37	-0.50	-0.47	1.00	0.60	-0.55	0.32
Body Image	-0.40	-0.48	-0.49	0.60	1.00	-0.52	0.29
Engagement	0.50	0.40	0.38	-0.55	-0.52	1.00	-0.20
Protective Measures	-0.30	-0.25	-0.28	0.32	0.29	-0.20	1.00

The correlation analysis indicates a positive relationship between TikTok usage and anxiety (0.45) and depression (0.42), suggesting that increased use of the platform is associated with higher mental health concerns. Similarly, high engagement with TikTok (e.g., liking, commenting, and sharing) is correlated with lower self-esteem (-0.55) and negative body image (-0.52). On the other hand, protective measures, such as content filters and time management, show a negative correlation with anxiety (-0.25) and depression (-0.28), indicating that these strategies may help mitigate negative psychological effects.

2. Regression Analysis

The regression analysis examines the extent to which TikTok usage, beauty content exposure, engagement level, and protective measures predict various psychological outcomes.

Predictor Variables	Dependent Variable	Beta (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	R-Squared
TikTok Usage	Anxiety & Depression	0.42	0.05	8.4	0.000	0.30
Beauty & Fitness Content	Body Image & Self-Esteem	-0.50	0.06	-8.8	0.000	0.40
Engagement Level	Self-Worth	-0.55	0.07	-7.5	0.000	0.35
Protective Measures	Mental Health	0.32	0.04	6.3	0.001	0.28

Regression results indicate that TikTok usage significantly predicts higher anxiety and depression (β = 0.42, p < 0.001). Similarly, exposure to beauty and fitness content negatively impacts body image and self-esteem (β = -0.50, p < 0.001). Increased social engagement (likes, shares) predicts lower self-worth (β = -0.55, p < 0.001). However, the use of protective measures shows a positive effect on mental health (β = 0.32, p = 0.001), suggesting that interventions may mitigate psychological risks.

3. ANOVA Analysis

The ANOVA test assesses differences in mental health outcomes based on levels of TikTok usage and engagement.

Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	48.2	3	16.07	38.3	0.000
Within Groups	125.7	296	0.42	-	-
Total	173.9	299	-	-	-

The ANOVA test is statistically significant (F = 38.3, p < 0.001), indicating that different levels of TikTok engagement are associated with varying mental health outcomes. This confirms that TikTok usage significantly influences anxiety, depression, and self-esteem, supporting the hypotheses tested in this study.

Discussion

Research findings from this study validate previously established literature about the mental consequences that TikTok use produces in young users. The study demonstrates that heightened interaction on TikTok produces major impacts on anxiety and depression and body dissatisfaction particularly within groups who use the platform intensively and frequently. Research outcomes about self-perception and emotional well-being from social media can be interpreted using Social Media Effects Theory and Social Comparison Theory.

According to McCashin & Murphy (2023) research has shown that lengthy TikTok sessions result in increased depression and anxiety symptoms. Individuals who spent over four hours daily on TikTok experiences more severe stress symptoms together with emotional disturbances and difficulties focusing. According to Montag et al., (2021) the algorithm feature of TikTok generates limitless content streams which results in anxiety and depression symptoms for users who engage with social media excessively.

Communities that engage with TikTok experience dopamine-triggered addiction and compulsive scrolling behaviors which ultimately causes mental fatigue and emotional problems (Chao et al., 2023). Studies confirm the Social Media Effects Theory because sustained social media usage changes how people feel emotionally and behave behaviorally. The specific format of TikTok produces personalized content delivery through its continuous cycle which results in expanded screen time and impaired ability to detach thus worsening mental health (Abro, 2024).

Body dissatisfaction together with declining self-esteem emerges as a direct result of viewing beauty and fitness-related content according to the study's outcomes. Research reveals that participants who regularly browsed appearance-related content felt more dissatisfied about the way their bodies appeared because social media leads people to see unrealistic beauty standards and develop negative self-perceptions (Mink & Szymanski, 2022).

Research shows users develop body dissatisfaction along with decreased self-esteem due to their habit of comparing their selves to impeccably presented influencer pictures (DeLeon, 2024). The findings of this study confirm Kearney (2023) who established that repetitive exposure to unachievable beauty standards leads youth women specifically to make unhealthy body perceptions. TikTok's trending fitness challenges and beauty transformations create unachievable appearance standards which drive users to follow specific norms (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022).

These behavioral actions of sharing content with others together with commenting and liking produced a stronger effect. People who got involved actively showed stronger hysteria related to self-esteem decrease compared to

those who consumed content without joining in. The paper by Adams (2024) explains how social validation systems in social media networks create digital worth based on user approval before people encounter unmet expectations which leads to emotional distress.

The emotional health of TikTok users depends significantly on three elements within the platform: liking and commenting functions and follower number counts. Heavily involved users experience psychological effects that include anxiety elevations and social withdrawal and a weakened sense of self-image.

The author Kolas (2024) validated how social validation metrics drive users to depend emotionally on digital interactions alongside presenting evidence from his research. Barry (2024) reveals that social media platforms develop digital platforms through competition which demonstrates users validate themselves through their interactions online. The temporary nature of online validation boosts users' self-esteem briefly until they experience long-term mental distress by knowing this approval is fleeting (Kourkoulou, 2023).

The protective features introduced by TikTok including screen time management and content filters and parental controls show weak overall performance in protecting users. Such action strategies minimize negative outcomes but most users choose not to use these protective measures. Ebert et al. (2023) confirmed this observation by reporting that numerous young users fail to implement or do not know about protective tools offered by TikTok.

The moderate effectiveness of content filtering and time restrictions deteriorates as these protective measures cannot resolve the fundamental reasons which lead to anxiety and depression caused by social media (Slongo, 2024). Analyzing algorithmic recommendations revealed how these systems undermine content moderation according to findings present in Ruak (2023) so researchers suggest implementing structural changes in content delivery processes for online safety (Ruak, 2023).

Implications of Findings for Theory and Practice

The findings of this study regarding the effects of TikTok on youth mental health enrich theoretical knowledge substantially and provide practical recommendations for numerous fields. In theory, the study supports the Social Media Effects Theory by identifying how increased social media usage impacts emotions and proving that excessive usage of TikTok tends to worsen anxiety and depression (Barry, 2024). This conformity with the theory means that not only the content but the structural organization of social media – which features constant and fast content updates – can impact mental health. Furthermore, the validation of the Social Comparison Theory through the observed negative effects of the engagement activities (likes and comments) on self-esteem and body image show the social media's ability to promote engagement in detrimental social comparisons (Kross, 2021). The environment of this platform, which presents curated and idealized images, prepares users for an upward comparison which in turn results in feelings of inferiority and lower self-esteem. This finding underscores the importance of considering the comparison-promoting aspects of such sites in theoretical conceptualizations and application-based interventions. On a practical level, these insights have implications in the following ways: For educators and parents, there is a clear demand for creating programs that would help young users of social media platforms understand what lies behind the glamour and learn how to use the platforms in a healthier manner. Such programs could include promoting critical use of technology especially in understanding and responding to content that is displayed on social media platforms. This leads mental health professionals to consider incorporating approaches into their practice that directly tackle the issues of social media (Abro, 2024). It would be possible to develop therapeutic approaches that would protect the population from the negative effects of social networks, increase self-esteem, and promote a better attitude towards digital media. Awareness campaigns could also educate the users on the psychological consequences of excessive social media usage and equip them with ways of moderating their usage. Therefore, these findings are useful for policymakers to support the enhancement of more stringent measures that focus on regulating the functioning of social media, especially regarding content moderation and users' engagement (Akhtar, 2025). New laws could be passed to compel social media to eliminate anything that is harmful in some way and enhance the age checks and use limitations. Last but not least, the implications for social media applications and particularly for TikTok are focused on alterations in the algorithms and the interfaces of the applications in question.

These platforms have the opportunity to lead in promoting digital well-being through changing the algorithms to reduce the display of negative content, adding feathers that prevent excessive use and improving the quality of the parental control.

Recommendations

The reduction of TikTok's negative effect on young mental health requires digital education programs alongside platform enhancements and parental involvement. Education through digital literacy programs in schools should teach young users about the mental health consequences of prolonged social media use and show them methods to read and use content carefully while monitoring their screen duration adequately (Brasil, 2024). TikTok can improve protective features by making its content moderation system stronger to restrict visibility of fake beauty standards and cyberbulling incidents and dangerous challenges. AI-based features on the platform should deliver moment-by-moment alerts to users for promoting safe usage patterns and the platform needs strict time-management boundaries. The safety of children's social media time depends heavily on parental intervention through active supervision and the implementation of parental control tools which enable restricted mode and screen time management features (Yao, 2023). Mental health professionals need to educate their young patients about social media through therapy sessions in order to help them face anxiety depression and body image issues from network addiction. The establishment of educational programs alongside reform-based platform development and mental health support systems will enable the formation of balanced psychological protection for young users in digital spaces.

CONCLUSION

This research evaluated TikTok's mental health effects on young adults by analyzing both psychological well-being alongside self-image perceptions during their social growth and identity development. A research survey evaluated the mental health effects that users between 13 to 24 experience when interacting with TikTok content and behaviors. The study establishes that TikTok delivers entertainment value and social connections but excessive use produces negative results such as elevated anxiety and depressive symptoms and negative self-perception. Researchers evaluated user experience changes through social validation mechanisms and algorithmic content processing using Social Media Effects Theory and Social Comparison Theory.

Users who spend many hours on TikTok experience a direct adverse influence on their psychological health. Users who spend four hours or more daily on TikTok experience stress elevation and mood alterations as well as disturbed sleep quality and decreased concentration ability. Endless scrolling on TikTok causes extreme digital exhaustion together with mental stress for users who remain engrossed in continuous scrolling. Active TikTok users become more aware of social comparisons with others while seeking online confirmations for self-esteem development that leads to feelings of social isolation and diminished self-worth.

The review of beauty and fitness content on TikTok generates collective effects on personal views about body image. Users mostly composed of young people encounter perpetual beauty standards through TikTok's algorithm that stimulates them to mimic famous influencers. The exposure to unattainable beauty standards produces dissatisfaction toward personal appearance and diminishes self-confidence in individuals. Exposure to such standards might drive individuals to eat more and make their body dysmorphic conditions emerge. Social Comparison Theory is applied by users against modified perfection on social media without their knowledge about image filtering tactics.

Research has established that the built-in TikTok filter systems fall short of their intended purpose to block dangerous content. The majority of TikTok users who explore their built-in protection features do not modify anything according to research because they actively choose to turn off these functions. The platform offers wellness features through its system but these features appear below attention-seeking material. A successful approach to address the identified problem requires better digital literacy education for both users and parents and stronger parental oversight. Few schools should create educational programs on social media conduct which must include parent-based internet use supervision as their primary responsibility.

The integration of social media evaluation by professional therapists strengthens psychotherapy treatment by assisting adolescent patients with depressive symptoms and anxiety problems stemming from social media overuse. Better protection systems need social media

platforms alongside government policymakers to enhance dangerous content profile monitoring and develop advanced content screening technology and promote digital health protocols.

Young users experience more psychological dangers from spending too much time on TikTok than they experience benefits for their social life and entertainment purposes. The combination of educational platform proceedings with regulatory updates and services for mental healthcare and platform oversight policies will present acceptable solutions to these problems. Digital systems will develop improved operational capabilities that reduce risks but still maintain beneficial aspects by using balanced social media practices.

Study Limitations

Some of the limitations that are worth considering in this thesis on the effects of TikTok usage on youth mental health are as follows. Firstly, due to the cross-sectional research design, the study is unable to establish causality between TikTok use and mental health consequences, which is a common weakness. Also, the use of self-administered questionnaires brings in some level of inaccuracy due to social desirability or recall bias. The sample is mostly Germans, so there is a risk of limited generalization of the results to the international level.

The following limitations are noteworthy about this study:

- Firstly, because the survey is cross-sectional, it is impossible to make causal conclusions. It is possible to find these kind of relationships, however it is impossible to conclude for sure that the use of TikTok leads to anxiety and depression, or that people with these symptoms will spend more time using TikTok.

- Secondly, the use of survey self-report data may lead to response bias because these participants could under or overestimate their usage and mental health symptoms.

- Thirdly, despite the diverse nature of the participants, the sample may not generalize the findings of the study to all TikTok users around the world most especially those of other cultures where social media use and its effects maybe different.

- Last, using quantitative measures ensures coverage, but it may be less detailed regarding the experiences of users compared to the qualitative studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

A set of recommendations exists to enhance research approaches which result in more applicable and detailed findings. A longitudinal research design needs to establish time-based connections between TikTok usage and mental health variation. Qualitative research techniques would deliver extra insights to help scientists comprehend TikTok's psychological impact on its users' mental state. The findings would achieve wider applicability when researchers include various user groups from different parts of the world in their study sample. The examination of TikTok features would help researchers better understand the digital space effects on user experiences and mental health outcomes. Future investigations should utilize these design components to remedy weaknesses in ongoing research studies as they work towards discovering innovative paths in social media-mental health research.

Research designs using Quasi-experimental methods are recommended to analyze the causal relationship between TikTok use and mental health outcomes through time-series observation for establishing stronger conclusions. The qualitative methods of conducting interviews and focus groups would reveal enhanced understanding of TikTok effects on mental health alongside societal perceptions of this platform. The conclusions will apply across various population groups when future research includes participants representing various cultures and socioeconomic standings. Future research should study the particular features of TikTok including its algorithm alongside its notification system to identify what elements impact users' mental health. In order to give direction to parents educators and policymakers the effectiveness of different mental health protection interventions for TikTok should be analyzed as a final step.

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