



## TikTok Use among College Students: Friend or Foe?

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### Abstract

Social media is a collection of websites and applications, or “apps,” that are used worldwide to share information and provide entertainment. Ceci [1] found that 71% of individuals between ages 18-29 utilized Instagram, 65% utilized snapchat, and over 50% utilized TikTok. Millennials switch between media sites an average of 27 times per hour [2]. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the levels of TikTok intake among college students and how it may be affecting them. For this study, the dependent variable was the amount of TikTok intake among college students. The independent variables were gender, race, and classification. Data were collected using a questionnaire designed by the researcher and analyzed using SPSS. Of the 130 volunteer participants, there were 33 males (25 %) and 97 females (75 %). Out of 130 participants 38 were African American (29.2 %), 83 were Caucasian (63.8 %), 2 were Asian (1.5 %), 5 were Hispanic (3.8), 1 was Native American (.8 %), and 1 was Pacific Islander (.8 %). Thus, the study involved 40 freshman (30.8 %), 34 sophomores (26.2 %), 34 juniors (26.2 %), and 22 seniors (16.9 %). Multiple significant differences were found between male and female participants including how many people have TikTok downloaded. The results identify  $X^2=10.727(df=1)$  ( $p=.001$ ). Out of 130 participants, 88 percent have TikTok downloaded and the majority of the downloaders are female (77%). Females also showed a significant difference on creating content on TikTok. The results indicate  $X^2=9.637(df=1)$  ( $p=.002$ ). No significant differences were found between race and classification.

Social media is a collection of websites and applications used worldwide to share information and provide entertainment. Social media sites, including Facebook, TikTok and Snapchat, have created significant social changes and these influences are ongoing. From an entertainment perspective, social media is used daily around the world by millions of people and all ages. Social media became even more popular in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people were homebound, so they chose to entertain themselves with their phones. This has slowly caused a social media addiction for many, especially among the younger generation.

According to Ceci [1] in 2021, 71% of individuals between ages 18-29 utilized Instagram, 65% utilized snapchat, and over 50% utilized

TikTok. Millennials switch between media sites an average of 27 times per hour [2]. College students fall into the age brackets for prominent levels of social media use. These students may also be dealing with stress, anxiety, and busy schedules, often relying on social media in their daily routine to escape academic stress [2]. Scrolling may provide a sense of calmness or distraction, and hours may pass as their minds take a break from work and stress. According to Maguire and Pellosmaa [3], each individual has their own reasoning for using social media. Previous research has shown the most common uses are for social interaction, information seeking, and passing the time [4].

Although getting a mental break from society by scrolling on an app for an hour or so may feel well worth it, the level of social media intake has become alarming. Social media addiction is more difficult to deal with than substance addiction because social media uses algorithms to increase users time [5]. Excessive time on social media can seem harmless, but elevated levels of social media have been linked to increased anxiety, lack of sleep, depression, and other mental health problems [2]. For example, the endless amount of information and topics provided daily result in individuals scrolling for hours until they get headaches or fall asleep. College students are at risk of becoming dependent on social media as it becomes harder to focus on important things such as health, studying, and work [6]. To be more specific, it has been noted that more freshmen have become dependent on social media and use it as comfort to cope with being away from home. With loneliness individuals attach to the internet to compensate for affection that is missing [6].

TikTok is a new and improved social media application that has successfully taken over the globe. With its visually appealing videos, this app has taken the world by storm. TikTok is an app that allows you to post and watch short clips that fit your interest based upon your activity and algorithm. Not only has this app taken over the younger generation, but it has influenced the older generation to become accustomed to social media. TikTok can be utilized for many types of entertainment such as comedy, helpful tips, today's news, dance challenges, and many more activities. Many businesses and politicians take advantage of how quickly information spreads on TikTok because they can get their information out quicker than on television.

In today's society, people generally keep a phone in their hand, but could this be a problem? TikTok and other social media platforms have become so popular that they are causing addiction among all generations. Previously, whereas an elder might complete crosswords throughout most of the day, now older adults are scrolling through TikTok. While some children may be playing with flashcards and learning words, others children are allowed to scroll on TikTok. Too much use of TikTok and other forms of social media has become a nationwide issue, especially among college students who are affected mentally, physically, and emotionally. The shortening of attention span, body shaming, and fake news are detrimental to young adults and fed by a daily routine of TikTok intake. As previously mentioned, social media and more specifically TikTok has created algorithms that keep users scrolling. For example, if you like a video on TikTok, viewers may view multiple related videos to promote additional scroll time. This is a continuous loop, which forms the addiction and unhealthy levels of intake leaving people trapped in their own bubble [5]. While 6 out of 10 would be angry about a nationwide ban, 40% of college TikTokers utilize the app more than Google [7]. Although TikTok can be harmful with the number of levels of intake, these apps have been more beneficial to spreading news to the younger generation than are actual aired news channels. According to Appleby, 34% of college students get their news on TikTok and 56% say TikTok gives you skills (2023).

Overall, social media has been a great asset to the world as a source of entertainment, news, and useful skills. The amount of time spent on these apps is when it becomes concerning. Social media apps have become so addicting that people across generations are relying on them. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the levels of TikTok intake among college students and how it may be affecting them. For this study, the dependent variable was the amount of TikTok intake among college students. The independent variables were gender, race, and classification. Data were collected using a questionnaire designed by the researcher and analyzed using SPSS.

## Method

### Participants

Participants in this study were a part of a convenience sample that consisted of undergraduate students at a small southern university. There was a total of 130 ( $N=130$ ) students who voluntarily participated in this research. Of the 130 participants, there were 33 males (25 percent) and 97 females (75 percent). The majority of the participants were female. Out of 130 participants, 38 were African American (29.2 percent), 83 were Caucasian (63.8 percent), 2 were Asian (1.5 percent), 5 were Hispanic (3.8 percent), 1 was Native American (.8 percent), and 1 was Pacific Islander (.8 percent). Thus, the study involved 40 freshman (30.8 percent), 34 Sophomores (26.2 percent), 34 Juniors (26.2 percent), and 22 seniors (16.9 percent).

### Materials

Data was collected using a modified questionnaire found from previous research. It consisted of demographics that asked about sex at birth, race, classification, and age. The demographics were followed by 20 questions. The first 2 questions asked if the participants were aware of the app TikTok and do they know how to operate or create content on the social media app. These were yes (=1) or no (=2) questions. The next fourteen questions were related to how knowledgeable they are about TikTok and how they utilize it on a daily basis. These questions were a Likert-type scale of measurement, and the answer options were Strongly Disagree (=1), Disagree (=2), Neutral (=3), Agree (=4), and Strongly Agree (=5). The remaining four questions were questions gaining insight on how much time they spend on the app and how many times does it affect them? These questions were also based on a Likert Scale of measurement rating 0 (=1), 1-5 (=2), 6-10 (=3), 11-15 (=4), 16-20 (=5), and 20 or more (=6).

## Procedures

Data was collected in the span of one week. A convenience sample was utilized on the college campus. The primary researcher approached several campus faculty for various courses and asked permission to collect data at the beginning of their classes. All participants involved in the study were informed of the parameters of consent before they were handed a survey.

Participation in this research was voluntary, and participants were notified that they could withdraw their participation at any time. Once data was collected, the data was entered and analyzed by SPSS.

## Results

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the levels of TikTok intake among college students and how it may be affecting them. For this study, the dependent variable was the amount of TikTok intake among college students. The independent variables were gender, race, and classification. Data were collected using a questionnaire designed by the researcher. The overall goal of research was to answer the following hypotheses.

### Hypothesis 1

The researcher predicted that there would be a significant difference between sex at birth and TikTok use. After running a variety of Chi square test through SPSS, there was a significant difference between sex at birth and how many people have TikTok downloaded. The results indicate  $\chi^2 = 10.727 (df=1)$  ( $p=.001$ ). Out of ( $N=130$ ) participants, ( $n=115$ ) (88 percent) participants have TikTok downloaded. There are more females ( $n=91$ ) who have TikTok downloaded than males ( $n=24$ ). There was another significant difference between sex at birth and how many people actually create content on TikTok. The results indicate  $\chi^2 = 9.637 (df=1)$  ( $p=.002$ ). Out of ( $n=130$ ) participants, ( $n=109$ ) (84 percent) actually create content on TikTok. There were also more females ( $n=87$ ) who create content on than males ( $n=22$ ). Overall, this hypothesis was proven true, that there was a significant difference between sex at birth and TikTok use.

### Hypothesis 2

The researcher predicted that there would be a significant difference between race and TikTok use. After running a Chi square test through SPSS there was no significant difference noted between race and TikTok use.

### Hypothesis 3

The researcher predicted that there would be a significant difference between student classification and TikTok usage. After running a Chi square test through SPSS, there were no significant differences noted between student classification and TikTok use.

### Hypothesis 4

The last hypothesis the researcher predicted that there would be a significant difference between age and TikTok usage. After running Chi square test through SPSS, there was a significant difference between age and how many people have TikTok downloaded as an app on their cellular phones. The results indicated  $\chi^2 = 9.312 (df=3)$  ( $p=.025$ ). Out of ( $N=130$ ) participants, ( $n=115$ , or 88 percent) have TikTok downloaded. Results also indicate that the age group of 18–20-year-olds ( $n=81$ ) utilize TikTok more than any other age group represented. Overall, this hypothesis was proven true, that there is a significant difference between age and TikTok usage.

Further results identified that race, sex a birth, classification and age are all significant and many college students have the TikTok app downloaded and access it throughout the day. After running independent t-tests with SPSS, there was a significant difference noted between sex at birth and how many students open the TikTok app whenever they are bored. Males were represented with a mean of 3.30, while females had a mean of 4.37. The overall significance was ( $p=.001$ ). Results indicate that students, particularly females, open

the TikTok app when they have downtime during their daily college schedules.

The research findings indicate that many college students have an addiction to TikTok. Results from independent t-tests found there is a significant difference between sex at birth and how many participants end up having headaches from scrolling on TikTok for too long. Males were represented with a mean of 1.24, while females had a mean of 1.68. The overall significance was ( $p=.002$ ). Scrolling for hours on an app can be a sign of addiction to social media. It is to be noted that the continuous cycle of the TikTok algorithm can keep an individual “in the loop” where they continue to scroll and stay on the app for too long. Many side effects of this scrolling can cause excessive tiredness or being sleepy, lack of focus, and even considerable headaches.

According to the findings of the current research, it can be determined that college students may not be aware of how much time they are spending on TikTok. Further, these users may also be unaware of how their habit may be impacting them. Independent t-test results determined there is a significant difference between how many times students open the TikTok app and sex at birth. Males were represented with a mean of 3.42, while females were represented with a mean of 4.74, with the overall significance being ( $p=.002$ ). Many students are not aware that the more times that they open their TikTok app, the more a continuous loop of addiction is created. This addiction can influence the ability to focus on college courses, current and future jobs, and other important college activities.

Current findings determined that the TikTok app can seriously impact the day-to-day activities among college students. Results indicate a significant difference between students utilizing TikTok as a mental break and the variable of sex at birth. Males were represented with a mean of 2.96, while females had a mean of 3.87. The significance results as ( $p=.009$ ). As mentioned, college student live busy lives with classes, work, and other busy activities. Some students are using TikTok as a means to take some time to just sit and scroll on TikTok as a mental break or as a form of escape.

## Discussion

The results of this study indicated that undergraduate students in the research sample are aware of the TikTok app and use it often throughout their college lives. Research indicates that students use TikTok as a means to escape when feeling overwhelmed or stressed. This usage of TikTok may be creating an addiction to social media for these same students. One limitation of this study to note is that there were three times as more females than males surveyed in this research. This should be noted that there was a significant skew in female research participants (75%) versus male participants (25%). Another significant potential limitation is the fact that this research was completed at a small southern university in the United States. Greater applicability may be impacted by the use of a small sample. Results from this study would likely have been more generalizable if research had been conducted in different regions with different

university populations and varying number of participants. The present research focused less on creating strategies or solutions to address the concerns surrounding TikTok usage in undergraduate students. Instead, this research focused more on identifying the prevalence of TikTok usage and ascertaining some potential complications that may occur from regular TikTok usage. Addressing concerns related to excessive TikTok usage should be examined in future research.

In additional future research, it is recommended that a larger sample of participants would be beneficial to increase the variety of demographics represented by the population. Further research on the harms of social media scrolling would be advantageous as social apps are gaining in popularity and are sure to be around in our future. Hereafter investigations to examine social media apps, such as TikTok, should delineate between the benefits versus the harms of social media usage and potential addiction.

**Conflicts of interest:** Authors report no conflict or competing interest.

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