

DETERMINANTS OF TIKTOK USAGE AMONG UNIMEL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the relationship between TikTok usage and three influencing factors, time duration, self-presentation, and stress level among students at Universiti Islam Melaka (UNIMEL). A quantitative research design was employed using a structured online questionnaire distributed to 80 respondents selected through convenience sampling. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27, applying descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation test. The findings revealed that self-presentation showed the strongest positive correlation with TikTok usage ($r = 0.822, p < 0.001$), followed by stress level ($r = 0.759, p < 0.001$) and time duration ($r = 0.497, p < 0.001$). These results indicate that psychological and social factors play a greater role in shaping TikTok engagement than the amount of time spent on the platform. The study concludes that TikTok serves as both a source of benefit and potential risk, depending on the user's self-control and motivation. Therefore, students should cultivate mindful usage habits, while educators and policymakers can leverage TikTok as a tool for creative learning and digital wellbeing. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on social media behavior by emphasizing the psychological motivations underlying digital engagement among university students.

Keywords: TikTok, self-presentation, stress level, time duration, social media behavior

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology in today's world has led to the emergence of various sophisticated innovations designed to provide users with easier access to information through multiple online platforms. Internet connectivity has become an essential component of human life; without it, individuals would face challenges in accessing communication and information networks. Social media, in particular, has become one of the most popular digital networks among society today. Various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are increasingly favored by users. TikTok, for instance, has gained tremendous popularity, with approximately 5.9 billion views or users in Malaysia alone (Amanz, 2024).

TikTok was first introduced in September 2016 and has since become one of the leading social media platforms globally (Montag et al., 2021). The application allows users to share short-form videos ranging from 15 seconds to 10 minutes. According to Awang et al. (2022), TikTok can have a positive impact on students by enhancing engagement and improving comprehension, particularly when used as a teaching aid. Its short, visually engaging videos help capture students' attention and make learning more interactive and appealing.

In the context of education, Malaysia launched its Digital Education Policy on 28 November 2023, which aims to nurture a generation proficient in digital literacy, involving both educators and students (Fahmy A. Rosli, 2023). This initiative supports Malaysia's vision of becoming a progressive nation that remains at the forefront of digital education (Mohamad Idham, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning became an essential solution to ensure uninterrupted education. This period also witnessed a growing use of digital learning content not only through platforms like Google Classroom but also via TikTok, which offered accessible educational content to a wider audience.

Moreover, TikTok has become closely linked to users' lifestyles, especially among students. The platform can influence one's lifestyle positively or negatively, depending on how it is used. As highlighted in *Berita Harian*, technological advancement and broader internet access have transformed how people interact, communicate, and obtain information. Lifestyle, in this context, refers to how individuals spend their time, express their interests, and form opinions about themselves. Hence, this study was conducted among UNIMEL students to examine the relationship between time duration, self-presentation, and stress level in relation to TikTok usage.

1.1 Problem Statement

Excessive use of social media applications can influence individuals' social behavior, lifestyle, and perception of reality. According to Dewi Oktaviani et al. (2019), overreliance on social media may lead to reduced real-world social interaction, which could negatively affect one's cultural values and personal outlook. Among university students, poor time management between entertainment and academic responsibilities such as completing assignments, revising lessons, and participating in educational activities can result in declining academic performance. Ugochukwu Obasi (2024) found that 70% of students at a Nigerian university agreed that TikTok interferes with their studies, delays task completion, and contributes to lower academic achievement. This is likely due to TikTok's short, captivating video format, which can easily cause users to lose track of time and spend excessive hours watching videos instead of focusing on academic tasks.

However, the remaining percentage of respondents in the same study viewed TikTok as a tool that helps relieve stress and enhance motivation. For some students, using TikTok during study breaks provides relaxation, allowing them to return to their learning activities with improved focus. On the other hand, self-presentation on TikTok may sometimes lead to negative self-perception. As noted by Fauziah et al. (2020), users often compare themselves to others based on appearance, lifestyle, and success, which can lead to feelings of insecurity and diminished self-esteem. Negative comments and online criticism may also discourage users from expressing themselves, as reported by Harnata and Prasetya (2023), who found that some students refrain from posting videos due to fear of judgment or harassment.

While TikTok serves as a source of entertainment and stress relief (Nath & Badra, 2021), it can also contribute to emotional distress when users are exposed to cyberbullying, including body shaming or verbal abuse. Such experiences can lead to psychological strain, anxiety, and in extreme cases, suicidal tendencies. Suraya Roslan (2024) reported that online harassment related to users' physical appearance, behavior, or family background has, in some instances, escalated to severe mental health crises. Similarly, Hinduja and Patchin (2019) found that both face-to-face and online bullying could increase suicidal ideation among adolescents. These findings highlight that uncontrolled TikTok usage can serve as a platform for cyberbullying, which may heighten stress and emotional instability among students.

Given these concerns, this study focuses on investigating the relationship between time duration, self-presentation, and stress level in TikTok usage among UNIMEL students, to determine whether the platform serves as a source of benefit or risk.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the relationship between TikTok usage and three key factors which are time duration, self-presentation, and stress level among UNIMEL students. Specifically, the objectives of this research are to:

1. Identify the relationship between time duration allocated for TikTok usage and the level of TikTok engagement among UNIMEL students.
2. Determine the relationship between self-presentation and TikTok usage among UNIMEL students.
3. Examine the relationship between stress level and TikTok usage among UNIMEL students.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 TikTok Usage

According to Nath and Badra (2021), the majority of respondents agreed that TikTok serves primarily as an entertainment platform, helping users relieve stress through light-hearted and enjoyable video content. However, TikTok is not limited to entertainment purposes alone. Research conducted at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia by Khaidir and Osman (2022) revealed that TikTok has also emerged as a medium for religious education and knowledge sharing. The platform has attracted many preachers and educators to disseminate religious and educational content, providing accessible knowledge to audiences across various age groups.

Furthermore, TikTok offers users opportunities to generate income through multiple avenues such as affiliate marketing. Affiliates can promote and sell products on behalf of others and earn commissions from the sales generated. Syafruddin et al. (2024) found that TikTok significantly influences individuals' economic activities, as many users have successfully developed personal businesses through the platform's affiliate system. This trend became more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many consumers turned to TikTok for online shopping due to its convenience, variety, and efficiency.

Nonetheless, issues such as online fraud and product misrepresentation also occur on the platform. Michelle et al. (2024) emphasized that effective communication, ethical practices, and user interaction play critical roles in building customer trust in affiliate-based marketing. Affiliates who maintain professionalism and transparency are more likely to attract repeat buyers and sustain long-term engagement.

2.2 Time Duration

The variable of time duration in this study focuses on students' ability to manage their time between TikTok usage and academic activities. Excessive use of the platform can interfere with students' learning and reduce academic performance. Ugochukwu Obasi (2024) reported that some students admitted that heavy TikTok usage led to delayed assignments and lower grades. Similarly, Normala Ismail (2024) found that most university students spend between six and eight hours daily on social media, indicating a high level of dependency and possible addiction.

On the other hand, Awang et al. (2022) highlighted that TikTok can be a useful educational tool when utilized purposefully. Instructors have begun using TikTok as a digital platform for coursework,

encouraging creativity and engagement. This suggests that when time spent on TikTok is managed wisely, the platform can serve beneficial educational purposes rather than being a distraction.

2.3 Self-Presentation

Self-presentation refers to an individual's confidence and willingness to express themselves on TikTok without fear of negative feedback. Harnata and Prasetya (2023) found that some users hesitate to post videos due to concerns over receiving negative comments related to their physical appearance or personal background. Such fear often leads to withdrawal from content creation and reduced confidence.

Conversely, Novitasari et al. (2024) observed that TikTok can enhance self-confidence by allowing users to develop new skills such as video editing and digital communication. Interaction with positive and encouraging content creators also helps individuals build self-assurance and motivation to share content. The supportive environment provided by online communities contributes to greater confidence and self-expression among users.

2.4 Stress Level

Stress can be defined as a physical or emotional reaction to various challenges, including academic workload, personal relationships, or financial difficulties. TikTok's diverse range of content such as comedy, cooking, motivational talks, and religious messages can help users temporarily escape stress and improve their mood. Nath and Badra (2021) found that users view TikTok as a form of entertainment that alleviates stress after a long day of activities.

However, exposure to negative online behaviors such as cyberbullying may have the opposite effect. Hassan and Isa (2024) reported that online harassment, including public humiliation and false accusations, can lead to severe emotional distress. Hinduja and Patchin (2019) also revealed that both face-to-face and online bullying significantly increase suicidal ideation among adolescents. Therefore, while TikTok can serve as a source of relaxation, it may also pose psychological risks if misused or left unregulated.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between TikTok usage and three independent variables: time duration, self-presentation, and stress level among UNIMEL students. The study adopted a correlational research approach, which aims to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables without manipulating them.

3.1 Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business, Hospitality, and Technology at Universiti Islam Melaka (UNIMEL). A total of 80 respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method, as this approach was appropriate for gathering data efficiently within a limited timeframe. All participants were active TikTok users, ensuring that responses were relevant to the study objectives.

3.2 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure four constructs: TikTok usage, time duration, self-presentation, and stress level. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended items measured using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. This format allowed for consistent quantitative measurement of respondents' attitudes and behaviors. The instrument was reviewed by academic experts to ensure content validity and clarity.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to reach students conveniently and to encourage voluntary participation. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. Data collection was conducted over a two week period to ensure an adequate sample size for statistical analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

All collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. The analysis began with descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) to summarize respondents' demographic profiles and general patterns of TikTok usage. Subsequently, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient was applied to identify the relationships between the independent variables (time duration, self-presentation, and stress level) and the dependent variable (TikTok usage). The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$, indicating that relationships were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of the statistical analysis conducted to examine the relationship between TikTok usage and the three independent variables time duration, self-presentation, and stress level among UNIMEL students. The findings were analyzed using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient to determine the strength and direction of each relationship.

4.1 Correlation Analysis

Table 4.3 shows the results of the Pearson correlation analysis between the dependent variable (TikTok usage) and the independent variables (time duration, self-presentation, and stress level).

Table 1: Correlation Between Variables

Variable	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i> -value	Relationship Strength
Time Duration	0.497	0.000	Moderate Positive
Self-Presentation	0.822	0.000	Very Strong Positive
Stress Level	0.759	0.000	Strong Positive

The results indicate that self-presentation has the strongest correlation with TikTok usage ($r = 0.822$, $p < 0.001$), followed by stress level ($r = 0.759$, $p < 0.001$) and time duration ($r = 0.497$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that psychological and social factors such as self-expression and emotional coping play a more dominant role in influencing TikTok engagement than the amount of time spent on the application.

The very strong positive relationship between self-presentation and TikTok usage suggests that students who are more confident and expressive in showcasing their identity tend to use TikTok more actively. This can be attributed to the platform's design, which rewards creativity, visibility, and engagement. Students are motivated by the feedback and validation received through likes, comments, and shares, which reinforce their online presence. Furthermore, TikTok allows users to experiment with video editing, aesthetics, and trends, providing a creative outlet for self-expression. These findings align with Harnata and Prasetya (2023) and Novitasari et al. (2024), who reported that positive feedback and skill development on TikTok enhance self-confidence and social connection. However, the emphasis on appearance and online validation may also cultivate comparison-based insecurities, warranting attention to digital self-esteem among students.

The strong positive correlation between stress level and TikTok usage ($r = 0.759$, $p < 0.001$) reveals a dual psychological function of the platform as both a stress reliever and a potential stress amplifier. On one hand, students may use TikTok for relaxation and emotional release, particularly after demanding academic tasks. The short and entertaining video format provides immediate gratification and mental breaks. On the other hand, excessive exposure to negative interactions such as cyberbullying, body shaming, or social comparison can heighten stress and anxiety. This supports the findings of Hassan and Isa (2024) and Hinduja and Patchin (2019), who highlighted the psychological risks associated with online harassment. Therefore, while TikTok can serve as a positive coping tool, its misuse or overexposure can contribute to emotional distress. Universities should integrate digital wellbeing programs and provide psychological support to help students manage their online behavior healthily.

The moderate positive correlation between time duration and TikTok usage ($r = 0.497$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that while the amount of time students spend on TikTok is relevant, it is not the sole determinant of

engagement intensity. The relationship implies that some students are able to balance their screen time effectively, using TikTok for learning or entertainment in moderation, whereas others may struggle with time management. These findings are consistent with Awang et al. (2022) and Ugochukwu Obasi (2024), who noted that excessive TikTok usage can interfere with academic performance but may also serve educational purposes when used strategically. The moderate strength of this correlation underscores the importance of quality of use rather than quantity of time. Educators can leverage TikTok as a pedagogical tool by encouraging students to create short educational videos, thus transforming recreational use into purposeful engagement.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that TikTok usage among UNIMEL students is driven more by psychological and social motivations than by mere time spent online. The platform functions as a medium for identity expression, stress management, and creative communication. However, the positive correlations observed should be interpreted with caution. Correlation does not imply causation; it remains unclear whether increased TikTok use reduces stress or whether stressed individuals turn to TikTok more frequently. Similarly, high self-presentation tendencies may either result from or lead to greater engagement on the platform. Future studies should therefore employ longitudinal or experimental designs to clarify causal directions.

Overall, these findings reinforce that TikTok, when used mindfully, can enhance students' social connectivity and self-expression. Yet, without moderation, it may contribute to distraction, stress, and comparison anxiety. Academic institutions and mental health practitioners should guide students toward balanced and purposeful social media use, promoting digital literacy, time regulation, and resilience to online feedback.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested using the significance levels from the Pearson correlation analysis. Since all p-values were below 0.05, the null hypotheses (H_0) were rejected and the alternative hypotheses (H_1) were accepted for all three variables.

Table 2: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H _{1a}	There is a significant relationship between time duration and TikTok usage among UNIMEL students.	Supported
H _{1b}	There is a significant relationship between self-presentation and TikTok usage among UNIMEL students.	Supported
H _{1c}	There is a significant relationship between stress level and TikTok usage among UNIMEL students.	Supported

The findings indicate that the students' engagement with TikTok is influenced not only by the time they spend on the application but also by their level of confidence and psychological state.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the relationship between TikTok usage and three key factors, time duration, self-presentation, and stress level among students of Universiti Islam Melaka (UNIMEL). The findings revealed that all three variables have a positive and significant relationship with TikTok usage, with self-presentation showing the strongest correlation, followed by stress level and time duration. These results demonstrate that students' engagement with TikTok is driven more by psychological and social factors than by the amount of time spent online. Specifically, self-presentation emerged as the most influential factor, suggesting that students use TikTok as a medium for identity expression, creativity, and social validation. The strong relationship between stress level and TikTok usage indicates that students often rely on the platform to relieve academic pressure and emotional fatigue, though excessive use may also heighten stress levels through exposure to negative content or online comparison. Meanwhile, time duration displayed a

moderate correlation, implying that students are generally capable of managing their time between entertainment and academic commitments, though some may still experience distraction due to prolonged use.

Overall, the study concludes that TikTok serves as both a source of benefit and a potential risk to students. When used responsibly, TikTok can enhance creativity, promote digital learning, and serve as an outlet for emotional expression. However, unregulated or excessive use can lead to poor time management, decreased academic performance, and psychological strain. To address these challenges, several measures are recommended. Students should practice time discipline by setting boundaries for daily TikTok use, focusing on positive and educational content, and developing digital resilience to handle negative feedback or comparison. Educators and universities should integrate short-form video platforms like TikTok into teaching practices to encourage creative learning while promoting awareness of healthy social media habits. They should also organize digital literacy and mental wellbeing programs to help students manage stress associated with online activities. Policymakers and institutional leaders, meanwhile, should formulate guidelines for responsible social media use in higher education, aligning them with Malaysia's Digital Education Policy (2023), and foster collaborations with social media platforms to encourage safe, educational, and constructive digital ecosystems.

In summary, the study confirms that TikTok usage among UNIMEL students is influenced by self-presentation, stress management, and time allocation. The platform's dual nature as both a source of empowerment and distraction highlights the need for balance and guidance. With mindful engagement, institutional support, and proper digital literacy education, TikTok can evolve from being merely a form of entertainment into a productive and meaningful digital space that contributes to students' creativity, learning, and emotional wellbeing. Future research should explore these relationships using longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to better understand the causal effects and motivations behind TikTok engagement, as well as its broader implications on students' academic and psychological development.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. All authors participated in drafting, revising, and approving the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its submission and declare no conflict of interest on the manuscript.

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