Tiktok Influences on Teenagers and Young Adults Students: The Common Usages of the Application Tiktok

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Abstract

This research paper is aimed at shedding light on the use of the mobile application Tiktok, it concluded that the use of the application, has had a very little negative impact on the main target user base. The research outlines to a certain degree some difficulties in the management of the application but in comparison with similar social media applications, they appear to be few. This research has concluded that the use of the application seems to be of more concern to spectators of the users than the actual users. This research has also been able to map out the spread of Tiktok over the past 3 years and how it has become a significant participant in the role of influencers, creating an entrepreneurial possibility with its growth. This research recommends further research into the use of popular social media apps and further monitoring of the expansion of the popularity of the usages of social media apps in general.

Keywords: Tiktok; Social media; Influencers; Young adults; Teenagers.
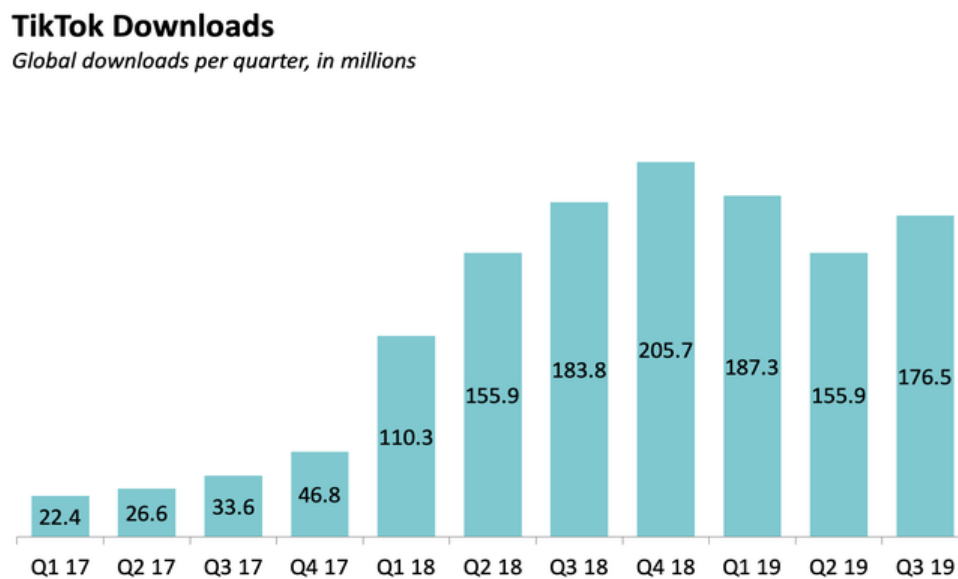
1. Introduction

Over the past 3 years from 2017 to 2020, I have conducted over 3500 interviews, in cooperation with my teaching assistants, to try and map out the use of social media. Through this research, I became familiar with the mobile application TikTok. Tiktok is described as "….. the leading destination for short-form mobile video. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy", on their website [1]. Tiktok was introduced to the social media marked in September 2016 and quickly took a leading role in the universe of social sharing [2].

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With a ray of celebrities quickly adding their profile to the platform, the media became a source of attraction for teenagers and young adults worldwide. Tiktok can be described as a platform where people can make videos of about 15 seconds, these videos then run in a loop until you choose to move to the next video. It is also possible to merge video clips which then allows for 60-second clips. Videos can incorporate music samples, filters, quick cuts, stickers, and other add-ons [3]. In February 2020 the platform had around 800 million users worldwide, 150 million of these users are in China, who are using the Chinese version of the app, which is called Douyin. TikTok has found enthusiastic popularity in Asian countries such as Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. The popularity has in large measures been explosive in these countries, in comparison it took Instagram almost six years from its beginning to gain the number of active users that TikTok has managed to have in under three years. Facebook took over four years to match the number of Tiktok (see figure 1) [4]. In its infancy, Tiktok ran into a series of controversy and in 2019, it was banned in India for a short amount of time due to "morality issues". On several occasions, it has been accused of not doing enough to protect the users who are by and large young teenagers and young adults. Tiktok was investigated in the US over national security concerns but despite these shortcomings, the app has proven resistance to criticism and any backlash from critics [5]. This research aims at young students who in increasing numbers have taken up the use of the Tiktok application. It will look at how young adults are using the app and also what influence the app has on the lives of what is popularly called Gen Z. The Gen Z population, which are people born between 1997 and 2012, is skilled in using mobile tools such as mobile phones and tablets to express themselves, and TikTok just is one of the hundreds of possibilities that gives them a platform to do so [3].

TikTok Downloads
Global downloads per quarter, in millions

Quarter	Downloads
Q1 17	22.4
Q2 17	26.6
Q3 17	33.6
Q4 17	46.8
Q1 18	110.3
Q2 18	155.9
Q3 18	183.8
Q4 18	205.7
Q1 19	187.3
Q2 19	155.9
Q3 19	176.5

Figure 1: Tiktok downloads in 2019

2. Literature review

Social media gives adolescents the opportunities to identify with other users have similar interests, but it also offers a comparison to other users. This comparison is prevalent in all generations of adolescents but becomes to a certain degree more anonymous on social media. As identification has a role in the development of young

people social media offers this without the need for direct interaction. Studies have examined the use of social media and apart from passing time, entertainment, and information seeking, interpersonal/interactive searches the main searches made by adolescents and young adults. Studies have found that among groups of young people who use social media the reason for using the platforms is to overcome perceived shortcomings within themselves [6].

2.1. Importance of social media

Social media has increasingly become a major component of our lives. From Presidents to first graders are now scouring the social media platforms and contributing to the continuous stream of information, videos, and picture forums that exists. In a New York Times article, the need to participate on social media is described as a "Fear of missing out", the article continuous with adding simplicities of life like a concert, a secret beach, or a brunch becomes significant in knowing we are part of a larger community [7]. Social media can no longer be ignored in the daily agenda of people's private lives and political opinions. During the inauguration of Brazil's new, Jair Bolsonaro, his supporters began to chant "Facebook, Facebook, Facebook!" the crowd yelled. "WhatsApp, WhatsApp, WhatsApp!", crediting the platforms for the victory of their preferred president [8]. The newest branch of this collection is Tiktok.

2.2. Problems and dangers

Most social media platforms have generated a new stream of income possibilities, for the social network the appearance of influencers has become synonymous with the possibility of non-talented fame as more and more are taking to the platforms to create a career for themselves. TikTok, like other social media platforms, has its share of influencers and the 15-sec video makes it a magnet of what is popularly called meme machines. Meme machines are influencers who earn money based on views, likes, comments, and shares. At present, there are more than 35 TikTok stars who have tens of millions of followers [2].

In essence, this form of entrepreneurship is welcomed as evolution is the trade and overall know-how area, but to some extent, this form of advertising is still underregulated and has the risk of being abusive in its message. In 2019 the Indian government ordered Google and Apple to take down Tiktok from their app selections. This happened after a court ruling that expressed concerns that pornographic material was being shared through the app. Tiktok was at that time already banned in Bangladesh and was given hit a large fine in the United States for illegally gathering information on children [9]. The lack of regulation has an impact on the users who are of an age where they are influenced by trends in their community, and as the community has moved from local to global a larger possibility for negative influence is present. In interviews conducted by this research with 650 Thai girls and boys, aged 16 to 25, 85 % had had negative experiences with Tiktok use. 50 % had been sent nudity and almost all interviews, 90 %, had been approached with bullying or sexual offers. The main problem with the negative interaction is that most of the interviewees had nowhere to vent or report these incidents. Although Tiktok offers a reporting option most users will not report due to a lack of knowledge of the reporting system. Another critic of Tiktok is that it creates anti-social behavior. The rising trend of Social media platforms has been claimed to make people are becoming less social. The claim states that when youngsters loos interest in

studies they tend to "show off" through apps like Tiktok [10].

This claim can be view as a repeat of generations of concerns into the behavior of youth and how they interact. Throughout time the older generations have worried and found the new way of social interaction negative, but in the case of Tiktok, the major concern and the people who misuse the platform are adults and middleaged.

In interviews with young users, a large majority have been contacted and approached by older people seeking sexual favors from young people. Although trends on Tiktok are to a certain extend of questionable nature, it seems that the younger generation has adapted to an expressional form whereas the older generation has difficulties distinguishing between harmless play and sexual invitation.

3. Design and Methodology

To address the objectives of this research, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The qualitative data by and large supported the quantitative data analysis and results. The results of this research were combined and sourced from a larger study into the use of social media in general. 3500 interviews were made for this study and in this research 650 interview answers have been sourced to meet the research objectives.

3.1. Interviews and survey

The 650 Thai girls and boys aged 16 to 25 were asked to participate in anonymous interviews and to fill out a survey. In the interview the were asked to answer a series of questions about their use of Tiktok and the purpose of using the application. In the survey, they were asked to rate the use of Tiktok and to schematically distinguish between positive and negative experiences with the app. The questions in the interview varied as to be as accurate as possible. The survey questions were as follows (see table 1):

In an effort to stay non-bias 3 identical questionnaires were made and given to the research subjects. Each of the other questionnaires had the word Tiktok replaced with Facebook, Instagram, and Tinder. This was made to ensure that Tiktok was not singled out and comparisons could be made between the platform.

The results were divided up separating trans-gender, girls, and boys to clarify gender differences. Furthermore, this research has stayed in contact with all interviewees to make sure any discrepancies are accounted for in the research. Quantitative research was done by scanning the news media in a period of 3 years for news related to Tiktok. A selection of these news sources is used in reference to this paper.

Table 1: Question for interviewees

Q1: What social media and dating apps do you use?
Q2: How often do you use your social media profile daily?
Q3: How often do you use your dating apps during the day?
Q4: Do you find any satisfaction and/or approval from using your Tiktok profile?
Q5: Have you ever had unpleasant experiences with your Tiktok app?
Q6: Do you spend more time looking at other's profiles or updating your own profile?
Q7: What do you see as the greatest advantage of using the Tiktok app?
Q8: Do all your friends use Tiktok?
Q9: Do you think the use of Tiktok is a problem for society?
Q10: Do you use a computer and/or phone to update your profiles?
Q11: Is your profile on Tiktok's true image of yourself?
Q12: Have you ever received nude or sexually explicit pictures through your Tiktok app accounts?
Q13: Have you ever shared nude or sexually explicit pictures with others on your Tiktok accounts?
Q14: Do you feel that Tiktok is superficial?
Q15: On ''Tictok'' very young girls often display themselves in provocative ways, do you feel that distorts the image of girls and women in society?
Q16: Is your Tiktok account an important part of your life?
Q17: Do you believe that anyone is honest on your Tiktok apps?
Q18: Do you use your Tikto for long-term relationships or single encounters?
Q19: Do you feel that men and women use Tiktok differently and for different reasons?
Q20: Many pages on Tiktok displays women in sexually provocative ways, do you think this improves or destroys the image of women in society?
Q21: What do you hope to achieve with your profile on the Tiktok app?
Q22: Why do you think people are braver when using the Tiktok app?
Q23: How do you feel the future of Tiktok will be?
Q24: Do you think young people's profiles can lead to increased sexual activity at a young age?
Q25: What do you see as the best way to legally limit the Tiktok app?
Q26: Are you transgender, male, or female?

4. Findings

The overall findings in this research are overwhelming in favor of Tiktok, but the limitations of geographical participants must be taken into account and an analysis of the result is therefore limited to views and conclusions based in Thailand. In the following, each question is outlined with a percentage of answers in the given possibilities. The survey was given in both English and Thai.

Question 1: What social media and dating apps do you use?

Table 2: Answers for question 1

Tiktok	Facebook	Instagram	Tinder	Others	None of the mentioned
86 %	92 %	87 %	82 %	12 %	7 %

Question 2: How often do you use your social media profile daily?

Table 3: Answers for question 2

0 to 2 hours	2 to 4 hours	4 to 6 hours	6 to 8 hours	8 to 10 hours	More than 10 hours
32 %	35 %	14 %	15 %	3 %	1 %

Question 3: How often do you use your dating apps during the day?

Table 4: Answers for question 3

0 to 2 hours	2 to 4 hours	4 to 6 hours	6 to 8 hours	8 to 10 hours	More than 10 hours
72 %	15 %	4 %	5 %	3 %	1 %

Question 4: Do you find any satisfaction and/or approval from using your Tiktok profile?

Table 5: Answers for question 4

Yes	No
91 %	9 %

Question 5: Have you ever had unpleasant experiences with your Tiktok app?

Table 6: Answers for question 5

Never	Few	Some	Many	Everyday
0 %	25 %	15 %	33 %	27 %

Question 6: Do you spend more time looking at other's profiles or updating your profile?

Table 7: Answers for question 6

Updating my profile	The same amount of time doing both	Looking at other peoples profile
38 %	24 %	38 %

Question 7 (More than one could be chosen): What do you see as the greatest advantage of using the Tiktok app?

Table 8: Answers for question 7

Being in touch with friends	Getting seen by others	Having fun and relaxing	Being popular	Possibility for a future career	Other
56 %	43 %	88 %	19 %	6 %	93 %

Question 8: Do all your friends use Tiktok?

Table 9: Answers for question 8

Yes	No
96 %	4 %

Question 9: Do you think the use of Tiktok is a problem for society?

Table 10: Answers for question 9

Yes	No
22 %	78 %

Question 10: Do you use a computer and/or phone/tablet to update your profiles?

Table 11: Answers for question 10

Only computer	Only Phone/Tablet	Both
0 %	64 %	36 %

Question 11: Is your profile on Tiktok a true image of yourself?

Table 12: Answers for question 11

Yes	No
82 %	18 %

Question 12: Have you ever received nude or sexually explicit pictures through your Tiktok app accounts?

Table 13: Answers for question 12

Yes	No
96 %	4 %

Question 13: Have you ever shared nude or sexually explicit pictures with others on your Tiktok accounts?

Table 14: Answers for question 13

Yes	No
35 %	65 %

Question 14: Do you feel that Tiktok is superficial?

Table 15: Answers for question 14

Yes	No
75 %	25 %

Question 15: On ''Tictok'' very young girls often display themselves in provocative ways, do you feel that distorts the image of girls and women in society?

Table 16: Answers for question 15

Very much so	Yes it does	A little	No, it doesn't	Not at all
2 %	16 %	12 %	61 %	9 %

Question 16: Is your Tiktok account an important part of your life?

Table 17: Answers for question 16

Very much so	Yes it is	A little	No, isn't	Not at all
14 %	23 %	46 %	7 %	10 %

Question 17: Do you believe that anyone is honest with your Tiktok apps?

Table 18: Answers for question 17

Yes	No
23 %	77 %

Question 18: Do you use your Tikto for long-term relationships or single encounters?

Table 19: Answers for question 18

Long-term relationship	Single encounters	None of the mentioned
10 %	4 %	86 %

Question 19: Do you feel that men and women use Tiktok differently and for different reasons?

Table 20: Answers for question 19

Yes	No
97 %	3 %

Question 20: Many pages on Tiktok displays women in sexually provocative ways, do you think this improves or destroys the image of women in society?

Table 21: Answers for question 20

Improves the image of women a lot	Improves the image of women a little	Neither improves or destroys the image of women	Destroys the image of women a little	Destroys the image of women a lot
3 %	21 %	67 %	9 %	0 %

Question 21 (More than one could be chosen): What do you hope to achieve with your profile on the Tiktok app?

Table 22: Answers for question 21

A sense of fame	To have fun	Finding a partner	To stay in touch with my friends	Nothing
43 %	89 %	2 %	66 %	7 %

Question 22: Why do you think people are braver when using the Tiktok app?

Table 23: Answers for question 22

The app gives you confidence	It is impersonal	The app gives a sense of anonymity	It is easy to look different from real life using filters	It doesn't make the users braver
10 %	7 %	61 %	21 %	1 %

Question 23 (More than one could be chosen): How do you feel the future of Tiktok will be?

Table 24: Answers for question 23

The app will become better	It will not be as popular in the future	More people will use it	More options will get added	It will become a paid app
52 %	21 %	92 %	91 %	0 %

Question 24: Do you think young people's profiles can lead to increased sexual activity at a young age?

Table 25: Answers for question 24

Yes	No
17 %	83 %

Question 25 (More than one could be chosen): What do you see as the best way to legally limit the Tiktok app?

Table 26: Answers for question 25

Make it a paid app	Rigorous control by the owner	Make age limits to the app	Heavy punishments for people who break the rules	There should not be any limits on the app.
3 %	82 %	34 %	2 %	92 %

Question 26: Are you transgender, male, or female?

Table 27: Answers for question 26

Transgender	Male	Female
5 %	43 %	52 %

5. Conclusion

From the survey results, it is evident that the target users of Tiktok are happy with the app. Although a large percentage has had negative experiences with the app it does not seem to be a deterrent from using it. In comparison with the other application surveys, it also seems that Tiktok has a better protective service. Many more users of Instagram, Facebook, and Tinder have been targeted and had very negative experiences with those applications. There is also the fact that the app is largely used as a phone or tablet application, which leads to thoughts of where the computer is heading in the future. It can be difficult for parents to figure out if it is really safe. TikTok videos to its users seem harmless and creative fun, but parents seem to find that there are gaps in the usage of the app's security [11]. It must though not be forgotten that any social network, have had user difficulties and that parents throughout generations have seen danger in time trends. Although Tiktok was fined millions in settlements in the USA it still has not reached the level of interface problems Facebook and other social media platforms have [11]. It must be stated that for now the app does not seem to be a problem for its users, but more of a problem to the caretakers of the users. This might span from ignorance about the app but it can also be a symptom of the time we are occupying at the moment where there is a gap between limited literate technology users and very literate technology users. It is, by all means, understandingly that we offer concerns when the item of popularity is something we do not conceive, but efforts in education the older generation might be the answer to these concerns. As technological social interaction becomes more and more prevalent and unavoidable the emphasis on the controlled use must be education in consequences in the use of the

applications. Curricular subjects could be introduced in primary schools as a preventive measure of abuse and parental supervision should go hand in hand with the use of social media applications amongst minors.

6. Recommendations

This research recommends further research into the usage of Tiktok as the application becomes more and more popular a constant scrutiny of the application is necessary in order to assure it is still on the side of the users.

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