

The influence of TikTok on children's growth, behaviour, digital well-being, social interactions, and cognitive development

Mike Whiskey¹, Sri Kumah², Mahesa Wongateleng³

University of Life, INDONESIA¹
PT. Mawamedia Jayamusta Buanasiha^{2, 3}

Abstract - This research aims to describe the impact of the TikTok social media application on early childhood development. Based on the results of my findings and previous research, it is evident that TikTok has both positive and negative effects on children. The positive impacts include various educational benefits, such as facilitating learning through engaging content, enhancing counting skills, promoting reading, and providing a platform for children to express and develop their creativity. TikTok offers a diverse range of videos that can introduce children to new concepts and ideas, making learning enjoyable and interactive. However, there are several significant negative effects associated with TikTok usage among young children. One major concern is the influence on children's social behaviour, particularly in their interactions with peers and their environment. Excessive use of the app may lead to addiction, causing children to lose track of time and neglect essential daily activities such as eating, bathing, and resting. This overindulgence can result in a decline in physical health and well-being. Additionally, children may show a marked lack of interest in engaging with their peers, opting instead to spend their time on TikTok.

Keywords: tiktok, early childhood development, educational benefits, social behaviour, addiction, impact of social media

1. Introduction

In the digital era, social media platforms have significantly transformed how individuals, particularly children, engage with content, express creativity, and interact with their peers. Among the numerous social media platforms available today, TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential, especially among younger audiences (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Launched in 2016 by the Chinese company ByteDance, TikTok allows users to create, share, and watch short-form videos, often featuring music, dance, or comedic elements (Montag et al., 2021). The platform's intuitive design and engaging features make it highly appealing to children, who are drawn to its interactive and entertaining content. Its rapid rise in popularity, particularly among children and teenagers, has sparked considerable debate regarding its potential impacts on young users' cognitive, emotional, and social development.

With over one billion active users globally, TikTok has positioned itself as a dominant force in the digital entertainment landscape (Statista, 2023). The platform's algorithm-driven content delivery system ensures highly personalized feeds, which can enhance user engagement but also lead to excessive screen time (Kaye et al., 2022). TikTok's recommendation algorithm, based on user interactions and viewing history, creates an addictive experience that can significantly influence children's online behaviour. While TikTok provides children with a space for self-expression and skill development, it also exposes them to challenges such as age-inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and mental health risks (Uhls et al., 2017). These concerns have led researchers, educators, and policymakers to critically examine the platform's influence on young audiences.

One of TikTok's most notable benefits is its role in fostering creativity and self-expression. The platform encourages children to experiment with different forms of artistic expression, such as dance, music, storytelling, and digital editing. Studies (Smith, 2022; Jones & Lee, 2021) have highlighted that creative engagement on social media platforms like TikTok fosters artistic skills and boosts confidence. By producing

short videos, children develop storytelling abilities, editing skills, and improvisation techniques, all of which are essential for cognitive and creative development. Moreover, the platform offers opportunities for collaboration, enabling young users to participate in challenges, duets, and group projects that enhance their social skills and digital literacy.

One of the key aspects that differentiate TikTok from other social media platforms is its ability to encourage active content creation. Many children use TikTok as an avenue for creative exploration, helping them develop skills in video production, editing, and storytelling (Montag et al., 2021). Additionally, the interactive features of the platform, such as duets and challenges, foster collaboration and engagement, allowing children to connect with others who share similar interests. This form of social interaction can be particularly beneficial for children seeking a sense of belonging and validation.

2. Method

2.1 Document Study

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a document study method to investigate the impact of TikTok on children. Document study is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating both printed and digital materials relevant to the research topic. This method is particularly useful in examining existing literature, reports, academic papers, online articles, and social media policies to gain insights into TikTok's effects on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Bowen, 2009).

The primary sources for data collection include: **(1) Academic Literature:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and books that discuss social media usage among children, digital literacy, and mental health impacts. **(2) Policy Documents and Reports:** Studies published by international organizations such as UNICEF, WHO, and academic institutions regarding children's engagement with digital platforms. **(3) Existing Research on TikTok:** Studies that analyse the platform's influence on youth, including aspects of self-esteem, content exposure, and behavioural patterns. **(4) Media Articles and Expert Opinions:** Reports from reputable news sources and expert analyses from psychologists, educators, and child development specialists. **(5) TikTok's Official Guidelines and Policies:** Examination of TikTok's community guidelines, privacy policies, and parental control features to assess existing safeguards for child users.

The selection criteria for these documents include relevance to the study's objectives, credibility of the sources, and recency to ensure up-to-date information. By utilizing this document study approach, the research ensures a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis of the available data.

2.2 Technique of Analysis

The collected data is analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach. This method is employed to systematically interpret textual material by categorizing, coding, and identifying key themes related to TikTok's impact on children (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis follows these key steps.

By employing document study and qualitative content analysis, this study provides a well-rounded and evidence-based understanding of TikTok's impact on children. The systematic examination of existing literature and reports enhances the credibility of the research findings and offers valuable insights into shaping future policies on children's social media usage.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

This section presents the findings of the study on the impact of TikTok on children. The discussion is structured according to the research objectives and problems, analysing both the positive and negative effects of TikTok usage. The results are based on document study and thematic analysis of relevant literature, examining psychological, behavioural, and social aspects of TikTok's influence on children.

3.2 Positive Impacts of TikTok on Children

3.2.1 Enhancing Creativity and Self-Expression

TikTok provides an innovative platform for children to showcase their talents, including dance, music, storytelling, and comedy. Studies (Smith, 2022; Jones & Lee, 2021) have highlighted that creative engagement on social media platforms like TikTok fosters artistic skills and boosts confidence. By producing short videos, children develop storytelling abilities, editing skills, and improvisation techniques, which are essential for cognitive and creative development.

The ease of content creation allows children to experiment with various forms of artistic expression. Features such as video filters, editing tools, and special effects enable users to enhance their storytelling skills. The accessibility of TikTok encourages children to take part in trends and challenges that push them to be creative. Over time, this exposure to digital creativity can contribute to their overall cognitive growth and artistic development.

3.2 Discussion

Furthermore, TikTok's algorithm promotes user-generated content, meaning children receive instant feedback on their creative efforts. This reinforcement mechanism encourages continuous improvement and fosters a sense of achievement. As a result, TikTok becomes not just a social platform but a tool for skill-building and personal growth.

Many TikTok creators share educational content, ranging from science experiments to language learning tips. According to Martinez and Singh (2021), TikTok can serve as an informal learning tool, making educational topics more accessible and engaging for young audiences. Tutorials, DIY projects, and explainer videos enhance children's knowledge and curiosity about various subjects.

The short video format of TikTok makes learning more digestible. Children can grasp concepts quickly and engage with topics that interest them. Educators and professionals use the platform to simplify complex topics, making it easier for children to understand and apply knowledge in real life. From history lessons to coding tutorials, TikTok serves as a supplemental learning tool that complements traditional education.

Furthermore, TikTok's interactive nature allows children to participate in educational challenges and quizzes. The combination of entertainment and education makes learning enjoyable, increasing engagement and knowledge retention.

4. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of TikTok's impact on children, exploring both its benefits and potential risks. As one of the most popular social media platforms among young users, TikTok offers numerous opportunities for creativity, social interaction, and informal learning. However, it also presents challenges related to exposure to inappropriate content, excessive screen time, and mental health concerns. A balanced approach is required to maximize the positive effects of TikTok while minimizing its negative consequences.

One of the most significant advantages of TikTok for children is its ability to enhance creativity and self-expression. The platform enables young users to engage in creative activities such as dance, music, storytelling, and video production, which contribute to cognitive and artistic development. Many studies have shown that participation in such creative endeavours fosters confidence and communication skills, helping children develop a sense of identity and accomplishment. Additionally, the interactive nature of TikTok allows children to share their work with a broad audience, receive feedback, and refine their artistic talents over time.

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