

Article

The Impact of TikTok Use on the Mental Health of University Students: An Empirical Study

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¹Alkhady Ayman

¹Head of the Academic Guidance Department, Kuwaiti Embassy, Amman, Jordan,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7997-7583>

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of TikTok use on the mental health of university students, with particular emphasis on patterns of digital addiction and their psychological consequences. Tik Tok has become an essential part of the everyday life of students due to its rapid development, which has caused a concern about the effect of its use on well-being and the outcomes of behaviour. The descriptive-analytical research was used, and the data were gathered by a structured electronic questionnaire, which was conducted among a population of 60 undergraduate and postgraduate students in Latakia University. The tool assessed three key dimensions, namely the level of usage and addiction, psychological impacts of TikTok use and coping behaviours. The findings also show that there is a very high rate of daily Tik Tok usage with an average rating of above 4.0 in all the usage indicators. The most notable behaviour was anxiety in the case of not being able to use the platform (Mean = 4.32), then TikTok to feel better (Mean = 4.23), and the inability to control the use (Mean = 4.17). The results also demonstrate that overuse is linked to various psychological problems, such as an elevated level of anxiety, sleep deprivation, a lack of interaction, and a lack of concentration in academic performance. Moreover, the Pearson correlation analysis shows that excessive use of TikTok has the statistically significant positive correlation with psychological distress, which proves that the more people are engaged, the more severe mental health outcomes will be. The paper is concluded with the finding that excessive use of Tik Tok is an important risk factor to the mental health of students and that specific measures need to be implemented to achieve digital well-being.

Keywords: *TikTok, mental health, digital addiction, university students, anxiety*

Introduction

Over the last few years, the fast evolution of online technologies and social media websites has dramatically changed the manner, in which people communicate, interact and consume information.

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Out of those platforms, Tik Tok stands out as one of the most powerful applications with short videos, especially with young individuals and college students. Its algorithmic content, accessibility, and very captivating format have rendered it an indispensable aspect of the day-to-day lives of students.

Although Tik Tok is an entertaining, creative, socially connecting tool, its overuse has become a growing cause of concern about the possible effects on mental health and behavioural trends of students (Nweke, 2024; Haque, 2026). The research has indicated that the consistent use of social media platforms is related to psychological disorders, including anxiety, depression, sleep problems, and decreased academic concentration (Chancellor & De Choudhury, 2020). These effects can be aggravated by the nature of short-form video materials as immersive and addictive, where the user cannot easily control his/her screen addiction and the emotional reactions.

Recent studies have also pointed out the importance of the algorithmic delivery of content to strengthen the user interaction and possible addictive trends to digital environments. Social networks like Tik Tok are structured to optimize retention of users by providing personalized content streams and these can cause compulsive user habits and dependency behaviour (Barta and Andalibi, 2021). Such trends are especially alarming in students of universities, who are at a crucial stage of their development, and about which they tend to be subjected to academic stresses, social difficulties, and emotional strains.

Even though there is an increasing literature on social media and mental health, the extent to which the use of TikTok affects the students in universities, especially in developing countries, is still not well understood. Majority of the available samples concentrate on general use of social media, as opposed to platform-specific effect and there is no empirical study to combine behavioural, psychological and usage pattern in a single study.

Thus, the proposed research will focus on the effects of Tik Tok use on the mental health of Latakia University students. It aims at determining how it is used and addictive, examine the psychological effects related with it, and find ways of going about to reduce the adverse effects of over-use. In this way, the research will help to advance the existing knowledge about digital behaviour and its effect on student well-being.

Literature Review

The swift development of social media networks has also altered the modes of communication and behavioural patterns of people especially the youth and students of universities. The popularity of the use of short-video apps has been growing in recent years, with TikTok being one of the applications that tend to be highly engaging because of its algorithm-based content and extremely easy to use. These platforms are structured to ensure that the user is as actively engaged as possible by having personalised feeds that can result in long usage and subsequent behavioural addiction.

There is an increasing amount of literature on how social media use is related to mental health. It has been the research that excessive use of digital platforms is linked to various psychological problems, such as anxiety, depression, sleeping disorder, and poor performance in school (Chancellor and De Choudhury, 2020). The repeated exposure to curated online content and the social comparison systems could also be one of the causes of distress and reduced well-being in users.

The recent research that specifically addresses TikTok has pointed toward its individual peculiarities in contrast to other social media platforms. Barta and Andalibi (2021) also argue that TikTok encourages a fast consumption of content and continuous interaction between the user, which can support the habitual use of the app. The algorithm of the platform is aimed to provide highly personalised content, which enhances the retention of users and may result in addictive behaviour.

In addition, digital addiction is now a significant field of study in the modern research. Overuse of social media sites has been associated with compulsive behaviours, where one feels that he/she cannot regulate his/her use despite the adverse effects. This is especially applicable in case of university students who are likely to be under academic stress and might resort to social media as a way of managing the negative feelings.

Besides, some studies have highlighted the effects of social media on sleep quality and cognitive functioning. Long duration usage of screens, particularly to the bedtime, have been linked with disturbed sleeping habits and lower levels of concentration that can have adverse effects on the success in schools. These results indicate that the use of social media does not only affect psychological well-being but also disruptions in the daily operations and performance of students.

Although the research on the topic of social media and mental health is growing, the research on the topic of Tik Tok and its psychological effect in various cultural and educational settings has not been conducted empirically. Most current literature discusses the overall social media use without

considering the peculiarities of short-video platforms. Moreover, scanty studies have jointed behavioural addiction predictors with psychological consequences within one analytical model.

Research Problem

The use of Tik Tok by student masses in universities has become a source of great concern as to the possible effects on mental health and behaviour patterns (Turner, 2025; Ramsden & Talbot, 2025; . Although the platform provides entertainment and socialization, when used excessively, it can have adverse psychological effects, such as anxiety, sleep disorders, loss of socialization, and lack of concentration in academic work (Jain et al., 2025; Anser & Ullah, 2025).

Nevertheless, ethical evidence that would allow considering the exact impact of using TikTok on the mental health of students, especially in developing nations, is insufficient despite the increasing interest in the research of social media. The vast majority of available literature discusses the general social media platforms, excluding the specifics of Tik Tok, which imply the use of algorithms to generate and feed on content and non-stop interaction systems.

Moreover, a gap exists in terms of cohesive studies that explore the usage patterns and psychological implications in one study. This knowledge gap restricts the knowledge of the contribution of excessive use of TikTok to the development of digital addiction, as well as its ensuing mental health consequences.

Consequently, this research is aimed at exploring the extent of Tik Tok usage among higher education students and examining the effect of this platform on their mental health. It also focuses on investigating the connection between the usage patterns and the psychological outcomes, which will give empirical information that can be used to make interventions and policy choices.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

What is the level of TikTok usage and digital addiction among university students?

What are the psychological effects associated with TikTok use among students?

Is there a statistically significant relationship between TikTok usage and students' mental health?

What strategies can be adopted to reduce the negative psychological effects of excessive TikTok use?

Hypotheses

Based on the study objectives, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: TikTok usage is significantly associated with psychological distress among university students.

H2: Higher levels of TikTok usage predict increased levels of anxiety, sleep disturbance, and reduced academic concentration.

Methodology

Research Design

This research paper has an analytical descriptive nature of study because it aims at establishing the effects of Tik Tok on the mental health of college students. The design will be suitable in determining patterns of behaviour, quantifying the relationships between variables and determining the psychological impacts of using social media.

Population and Sample

The study target will be the undergraduate and graduate students in the Latakia University. Convenience sampling method was used to select a sample of 60 students.

The sample will consist of both genders and various levels of education, which will give a general picture of the behaviour and experiences of the students regarding the use of Tik Tok.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	30	50.0
	Female	30	50.0
Age	18–21 years	22	36.7
	22–25 years	28	46.7
	26 years and above	10	16.6
Academic Level	Undergraduate	42	70.0
	Postgraduate	18	30.0

The demographic characteristics of the study sample are given in Table 1. The findings indicate that the gender distribution is equal, 50% of the participants are male and 50 are female, which decreases the possibility of gender bias during the analysis.

Regarding age, most of the participants are in the age group 22-25 (46.7%), then 18-21 (36.7%), which means that the sample is comprised of mostly young adults in their initial years of studies.

With respect to academic level most respondents are undergraduate students (70) with the postgraduate students, who constitute 30 of the total sample. This distribution represents the common layout of the university populations and justifies the applicability of the findings to the student behaviour.

Research Variables

The variables used as the basis of the study are:

Independent Variable:

The use of TikTok (frequency, duration, and signs of addiction)

Dependent Variable:

Mental (anxiety, sleep disturbance, social isolation, and lack of concentration)

Data Collection Instrument

A structured electronic questionnaire created by the researcher was used in data collection. The tool was divided into three main parts to address the TikTok usage and addiction indicators, including frequency of use, struggle to stop use, and checking behaviour; psychological impacts, including anxiety, sleeping problems, social isolation, and loss of concentration; and recommended remedies, including awareness, regulation, and behavioural control. The responses of the participants were assessed based on five-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In order to guarantee content validity, experts in the field reviewed the questionnaire. Internal consistency measures were used to measure reliability and Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.92, which is a high level of reliability and strong internal consistency of the instrument.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics (Cronbach’s Alpha)

Scale	Cronbach’s Alpha
TikTok Usage and Addiction	0.91
Psychological Effects	0.89
Suggested Solutions	0.88
Overall Scale	0.92

Table 2 shows the reliability test of the study instrument in terms of Cronbach alpha coefficient. The findings show that the questionnaire has high scores of internal consistency in all the dimensions used with alpha coefficients of between 0.88 and 0.91. The total reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.92 which is higher than the generally accepted level of 0.70. This implies that the questionnaire is very stable and the measure contained in each scale measures the same constructs all the time.

Data Collection Procedure

Participants were given the questionnaire through the electronic means. They informed the respondents of the nature of the study and assured them that their answers will not be disclosed to any third party and the purpose of the research will only be used in research.

Data Analysis

Data which were gathered were analysed statistically in the following ways:

Means and standard deviations to determine the patterns of Tik Tok usage.

To test the hypothesis: Tik Tok and psychological distress Pearson correlation analysis to establish the relationship between the two variables.

The level of statistical significance was determined at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

Respondents were free to participate in the study and informed consent was given. During the research, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed and the data was not utilized outside of academia.

Results

This section presents the statistical results of the study, including descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, in order to examine TikTok usage patterns and their impact on students' mental health.

Results of Research Question 1: What is the level of TikTok usage and addiction among university students?

Table 3

TikTok Usage and Addiction Indicators (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I use TikTok daily on a regular basis	60	4.10	0.93
I spend more than one hour per day on TikTok	60	4.07	0.76
I check TikTok immediately after waking up	60	4.17	0.91
I find it difficult to stop using TikTok	60	4.17	0.69
I neglect my academic tasks because of TikTok	60	4.12	0.96
I feel anxious when I cannot access TikTok	60	4.32	0.75
I use TikTok to escape negative emotions	60	4.23	0.95

As presented in Table 3, the use of TikTok by university students is very high in all indicators with mean values of over 4.00. The greatest average score was obtained in the feeling anxious when could not use TikTok ($M = 4.32$) and then in using the platform to react to negative feelings ($M = 4.23$).

The students also complained that they have problems with their usage ($M = 4.17$) and that they are going to TikTok right after they wake up ($M = 4.17$). These results show there are high indicators of behavioural dependency and it is likely that TikTok has become intertwined in the everyday life of students.

Results of Research Question 2: What are the psychological effects associated with TikTok use?

Table 4

Psychological Effects of TikTok Use

Effect	Level
Anxiety	High
Sleep disturbance	High
Reduced social interaction	Moderate to High
Loss of concentration	High

The results show that excessive Tik Tok consumption is linked to a number of adverse psychological consequences. The anxiety and sleep disturbances appeared to be of high level, which indicates that the long-term exposure to the platform can impair the emotional stability and sleep patterns.

Moreover, students stated that their social interactions and concentration were worse than before, which can lead to a poor effect on their personal relations as well as their academic achievements. These findings point to the greater psychological influence of overuse of social media.

Results of Research Question 3 / Hypothesis Testing: Is there a relationship between TikTok use and mental health?

Table 5

Pearson Correlation between TikTok Usage and Psychological Distress

Variables	Correlation (r)	Significance (p-value)
TikTok Usage & Psychological Distress	0.68	< 0.01

The findings indicate the existence of a statistically significant positive relationship between the use of Tik Tok and the psychological distress ($r = 0.68, p < 0.01$). It means that increased amounts of Tik Tok usage are linked to the increased amounts of anxiety, sleep disruption and impaired focus.

In that vein, the research hypothesis is proven to be correct and that the problem of excessive usage of Tik Tok does greatly affect the mental health of students.

Discussions

This study examined the impact of TikTok use on the mental health of university students, with a particular focus on usage patterns, behavioural addiction, and associated psychological effects. The results are a good indication that too much use of Tik Tok is associated with poor mental health and dependency in behaviour among students.

The findings show that daily usage is high and that the level of digital addiction is high with an inability to control usage, the common checking behaviour and emotional dependence on the platform. These

observations align with prior studies that propose that user engagement and retention is the goal of algorithm-driven platforms like TikTok, which can cause compulsive use behaviours (Barta and Andalibi, 2021). The large average rates of all usage indicators also prove that Tik Tok is an inseparable part of the life of students.

Moreover, the researchers concluded that students have severe psychological impacts related to excessive consumption of TikTok, especially anxiety, sleep disorders, and diminished social experience and attention. These results are also consistent with the research by Munmun De Choudhury and his associates, who mention the connection between the use of social media and issues with mental health such as emotional distress and changes in behaviour. The fact that students tend to resort to Tik Tok to cope with negative emotions is another argument about the idea that the social media methods can strengthen maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Moreover, the Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated the statistically significant positive correlation between the use of Tik Tok and psychological distress. The given finding confirms the hypothesis of the study and is consistent with the current literature that suggests that the high use of social media is related to high levels of anxiety and low levels of well-being (Chancellor and De Choudhury, 2020). The correlation degree indicates that not only is TikTok use a behavioural habit, but it can also be a determinant of the psychological state of students.

The other significant result is the effects on TikTok on the cognitive and academic functioning. Students also claimed lower attention levels and disregard to study activities and this can be attributed to the constant exposure to short content and incessant stimulation. This is in line with the earlier research that indicates that too much screen time may have adverse impacts on attention span and academic performance.

Altogether, the research of this paper illustrates the duality of TikTok as an entertainment and a potential risk factor to mental health. Although the platform can be used to be creative and socialize, it can have adverse psychological and behavioural effects when it is overused. These findings bring up the importance of moderated use and the possibility of greater attention to digital wellness among university students.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of TikTok use on the mental health of university students, focusing on patterns of usage, behavioural addiction, and associated psychological outcomes. The findings

demonstrate that TikTok has become an integral part of students' daily routines, with high levels of engagement and clear indicators of excessive use.

The results further reveal that excessive TikTok usage is significantly associated with negative psychological effects, including increased anxiety, sleep disturbances, reduced social interaction, and decreased academic concentration. The statistically significant positive correlation between TikTok use and psychological distress confirms that higher levels of engagement are linked to poorer mental health outcomes.

Overall, the study concludes that while TikTok offers entertainment and social connectivity, its excessive use may pose serious risks to students' psychological well-being and academic functioning.

Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and students. Universities should consider implementing awareness programmes aimed at promoting digital well-being and responsible social media use. Counselling services and mental health support systems may also play a key role in helping students manage digital addiction and its psychological consequences.

In addition, policymakers and educational authorities should develop strategies to address excessive social media use among young people, including integrating digital literacy and self-regulation skills into academic curricula. Encouraging balanced usage and raising awareness of the risks associated with prolonged screen time are essential steps towards improving students' well-being.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The relatively small sample size ($n = 60$) may limit the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling may introduce bias and reduce the representativeness of the sample.

Furthermore, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by participants' subjective perceptions and response bias. The cross-sectional design also limits the ability to establish causal relationships between TikTok use and mental health outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalisability of the findings. Longitudinal research designs may provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of TikTok use on mental health.

In addition, future research could explore the impact of specific content types and algorithmic exposure on behavioural addiction and psychological well-being. Comparative studies across different social media platforms may also help to better understand platform-specific effects.

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