

A SOCIAL MEDIA TREND: HOW DOES TikTok INFLUENCE ADULTS?

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Abstract

Social media has become a huge part of our culture. From Facebook to Instagram to Pinterest, social media is ingrained in our daily lives. It is becoming more obvious that people live with their phones in their hands and the world at the fingertips. In August 2018, however, the face of social media changed forever when the company Bytedance Ltd. acquired the social media platform formerly known as Musical.ly. Through this merger, TikTok was born, and social media would again evolve. With this evolution in mind, this research sets out to underline how those social media changes affect adult users, if at all. The primary objective is to understand if the TikTok experience changes adults and in what ways through the use of primary and secondary resources. The survey administered to TikTok users within the United States ages 25-40 will provide primary data that will then be compared to secondary resources and publications collecting similar data for different age groups.

Keywords: social media, social media marketing, TikTok, adult behavior, TikTok influence, TikTok changes, TikTok data, digital marketing, marketing analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

How people as humans behave and see their selves is heavily influenced by popular culture. For decades people would look to television shows, music, movies, and print media to define key portions of their identity. How to dress, how to talk, and what to buy were all measured against the images being forced to the forefront via popular culture. What happens to humans, however, when the focus of popular culture changes from mainstream celebrities alone to the additional consistent connection to our peers? The birth of social media created a huge shift in society by changing the definition of popular culture; while celebrities still pave the way in some forms, we are now able to see into the lives of the "everyman" more easily. With each new technology come concerns about its potential impact on people's well-being (Orben, A. 2020). Social media is more widely used than ever before. It's as second nature as

breathing and thus becomes a huge influence on the humanistic sense of self and day to day behaviors.

TikTok burst onto the scene in 2018 and continues to be one of the most widely used social media platforms. It was downloaded 693 million times in 2019 and 850 million times in 2020 (Iqbal, M, 2021). That makes TikTok the seventh-largest platform in terms of users, ahead of others that have been around much longer such as Snapchat, Pinterest, and Twitter (Mohsin, M. 2021). Roughly 50% of TikTok's global audience is under the age of 34 with 32.5% aged between 10 and 19 (Aslam, S. 2021). With its witty videos and dance challenges, TikTok has taken off with the young adult demographic. This popularity, however, has mixed reviews for those studying TikTok influence on young adult users. For example, "TikTok has a chance in the field of education where the teachers can use this app in classrooms as a tool to illustrate an idea or example" (Jaffar et al., 2019). This allows TikTok to be utilized towards educational purposes in ways other social media platforms in the past haven't been able to do. This facilitates positive change and reviews amongst the platform users. Conversely, however, TikTok has come under fire for some of the racier content on the platform. Scantly clad dance videos, inappropriate humor and music, and potential for cyberbullying have all been huge worries to parents who claim the app is filled with taboo content. Parents worry that the app "will desensitize [their children] and they will think it's ok." They also worry that the app "subjects children to extremely foul language and dancing" (Jaffar et al., 2019).

Clearly the heavy role of such a social media platform could be quite confusing to a young adult who is trying to find their place or identity in the world. On one hand it's a wealth of knowledge and on the other it's a home for occasionally inappropriate content. Despite the ability to always change and grow, adults ages 25-40 tend to have a more defined sense of self. According to this consideration, this research is trying to look for the answer to this question: 'Are these apps just as influential for adults?'. This research will determine, comparatively, if adults are just as susceptible to TikTok's influence as data suggests young adults are.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research objective is to find out what influence, if any, the TikTok social media platform has on adult users ages 25-40. Thus, a survey focusing on self-image and behaviors associated with TikTok is administered to participants within the outlined age demographic. This method allows any correlation between TikTok and its effects to become evident.

Research methods are specific procedures for collecting and analyzing data (Scribbr, n.d.). As a research method, a survey collects data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire or an interview. The survey is one of the most widely used scientific research methods. The standard survey format allows individuals a level of anonymity in which they can express personal ideas (Conerly et al., 2021). Quantitative and qualitative research methods generate different types of data. In general, quantitative methods result in quantitative, or more personalized broad data, whilst qualitative methods produce qualitative, or more narrow anonymous data. Quantitative data is expressed in numbers e.g. units, prices, proportions, rates of change and ratios whereas qualitative data is expressed as words e.g. statements, paragraphs, stories, case studies and quotations (Simister & James, 2021). Quantitative methods receive more scientific credibility

and are thus used more often over qualitative methods that are composed of less concrete measurements. (Lakshman et al., 2000)

For this research, a quantitative method was used to collect primary data. Multiple choice questions were created and administered as an online survey via social media to adults ages 25-40. The goal of the survey being to assess within a sample set the influence of TikTok on the respondents' lives. The online survey was designed using Google forms and was utilized to collect primary data from a specific sample set of online respondents. The survey was designed with the goal of receiving maximum insights from survey research.

The questions utilized in this study were modeled after the questions used by Cell Dilon in his study entitled *TikTok Influences on Teenagers and Young Adults Students: The Common Usages of The Application Tiktok* (Dilon, C. 2020). They were adjusted minutely to cater to an older demographic. The questions in the survey varied to be as accurate as possible. The TikTok survey questions are given in the below Table 1. The word 'application' has been abbreviated as 'app' for simplicity purposes during this research.

Table 1: TikTok research survey questions, social media trends

| |
|---|
| Q1. What social media apps do you use? |
| Q2. How often do you check your social media profiles daily? |
| Q3. Do you check your TikTok more often than your other social media apps? |
| 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, less, or equal time looking at other's profiles versus updating your own profile? |
| Q7. Do the majority of your friends use TikTok? |
| Q8. Do you think overuse of TikTok is a problem for society? |
| Q9. Is your profile on TikTok honest to your identity? |
| Q10. Have you ever been harassed on your TikTok app account? |
| Q11. Does TikTok content ever affect your perceptions of specific products or services? |
| Q12. Do you feel that TikTok is superficial? |
| Q13. Do you get style tips from TikTok? |
| Q14. Is your TikTok account an important part of your life? |
| Q15. Do you believe that users are honest on TikTok? |
| Q16. Do you get recipes from TikTok? |
| Q17. Do you feel that men and women use TikTok for different reasons? |
| Q18. Many pages on TikTok display adult women in sexually provocative ways, do you think this distorts the image of women in society? |
| Q19. Have you ever used TikTok for dating purposes? |
| Q20. Do you think people are braver on the app than they would be in real life? |
| Q21. Do you feel that TikTok will exist for the long term? |
| Q22. Do you learn new skills or life hacks that you use daily from TikTok? |
| Q23. Do you personally experience or see bullying on TikTok pages? |

The survey consists of twenty-eight questions which were in two parts. Twenty-three questions related to TikTok, how the participant uses TikTok, and what influence the app has on their self-image and behaviors. Questions were organized by themes, to facilitate understanding and response time. The remaining five additional questions were designed in

order to collect demographic information to understand survey respondents' demographic characteristics. The demographic questions in the survey are given in the below Table 2.

Table 2: TikTok research survey questions, demographic trends

| |
|---|
| Q1. What is your age group? |
| Q2. What is your gender? |
| Q3. What is your location? (State, Country) |
| Q4. Race/Ethnicity? |
| Q5. Education level? |

The survey was initially administered on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to family and friends, but was shared with others almost immediately. Additionally, the survey appeared in several Facebook groups that have over fifty thousand members and thus received a lot of social media exposure within a period from April 19th, 2021, to May 2nd, 2021. After that, the data was collected and transferred into an excel file to be analyzed.

3. RESULTS

Demographic questions in a survey allow researchers to gain background information on their participants. These questions provide context for the collected survey data, allowing researchers to describe their participants and better analyze their data (Allen, M. 2017). Demographic questions allow you to know who your target market really is and what they are really thinking (Si, S. 2015). This survey included the common demographic questions exploring participants' age, sex, ethnicity, and education. After receiving the responses, it is observed that predominantly females have responded to the survey with 98% of female respondents and 1% male respondents. Only 1% of respondents did not mention their gender. This survey focused on adults aged 25-40, it is interesting to observe that 55% of the respondents were in the age group of 25-30, followed by age group 31-35 at 27%. Regarding race/ethnicity perspective 81% of the respondents were white which was followed by Hispanic or Latino at 10%. Demographics in terms of education, 66% of the combined respondents are enrolled in either bachelor's degree or high school. Respondents pursuing their associate degree with 19% then follow. The count and percentage of demographic characteristics are given in below Table 3.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics

| Demographics | Categories | n | % |
|----------------|-------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Gender | Male | 10 | 1% |
| | Female | 801 | 98% |
| | Prefer not to say | 6 | 1% |
| Age | 25-30 | 448 | 55% |
| | 31-35 | 219 | 27% |
| | 36-40 | 150 | 18% |
| Race/Ethnicity | American Indian/Alaska Native | 9 | 1% |
| | Asian | 22 | 3% |

| | | | |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----|-----|
| | Black or African American | 13 | 2% |
| | Hispanic or Latino | 85 | 10% |
| | White | 662 | 81% |
| | Others | 26 | 3% |
| Education | Associates Degree | 152 | 19% |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 277 | 34% |
| | High School | 260 | 32% |
| | Master's degree | 121 | 15% |
| | PhD | 7 | 1% |

The study concluded that adult TikTok users ages 25-40 are not as heavily influenced by TikTok as their younger counterparts. Overall, it was concluded that while many adults in this age group are TikTok users, their connection to the content on TikTok is not as important to their life view or self-image.

Findings of the survey have been analyzed according to different aspects such as TikTok usage, behavioral influence, emotional connection, personal experience, TikTok impressions and TikTok longevity.

3.1 TikTok Usage

As seen in Figure 1 below; of 817 respondents, 92.9% of them were TikTok users. Facebook, however, was used most often with 99.9% of the respondents utilizing this social media app. Instagram fell slightly behind with 88.2% of the respondents. With TikTok usage sandwiched between these two social media platforms, it becomes clear that it's importance to this demographic is generally even.

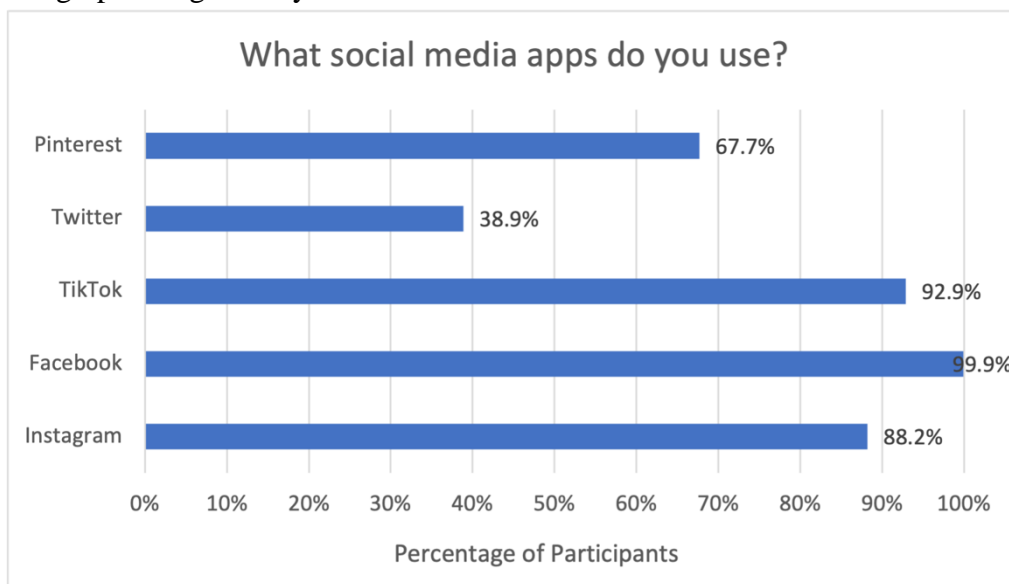


Figure 1: Survey question answers for the question ‘What social media apps do you use?’

When the respondents were asked if they check their TikTok app more often than other apps, 72.6% of them responded that they were not checking this app more often which is also

graphically represented in below Figure 2. This further concludes that TikTok does not have a massive impact on this demographic as other social media platforms seem to hold precedence.

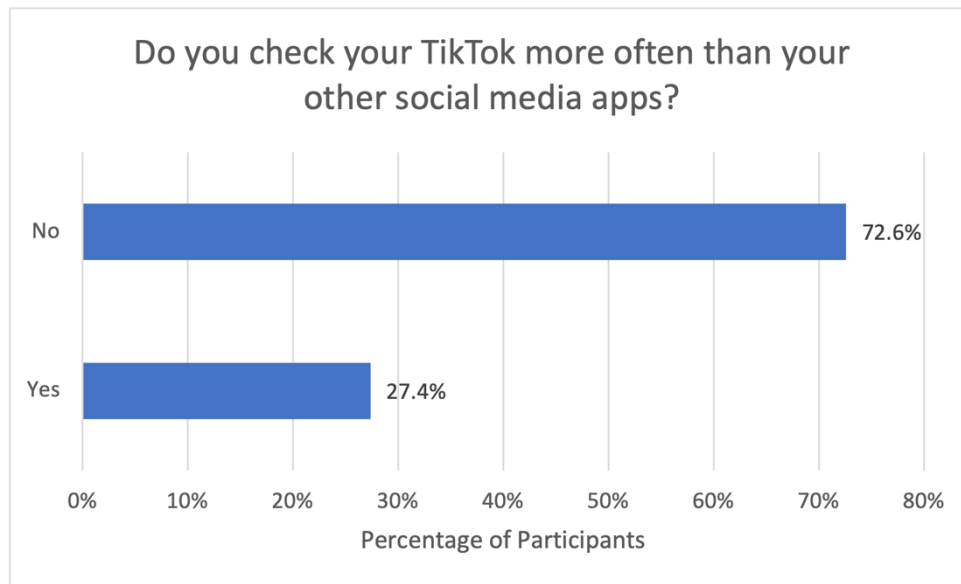


Figure 2: Survey question answers for the question ‘Do you check your TikTok more often than your other social media apps?’

In order to further analyze the usage of social media sites and apps, 47.1% of the respondents admitted to checking social media sites and apps over nine times a day. Social media is being checked often, however, TikTok is not the primary app being used. This is showing a strong alert for further research to investigate if it is healthy or not to be checking out an application so often within a day. The below graph represents how often respondents check their social media profiles on any social media site.

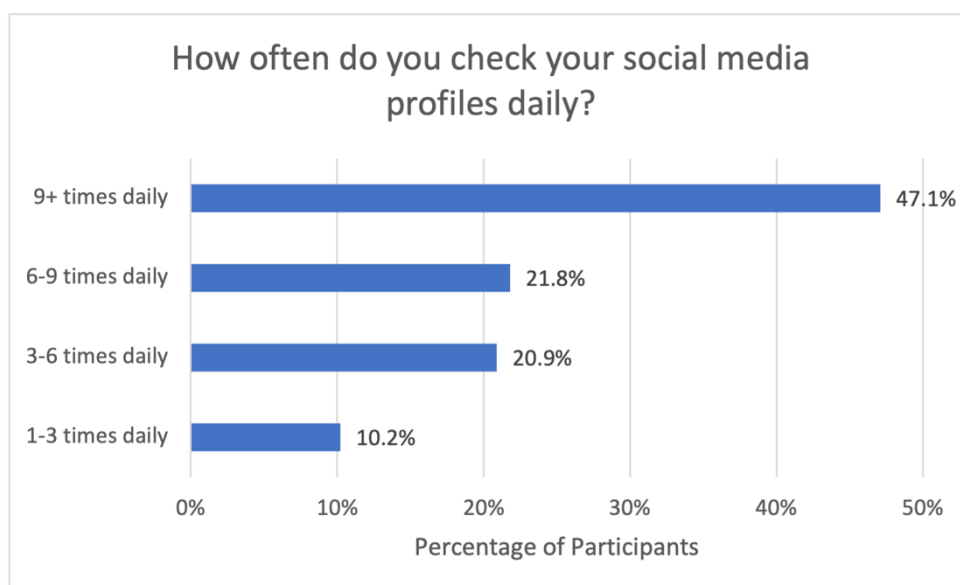


Figure 3: Survey question answers for the question ‘How often do you check your social media profiles daily?’

3.2 Behavioral Influence

The human species is so diverse despite our similar appearance. Unlike other species on this planet with sub-species that look so different from one another, humans almost look alike except for a variety in skin color and some features that determine our regional ancestry. Meanwhile, our cultural diversity also explains the difference in human behavior. However, human behavior changes the more we dabble with technology, especially with social media (Acevedo, M. 2017). In today's cultural and technological climate, everyone uses some sort of social media (The Psychology of Social Media, 2020).

When it comes to understanding the behavioral influence of social media, it is observed that adult users had less of a tendency to become influenced by TikTok. Only 55.30% responded sometimes for getting recipes while 25.6% respondents had mentioned 'never'. So, it can be concluded that TikTok does not have a strong influence on the consumers' behaviors. The below Figure 4 represents if users are getting recipes from TikTok or not.

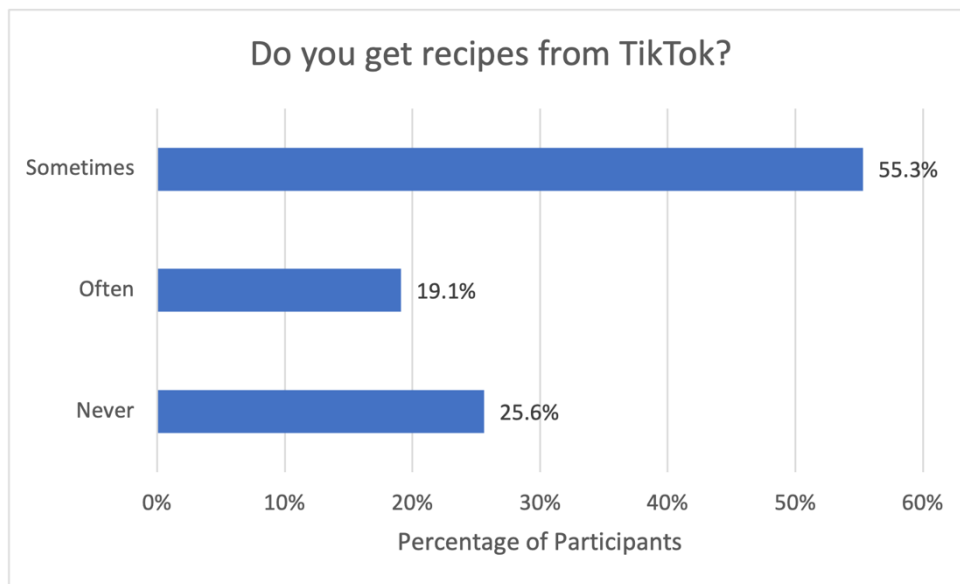


Figure 4: Survey answers for the question 'Do you get recipes from TikTok?'

As with Figure 4 and its data on TikTok as a means of gaining recipe knowledge, this study also delves into how TikTok influences adult product knowledge or perceptions. The question concluded that 58.3% of the respondents are susceptible to TikTok opinions of products or services sometimes, while the ones who responded as 'never' was also an important portion of the respondents at 30.6%. This underlines a correlation between these two behaviors on the app with adults.

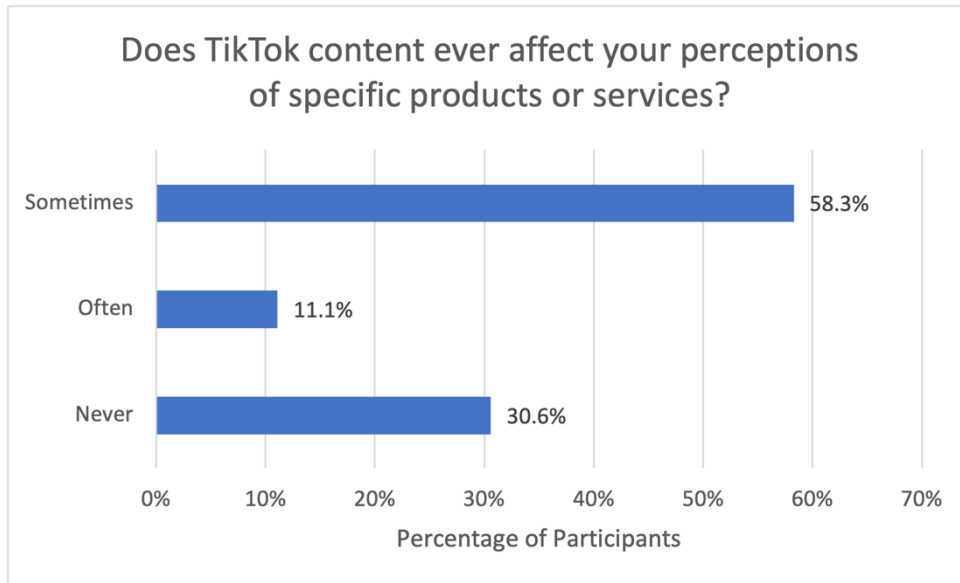


Figure 5: Survey answers for the question ‘Does TikTok content ever affect your perceptions of specific products or services?’

In order to analyze the impact of TikTok on fashion trends and other popular clothing styles the question address was ‘Do you get style tips from TikTok?’ and 56.5% of respondents mentioned ‘sometimes’ while 28.1% of respondents responded ‘never’.

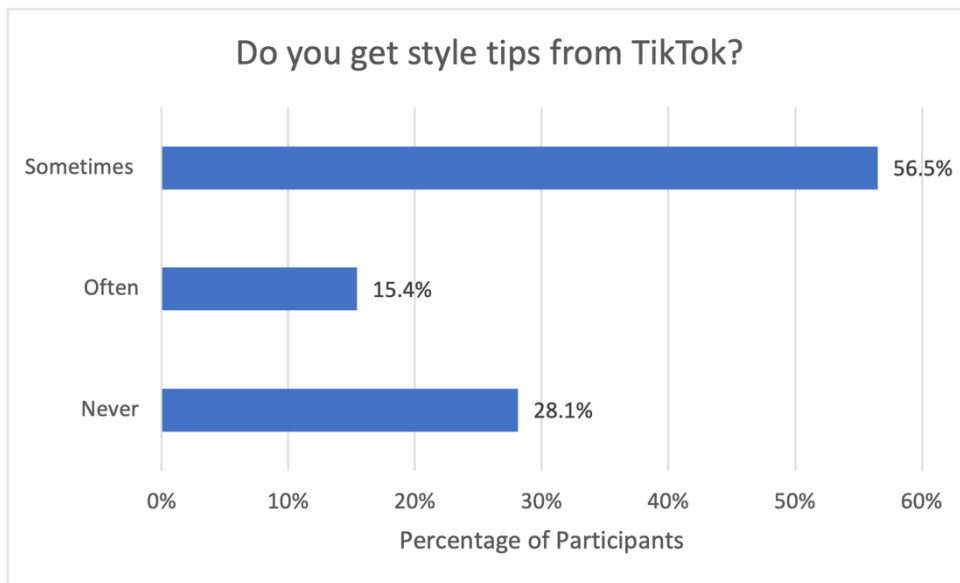


Figure 6: Survey answers for the question ‘Do you get style tips from TikTok?’

3.3 Emotional Connection

Social media has become an increasingly important part of our private and professional lives. It is used for various purposes; the main motivations being maintaining and creating connections, sharing with other users, and obtaining information and enjoyment (Hyvärinen & Beck, 2018). As smartphone technology has become ubiquitous, we’ve culturally evolved into an expectation of ‘always being on, always being available’ via text, social media, email, or

good, old-fashioned phone calls. Across projects and product categories, we see examples of the increasingly intense social pressure that people feel to stay digitally engaged (Miller, A. 2013). One of the interesting aspects of the impact of social media on people is the emotional connection. More than two third of the respondents have responded as often (20.0%) or sometimes (49.4%) find satisfaction from using their social media profile. The below Figure 7 represents the satisfaction/approval respondent feels from using their TikTok profile.

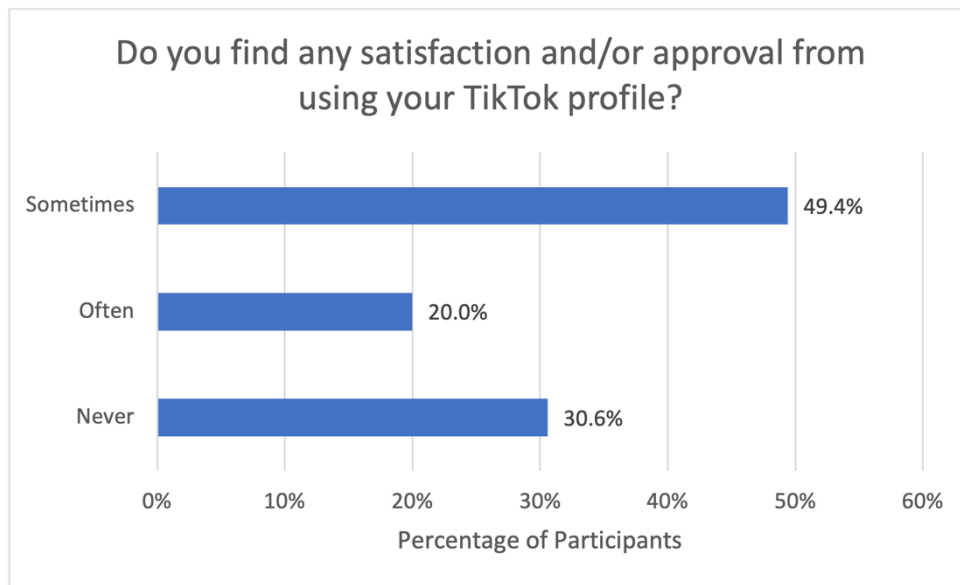


Figure 7: Survey answers for the question ‘Do you find any satisfaction and/or approval from using your TikTok profile?’

3.4 Personal Experience

The aforementioned statistics show that TikTok users are often on the younger end of the user scale. There are two ways of interacting on TikTok. Active use would describe a high engagement toward the platform including commenting and uploading videos. Passive usage would reflect in browsing and simply consuming videos (Montag et al., 2021). The need to distinguish between active and passive use of social media has been also recently empirically supported by Peterka-Bonetta and other authors (Peterka-Bonetta et al., 2021).

It is interesting to observe that the majority of respondents in this survey mentioned that TikTok does not play an important role in their lives with 84% of respondents claiming as such in Figure 8 below. Please note that this percentage is only for TikTok and not social media on a whole.

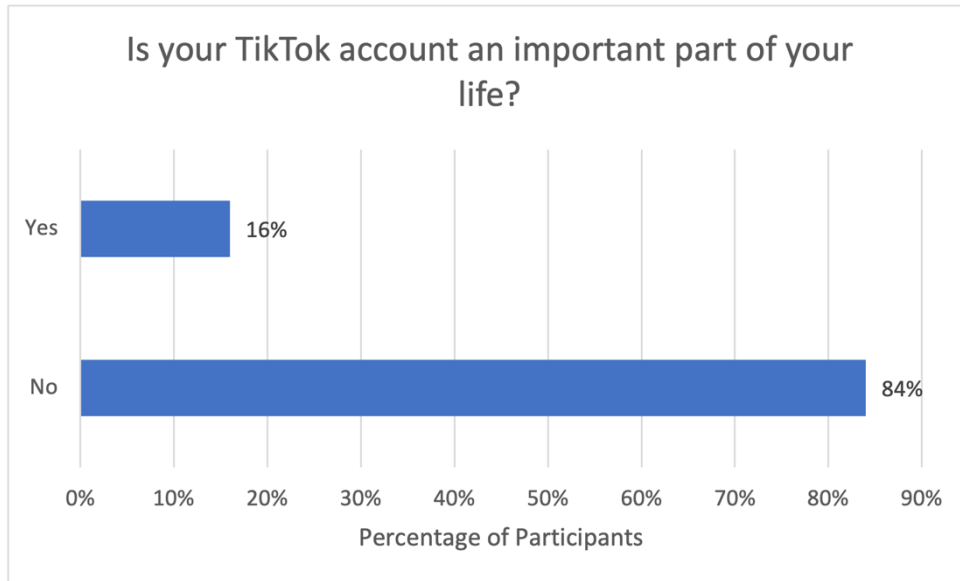


Figure 8: Survey answers for the question ‘Is your TikTok account an important part of your life?’

3.5 TikTok Impressions

Users log on to social media every day in hopes of finding content that feed into the desire for drama, news, or pure entertainment. Influencers exist who project the glamorous life that others dream of and find intoxicating. These pages focus on image or sex appeal to maintain users. The majority of the time these pages are showcased to capture a mass audience or to generate potential consumers for products (Writer, D.A., 2021). When it is combined with the responses of ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ 90.2 % of the respondents feel that TikTok is superficial according to Figure 9. This means that most of the adult users in this study can see how TikTok content focuses on appearance and façade to maintain hype.

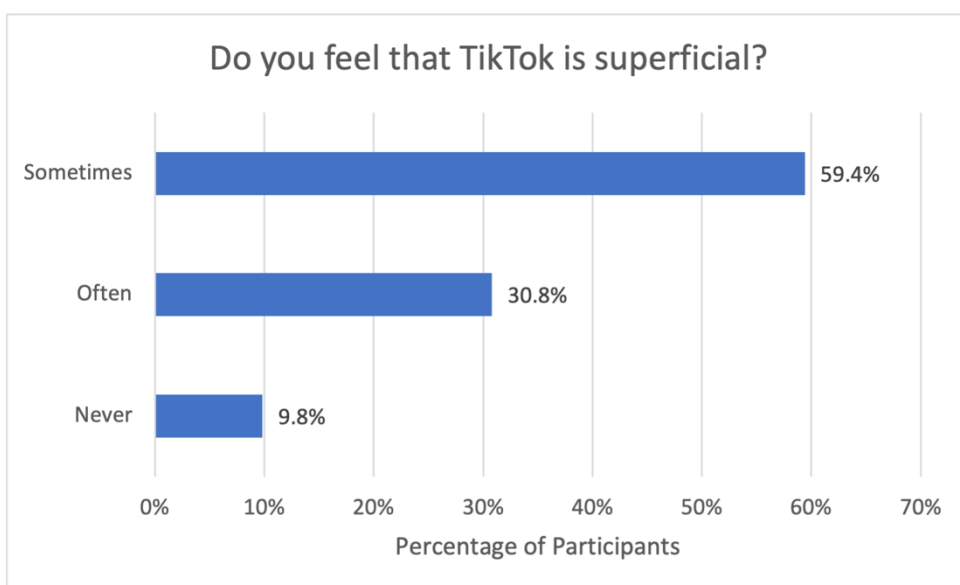


Figure 9: Survey answers for the question ‘Do you feel that TikTok is superficial?’

Nielsen conducted interviews with over 8,000 TikTok users from around the world to get their thoughts on various aspects of the in-app experience, including their perception of TikTok content, and ads, which showcases some key trends that have likely helped to propel the platform's massive growth. "Nielsen's study shows users around the globe find TikTok content to be authentic, genuine, unfiltered and trendsetting. At the same time, when looking specifically at advertising content, users still associated terms such as authentic and genuine, while adding honest, real, unique and fun." (Hutchinson & Hutchinson, 2021). The Nielsen study also shows that TikTok is a place where users feel free to be themselves (Nielsen Study Shows TikTok Ideal Place for "Discovery," Content More "Authentic," 2021). Despite the notation of superficiality in Figure 9, the respondents in this survey agreed with Nielsen and consider TikTok users to be honest while posting content on TikTok. According to this research, the below graph, Figure 10 represents that 89.7% of respondents find TikTok users to be truthful when the responses of 'sometimes' and 'often' are combined together.

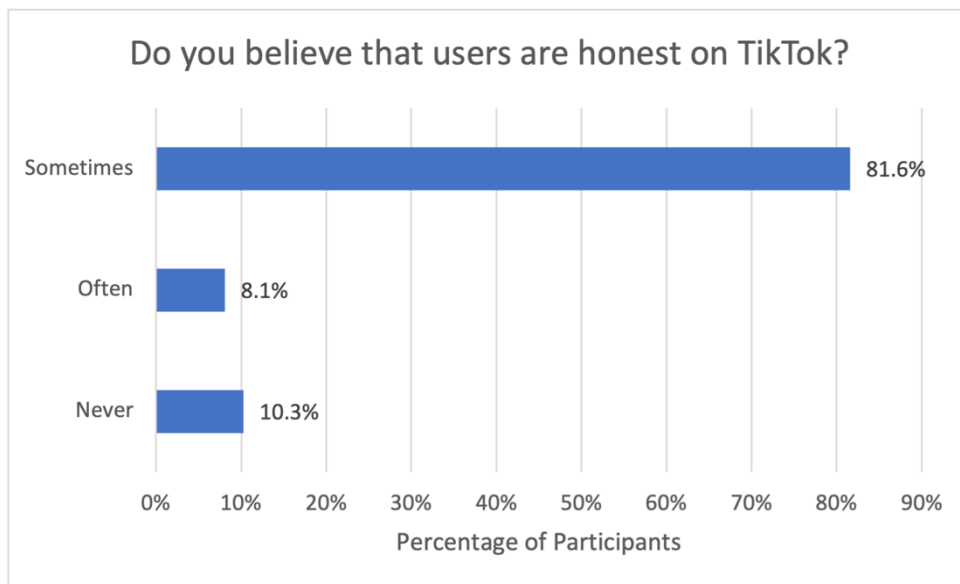


Figure 10: Survey answers for the question 'Do you believe that users are honest on TikTok?'

3.6 TikTok Longevity

TikTok had a huge rise in popularity owing to their ingenious algorithm that immediately shows users videos that connect to their interests or ideologies. In regards to social media platforms, one can never truly be sure when their popularity will decrease. Facebook has managed to stay somewhat relevant for 16 years giving way to Instagram in the 2010s; however TikTok has in recent years moved to the forefront. As seen below, there are many projections that can help anticipate TikTok's future success or failure (Tobin, J., 2020):

Why TikTok could diminish in success;

- Formulaic Content Won't Amuse For Long
- Copyright Claims Could Kill The Fun
- Brands Might Not Support It Or Support It Too Much

- Data Security and Chinese Ownership Could Rattle Users

Why TikTok could continue to thrive;

- Easy To Try
- More Modern TV Than Social Network
- Evolving Constantly
- Easy To Share

As it is seen in Figure 11, 40.8% of the respondents in this survey are not sure whether this app is here to stay or will fade away like many other social media apps and 13.1% responded as 'no'. However, 46.1 % are sure that TikTok is long term and will have a great user base in years to come.

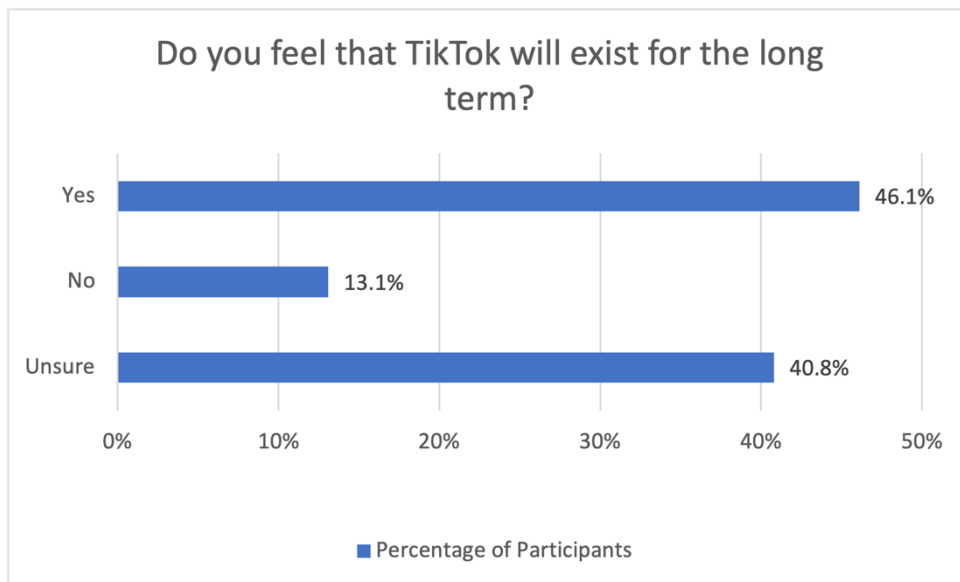


Figure 11: Survey answers for 'Do you feel that TikTok will exist for the long term?'

4. DISCUSSION

This research focuses on TikTok usage and its influence on adults. Like any other social media app, it has its own positive and negative impacts. Some positive features of using TikTok would include the following points.

- Entertainment as it serves as a great source of entertainment with dancing and acting videos that helps users to expand their social circle
- Publicity as it is a great app for people that want to get famous off unique talents and skills.
- On top of the funny videos and the dancing videos, there are some people that make videos with great opportunities and life tips that can help many people.

Obviously, there is a flip side to this social media app as well and some of the negative impacts of this app could be listed below.

- Addiction: The social media app may be designed to be addictive, with an unlimited stream of videos at around 30 seconds each, making it hard to get bored.

- While the application can be used to spread positivity, it can also be used as a platform for bullying.

- On TikTok, there are no restrictions as to who can join the app, so strangers can easily message children and create harmful situations.

Overall, TikTok is a one of the technological inventions in terms of the social media concept with different purposes such as watching videos and meeting new people. Also, it allows users to learn, discover new things, and explore opportunities ranging from volunteering or interning positions.

A plethora of researches and studies have been done to understand why TikTok has gained its sudden massive attention and its effects on the younger generation. The purpose of this research is to understand the usage and influence of TikTok on adults. The quantitative survey outcomes show that TikTok is definitely among the most used social media platforms, just next in line to Facebook which is widely the most popular still. The survey asked questions on behavioral influence of the app on its users, and it can be concluded that TikTok does not have a strong influence on the adult consumers' behaviors which is inclusive of mostly getting recipes or style tips from the app. This research concludes that TikTok does not play an important part of respondent's lives. While most respondents feel that the app is superficial, they also think that the creators are honest while posting any content. Finally, not many are sure if this app will last for long term or it's just a momentary phase where everyone is addicted to this musical app. It could be recommended for future studies to investigate more specific age intervals to see if the interest is more specific within smaller clusters of age. It would be also enlightening to analyze the demographic factors on more deeper aspects so that the background of users could lead to different outcomes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have participated to drafting the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the manuscript and read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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