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Short Made Them Powerful: Exploring Motivations and Problematic Uses of TikTok

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Abstract

The penetration of short-form content in daily life is undeniable. TikTok is one of the most popular and fastest-growing short-form video applications globally. This study examined the underlying motives for using TikTok and explored differences in psychological symptoms related to TikTok usage patterns (i.e., active vs. passive). A survey of 500 TikTok users identified six prominent reasons for engaging in TikTok. These are "information-seeking," "time-killing," "self-expression," "trend-seeking," "escapism," and "inspiration-seeking." In addition, the active use of TikTok was positively associated with dependency and addictive symptoms. The results contribute to the understanding of TikTok and other short-form videos by uncovering motives and demonstrating the distinguished outcomes of usage types.

Keywords: short-form videos, TikTok, motives, active use, passive use, problematic use

Introduction

The popularity of short-form content has rapidly increased. A recent report showed that TikTok, one of the most popular social media applications dedicated to short-form videos, was the most downloaded mobile application in 2022, with 2.5 billion daily active users globally.[1] Although the precise length of videos varies across platforms, a short-form video is typically defined as a video that is less than 60 seconds in duration.[2] Short-form videos are favored by users owing to their ease of digestion, sharing, and creation. Users gain information instantly and can easily invite their community to interact at a glance.[3] In addition, the pressure on creators to create longer content diminishes owing to the length and spontaneous nature of short-form content.

Over the years, abundant studies have employed the uses and gratification theory framework to unpack insights into user behavior and motivations on various social media platforms and to predict the future of newly emerging media.[4,5] Alhabash et al. explored the motives for using Facebook and specified social connections, shared identities, and engagement with photographs and content as key motivations, reflecting Facebook's role as a social interaction platform.[6] Lee et al. identified social interaction, archiving, self-expression, escapism, and peeking as the main motivations for using Instagram.[7] These studies emphasized the distinct nature of social media platforms by uncovering their various needs.

As a rapidly growing social media platform, a dedicated exploration of TikTok's unique user motivations is necessary, as TikTok users may have platform-specific reasons for using the platform. TikTok offers fragmented short-form videos curated using a recommendation algorithm based on user interests.[8] These distinctive characteristics of TikTok can be further understood through the lens of affordance theory. Building on Gibson's concept of affordances,[9] the theory was extended this idea to information systems, emphasizing the role of user experience and the perceived value technology offers.[10] Research has identified several technological affordances of short-form video platforms, such as algorithmic recommendations for personalized content delivery, vertical video formats for mobile ease of use, and cost-effective interactions that foster dynamic engagement.[11,12] These affordances significantly contribute to user engagement and have been linked to excessive usage and flow experiences on TikTok.[13]

The distinctive characteristics of TikTok, including its video-based nature and short content duration, necessitate an exploration of the unique motivation for its usage and a detailed examination of the varying motivations across both active and passive users. Some TikTok users create and

share their videos; this requires a higher level of engagement than uploading texts or pictures on other platforms. This kind of content creation may be driven by a desire for self-presentation and social recognition.[14] The need for interpersonal relationships may motivate users to mimic others' trendy content and participate in collective activities such as TikTok challenges.[15]

Active social media use, which involves sharing videos or photos or posting personal content, may serve as a form of self-presentation and social interaction tool. Conversely, passive social media use, which includes browsing, scrolling, and consuming others' content in social media platforms, requires less self-reflection but is more aligned with the need for information and entertainment.[16] Previous studies examined how passive and active use relate to social media addiction and emotional health, revealing that passive use is significantly associated with addictive behaviors as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression.[17–19] A detailed understanding of these varying motivations is essential for unpacking the distinct user behaviors on TikTok and their potential psychological and social outcomes such as excessive screen time and addiction.[20]

Despite TikTok's popularity and unique nature, little is known about users' social and psychological motives for using the platform. Most recently, Scherr and Wang identified four TikTok usage motives among Chinese users based on a 36-item measure: socially rewarding self-presentation, trendiness, escapist addiction, and novelty.[14] Their findings primarily revealed what drove the popular use of TikTok in China, but the items remain repetitive to existing social media platforms and less specific to the experience of TikTok users.[14] Captivated in scrolling through short videos, TikTok users demonstrated a higher degree of flow experience compared with Instagram users,[21] necessitating further examination of the specific needs that facilitate the experience on TikTok. To fill the gap in the literature, the current study aims to reveal a more expansive and recent scope of TikTok and uncover how it is distinguished from other platforms that attract users. Furthermore, to examine the differences in motivation for TikTok engagement, this study categorized TikTok usage pattern as either active or passive use. In this study, active TikTok use is operationally defined as user behaviors that involve both creating and sharing one's own content, as well as engaging with others' content by browsing and interacting. This dual dimension captures the multifaceted nature of active engagement on TikTok, where users may actively contribute to the platform by uploading videos while simultaneously consuming content created by others to stay connected and informed. In contrast, passive TikTok use refers solely to the browsing and consumption of content without contributing original material. Accordingly, the following research question was proposed:

RQ1: What are the underlying psychological and social motives for using TikTok? Are there any differences between active and passive TikTok users concerning the identified motive factors?

In addition, this study explored differences in TikTok fatigue and psychological symptoms of addiction (i.e., dependency and addiction) between active and passive TikTok users. Regarding fatigue, previous studies suggested that social media users often become overwhelmed by the abundance of content, posts, and friends, which causes them to distance themselves from social media.[22] TikTok continuously provides short-form content that requires cognitive and affective responses, potentially causing users to feel tense and overwhelmed. Furthermore, this endlessly curated content may contribute to TikTok dependency and addictive symptoms. Dependency refers to a psychological state in which individuals rely on social media for information and communication,[23] whereas addiction is defined as "being overly concerned about social media, driven by an uncontrollable urge to log in or use it, and dedicating excessive time and energy to social media at the expense of other important areas of life."[24] While addiction reflects a loss of control and involves compulsive social media use behaviors, dependency is more closely related to the psychological state of relying on social media.[25,26] Given that individuals may develop problematic patterns of use that hinder their academic and professional lives or interpersonal relationships, previous studies have discussed dependency and addictive symptoms in the context of smartphone and social media use.[7,16]

Regarding TikTok, its fragmented nature makes its content effective in grabbing users' attention, fostering intense pleasure, and facilitating quick shifts in attention span.[27] Furthermore, terms such as "popcorn brain" and "bed rotting" frequently depict the negative effects attributed to TikTok among younger generations. Owing to their short duration, compelling content, tailored algorithms, and immersive nature, short-form videos and platforms increase users' vulnerability to addiction.[12,28,29] A recent study has demonstrated that TikTok and Instagram users who reported higher levels of flow were also more likely to report negative mental outcomes.[21] Specifically, TikTok users, who felt deeply engaged while scrolling through short videos, demonstrated a higher degree of flow compared with Instagram users. This was positively associated with negative psychological symptoms such as fear of missing out, addiction, depression, and anxiety.[21] Despite past studies' explorations of distinct patterns of problematic use, relatively little is known about *how* TikTok use is related to potential negative consequences. Active and passive social media use are categorized based on the main activities in which users engage (e.g., uploading one's own content vs. browsing others' content), and these usage types have been found to be correlated with the intensity of social media use and addictive symptoms.[19] Consequently, this study aimed to explore the differences in fatigue, dependency, and addictive symptoms between active and passive TikTok users.

RQ2: Are there differences between active and passive TikTok users concerning TikTok usage, fatigue, dependency, and addictive symptoms?

Finally, Burnell and Kuther found that such symptoms can be explained by social and psychological factors, including sensation-seeking, social support, and self-esteem, which relate to the drives and needs that individuals seek to fulfill by using social media.[30] Focusing on the flow experience derived from social media, prior research has identified five subscales of flow (i.e., focused attention, enjoyment, curiosity, telepresence, and time distortion) and its relationship with social media addiction disorder.[31] Problematic social media use associated with flow experience has been found to be related to potential negative consequences for users' mental health.[32] Considering previous results and acknowledging the limited research on

identifying distinguished motivation for TikTok use in predicting problematic use symptoms, clarifying how these motivation factors are linked to problematic usage is expected to contribute to the literature. This will enhance the understanding of unique motivations for using TikTok and how each motivation relates to problematic symptoms of TikTok use such as fatigue, dependency, and addictive symptoms. Thus, the following research question was established:

> RQ3: Are there any relationships among the identified motives, fatigue, dependency, and addictive symptoms?

Methods

Participants

A total of 500 participants were recruited by a major research firm in Asia (Macromill Embrain) from an office in Seoul, Korea. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, ensuring their voluntary participation and adherence to ethical research standards. An online survey was conducted over a 2-week period in February 2024. Macromill Embrain utilized their extensive online panel to recruit TikTok users, ensuring a balanced and representative sample based on age, gender, and TikTok usage. For the purpose of this study, the survey's target population was users who had used TikTok within the past week. The participants included 253 females and 247 males, aged 14–59 years, with a mean age of 36.85 years. The participants indicated that they spend an average of 94.42 minutes on TikTok daily ($SD = 75.69$). Approximately 49.8% of the respondents indicated that they have used TikTok for less than a year, followed by over 2 years of usage (26.6%) and between 1 and 2 years (23.6%) (Table 1).

Measures

The scale items for TikTok usage motivations were derived from previous studies on motivations for using the Internet and social networking sites.[7,14,33–38] Given the considerable number of items, several of which overlapped, a revision and elimination process was employed to obtain more manageable and relevant items applicable to TikTok. Specifically, using a pilot test, items that contained the same meaning were removed to include only discernible items within the compatible category. Subsequently, an independent group of active TikTok users ($n = 20$) was asked to eliminate items that were not relevant to TikTok. Being actively engaged in TikTok, this group of users could filter items used to identify motives for other social media; however, these did not apply to TikTok activities. Finally, the participants were asked to list additional reasons for using TikTok. Consequently, 51 unique items regarding the motivation to use TikTok were identified.

Also, TikTok usage variables were operationalized by asking respondents to examine how often they logged into their accounts, their duration of TikTok usage, their daily TikTok usage, and their number of TikTok friends (followers). Furthermore, participants responded a single question assessing their primary TikTok activity—"What best describes your primary type of TikTok usage?" The response options were uploader (creating and sharing content such as videos), observer (viewing content uploaded by others), or both.

TikTok Fatigue was measured using the three-item scale by adapting the original developed and validated by Lee et al.[39] Sample questions include "Managing TikTok account is a burden" and "I feel tired after using TikTok" ($\alpha = 0.81$). Dependency on TikTok was measured using the seven-item scale adapted from a previous study.[30] Example items include "I often find myself using TikTok longer than intended" and "I will be upset if I had to cut down the amount of time I spend using TikTok" ($\alpha = 0.84$). Finally, the overall TikTok addiction symptoms were measured with

TABLE 1. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS ($N = 500$)

	Mean (min–max)
Sample profile	
Age	36.85 years old (14–59)
Gender	
Male	247 (49.4%)
Female	253 (50.6%)
TikTok usage	
Time spent on TikTok per day	94.42 minutes (2–630)
Frequency of logging onto TikTok per week	5.41 days (1–7)
Number of followers	285.86 followers (0–69000)
Number of followings	114.25 following (0–5665)

	Frequency (n)*	Percentage (%)
Usage period		
Less than 3 months	88	17.6
3 months ~ less than 6 months	75	15.0
6 months ~ less than 1 year	86	17.2
1 year ~ less than 2 years	118	23.6
More than 2 years	133	26.6
TikTok usage type		
Active	108	21.6
Passive	392	78.4

three items: "I feel troubled if I'm away from TikTok," "I find it difficult to overrule my impulse to use TikTok," and "I feel the urge to use TikTok" ($\alpha = 0.95$).[25] All items were anchored on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Results

To examine the first research question, exploratory factor analysis, followed by direct oblimin rotation, was performed to determine the underlying structure of TikTok usage motives. The analysis produced a six-component solution, which was determined based on the following criteria: eigenvalue (>1.0), variance explained by each component, loading score for each factor (≥0.50), and meaningfulness of each dimension. These criteria indicated that a six-component solution, explaining approximately 77.4% of the total variance, was appropriate.

As presented in Table 2, the first component, *information-seeking*, consisted of six items and accounted for 43.2% of the variance ($\alpha = 0.94$). The second component, *time-killing*, consisting of six items, accounted for 14.12% of the variance ($\alpha = 0.92$), and the third component, *self-expression*, consisting of five items, accounted for 7.65% of the variance ($\alpha = 0.96$). Furthermore, the fourth component, *trend-seeking*, consisting of six items ($\alpha = 0.94$), accounted for 5.15% of the variance, followed by *escapism*, consisting of five items ($\alpha = 0.92$), accounting for 4.76% of variance. Finally, *inspiration-seeking*, consisting of five items ($\alpha = 0.90$), represented 3.31% of the variance.

In addition, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted for the six components to compare the two groups' mean

TABLE 2. MOTIVATIONS FOR USING TIKTOK (PCA; *N* = 500)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Information-seeking ($\alpha = 0.94$)						
To get useful information	**0.92**	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.07
To get information of my interest	**0.89**	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.01	0.02
To obtain or share necessary information	**0.89**	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.03
To learn information quickly	**0.85**	0.07	0.03	0.08	0.08	0.05
To gain specialized tips or expertise	**0.83**	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.03
To exchange knowledge and opinions with others	**0.80**	0.10	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.09
Time-killing ($\alpha = 0.92$)						
Because I have nothing better to do	0.03	**0.89**	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.06
To kill time	0.01	**0.89**	0.06	0.10	0.01	0.15
To pass time when I'm bored	0.09	**0.89**	0.01	0.06	0.08	0.09
To get myself out of boredom	0.01	**0.79**	0.06	0.08	0.13	0.13
Because TikTok is entertaining	0.03	**0.73**	0.10	0.07	0.05	0.27
To have fun and to be entertained	0.05	**0.72**	0.03	0.08	0.14	0.16
Self-expression ($\alpha = 0.96$)						
To tell others about myself	0.02	0.04	**0.97**	0.01	0.01	0.03
To express my ideal self (who I want to be)	0.03	0.00	**0.93**	0.04	0.03	0.02
To promote myself	0.00	0.00	**0.92**	0.01	0.02	0.02
To express my actual self (who I really am)	0.03	0.04	**0.90**	0.03	0.05	0.04
To share updates in my life	0.01	0.01	**0.89**	0.04	0.03	0.01
Trend-seeking ($\alpha = 0.94$)						
Because TikTok is popular	0.09	0.04	0.01	**0.90**	0.07	0.09
Because everybody else is using TikTok	0.07	0.03	0.00	**0.86**	0.02	0.00
Because TikTok is a new trend	0.00	0.03	0.03	**0.82**	0.04	0.13
To keep up with the popular trend	0.04	0.00	0.02	**0.81**	0.01	0.13
Because friends are using TikTok	0.02	0.09	0.06	**0.80**	0.01	0.01
To stay in trend by using TikTok	0.13	0.02	0.00	**0.76**	0.01	0.08
Escapism ($\alpha = 0.92$)						
To escape from reality	0.01	0.03	0.07	0.00	**0.90**	0.08
To forget about troubles from daily life	0.05	0.01	0.02	0.02	**0.90**	0.04
To get a break from what I am doing	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.07	**0.85**	0.04
To forget unpleasant things from work, school, or life	0.02	0.00	0.04	0.05	**0.84**	0.03
To relax	0.01	0.14	0.04	0.02	**0.71**	0.06
Inspiration-seeking ($\alpha = 0.90$)						
Because TikTok sparks my curiosity	0.04	0.06	0.07	0.12	0.07	**0.75**
To find creative contents	0.12	0.04	0.11	0.08	0.00	**0.73**
To find contents to fulfill my curiosity	0.09	0.10	0.06	0.05	0.12	**0.70**
To experience diverse contents in different styles and formats	0.11	0.06	0.06	0.18	0.08	**0.67**
To earn inspiration	0.17	0.15	0.29	0.02	0.08	**0.51**
Eigenvalue	14.24	4.66	2.53	1.70	1.57	1.10
% of Variance	43.15	14.12	7.65	5.15	4.76	3.31
Cumulative %	43.15	57.27	64.92	70.10	74.83	78.14

Note: Loadings that are 0.50 or larger are in bold.

TABLE 3. MEAN COMPARISONS OF DEPENDENT VARIABLES BETWEEN ACTIVE AND PASSIVE USERS

Dependent variables	#	Item	Active user (n = 108)	Passive user (n = 392)	t-test	p value
Fatigue	1	Managing TikTok account is a burden	3.87 (1.53)	3.68 (1.25)	1.33	0.19
	2	I feel discomfort while using TikTok				
	3	I feel tired after using TikTok				
Dependency	1	I find myself using TikTok longer than intended	4.49 (1.27)	3.82 (1.18)	5.14	< 0.01
	2	Time passes without feeling using TikTok				
	3	I neglect my schoolwork because of TikTok				
	4	I find life boring without TikTok				
	5	Days pass by without the need to use TikTok				
	6	I will be upset if I cut down TikTok use				
	7	My TikTok use increased since when I started				
Addictive symptoms	1	I am troubled if I am away from TikTok	3.90 (1.75)	2.65 (1.55)	7.21	< 0.01
	2	I find it difficult to overrule my impulse to use TikTok				
	3	I feel an urge to use TikTok				

Note: Each item was scored along a seven-point scale (1—strongly disagree and 7—strongly agree).

scores. For analysis purpose, responses from "Uploader" and "Observer" were categorized as active and passive usage, respectively. Responses indicating "Both" were included in the active use category to align with the operational definition of this study, ensuring a comprehensive representation of active use while maintaining a clear distinction between active and passive usage categories. The results indicated that active users exhibited significantly higher scores on *information-seeking* (M = 5.09 vs. 4.49), *self-expression* (M = 4.61 vs. 2.73), *escapism* (M = 4.83 vs. 4.19), and *inspiration-seeking* (M = 5.09 vs. 4.33) than passive users ($p < 0.001$). However, the differences regarding *trend-seeking* ($p = 0.88$) and *time-killing* ($p = 0.88$) between the two groups were not statistically significant.

Regarding the second research question, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the general TikTok usage between the active and passive user groups. The results indicated that active users logged into their TikTok account more frequently (M = 5.81 days per week) than passive users (M = 5.30 days) ($p < 0.01$). On average, active users spent 119.59 minutes on the application each day, whereas passive users spent 87.49 minutes ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, active TikTok users reported significantly higher mean scores for *dependency* (M = 4.49) and *addictive symptoms* (M = 3.90) than passive users ($M_{dependency} = 3.82$; $M_{addictive\ symptoms} = 2.65$; $p < 0.01$). However, no statistically

significant difference was observed for *fatigue* (M_{active} = 3.87 vs. $M_{passive}$ = 3.68, $p = 0.19$) (Table 3).

Finally, an analysis of partial correlations among the variables of interest was conducted to answer RQ3, controlling for age, gender, and TikTok usage period. As presented in Table 4, all identified TikTok motives were positively correlated with dependency on TikTok. Concerning addictive symptoms, significant correlations were found among all motivations, except time-killing. In addition, significant positive correlations were found between information-seeking ($pr = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$), self-expression ($pr = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$), escapism ($pr = 0.09$, $p < 0.05$), inspiration-seeking ($pr = 0.09$, $p < 0.05$), and fatigue. However, trend-seeking motives were not significantly correlated with fatigue. Furthermore, time-killing was negatively correlated with fatigue ($pr = -0.13$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that TikTok users to pass their time are less likely to experience platform fatigue.

Discussion

TikTok opened a new arena for social networking and communication, particularly concerning its ability to spread social awareness through short-form videos. By surveying a sample of 500 TikTok users in Korea, this study identified six key motives for using TikTok. The findings suggest that *information-seeking, time-killing, self-expression, trend-seeking, escapism,* and *inspiration-seeking* are social

TABLE 4. PARTIAL CORRELATION AMONG VARIABLES, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M	SD
1. Information-seeking	—	0.30**	0.53**	0.67**	0.54**	0.97**	0.13**	0.50**	0.49**	4.41	1.27
2. Time-killing		—	−0.04	0.30**	0.39**	0.33**	−0.13**	0.26**	−0.02	5.45	1.01
3. Self-expression			—	0.51**	0.45**	0.49**	0.25**	0.48**	0.65**	3.13	1.77
4. Trend-seeking				—	0.58**	0.63**	0.06	0.48**	0.49**	4.48	1.39
5. Escapism					—	0.53**	0.09*	0.57**	0.50**	4.38	1.43
6. Inspiration-seeking						—	0.09*	0.49**	0.46**	4.47	1.31
7. Fatigue							—	0.20**	0.31**	3.72	1.32
8. Dependency								—	0.71**	3.96	1.23
9. Addictive symptoms									—	2.92	1.68

Notes. *M*, mean; *SD*, standard deviation; age, gender, and TikTok usage period were controlled.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.

and psychological factors that motivate TikTok usage. This study's findings expand prior literature by uncovering motives for engaging in TikTok that are distinct from other social media platforms.

The findings indicated that information-seeking was the most meaningful motivation for using TikTok. TikTok plays an important role in its users' daily lives as a major source of information, dissimilar to other social media platforms, for which social motives were identified as the most influential reasons for their use—e.g., "social interaction" for Instagram and "social connections" for Facebook.[6,7] A recent study examining the motives for Instagram reels, which share similar features with TikTok, found that information-seeking was not a usage motive.[33] This study's findings confirm that individuals prefer to leverage TikTok to hastily obtain information and useful tips.

The second motive, time-killing, involves the use of TikTok to pass the time and mitigate boredom. In fact, time-killing was negatively correlated with the level of platform fatigue, suggesting that users with this motive are less likely to become tired of using TikTok. The entertainment motive identified in previous studies shares similar features with time-killing, highlighting the prevalence of passive and habitual media use to block fragmented free time with a scroll of instant entertainment.[33] As described in the items that assessed the time-killing motive of TikTok from Table 2, one can assume that TikTok users are prone to flow, which describes a state of intensive enjoyment and intrinsic reward whereby people become so fully immersed that other surroundings fade into insignificance. Past research confirmed the positive linkage between online flow experience and decreased psychological well-being such as low life satisfaction and high anxiety, depression, and stress.[40] Our finding that TikTok users are largely drawn to the platform to seek enjoyment and pleasure contributes to this critical issue by emphasizing the need for further investigation in clarifying the impact of short-form consumption on mental health.

This study supports the findings of previous studies, as self-expression, trend seeking, and escapism were also observed as motives for using other social media platforms.[7,14,41] Therefore, the results demonstrate that, despite the novelty of TikTok, it shares some commonalities with other platforms concerning anticipated functions. Although inspiration-seeking was identified as the least explained component, it was significant owing to its uniqueness to TikTok. TikTok is often described as a creative tool rather than a social media platform where users are allowed to freely explore various features, including music, filters, and effects, to make their videos more engaging based solely on their interests.[42] These unique features of TikTok generated inspiration-seeking as an important antecedent that attracted users, whereas other social platforms focused more on content consumption and social interactions.

While this study's findings support those of previous studies by confirming the pre-discovered motivation for social media usage within TikTok usage, some commonly appearing motivations were not significant. For example, Omar and Dequan emphasized "archiving" as the most important predictor of consumption and participation in a media platform.[41] Previous literature suggested that archiving implies that individuals are motivated to use the media to remember

and trace special events and moments in their lives.[43] In contrast to previous studies that emphasized the commemoration of personal special incidents as archiving, a recent assessment of archiving expanded items to include the act of compiling and saving videos of interest.[34,41] Consequently, it can be expected that the *updated* definition of archiving may be more appropriate for TikTok—that is, tailored curation based on an algorithm.[44]

Another common motive in previous literature on social media was surveillance, which was not found in the study. Surveillance, also referred to as knowledge about others, implies users' curiosity and passion for knowing what others are doing and is reportedly an important use and gratification for social media.[33,34,45] One possible explanation for the absence of surveillance in the current study may be owing to surveillance being considered as the "sub-motivation" for information-seeking.[46]

Further, this study contributes to the extant literature by revealing the impact of usage type on motivations for TikTok usage as well as predictors of problematic use. Specifically, the findings indicated that active users have stronger information-seeking, self-expression, escapism, and inspiration-seeking motives than passive users. These findings suggest that active users are more likely to be dependent on and addicted to TikTok than passive users. Prior research has demonstrated that active Facebook use is positively associated with Facebook addiction due to the flow experienced while uploading posts.[47] Similarly, active TikTok users may invest time and psychological effort into content creation, likely increasing their vulnerability to symptoms of dependency and addiction. This result supports the latest findings on the impact of short-form consumption on addictive behavior.[15,48,49]

Furthermore, the observed positive relationship between active TikTok use and addiction contributes to existing studies on the relationship between active and passive social media use and well-being. Prior literature suggests that active social media use, involving self-expression, is positively related to well-being as it facilitates venting emotions[50] and garnering social support.[17,18] In contrast, passive social media use, which entails observing others' content, may increase the likelihood of engaging in social comparison, potentially leading to negative impacts on well-being.[17–19] Our findings indicating the positive association between active TikTok use and addiction suggest that active engagement on TikTok may differ from that on other platforms. Unlike platforms such as Instagram, where self-expression is a primary motivation, TikTok use might place a stronger emphasis on content consumption, as indicated by our findings that information-seeking and time-killing are the foremost motivations. For example, even participating in a TikTok challenge—a notable form of active engagement—often involves observing others' posts and mimicking their actions. These insights pave the way for future research to explore TikTok's distinctive characteristics, differentiating it from other social media platforms.

Previous studies indicated that addicted users exhibited significantly worse mental health states, such as psychological distress, social anxiety, and impaired attention ability compared to nonaddictive users.[48,51] Consequently, future studies should explore the potential predictors of the addictive use of TikTok to prevent the detrimental effects of short-form consumption. Most recent studies focused on the

consequences of problematic use; however, identifying the personality or environmental factors that trigger addiction can contribute to promoting the healthy use of short video platforms. Further considering previous findings on how flow experience predicts decreased psychological well-being among social media users,[40] future research should observe how each motive type is associated with specific dimension of flow (i.e., telepresence, time distortion, etc.) given the unique characteristics of short-form video use.

Finally, concerns about short-form video consumption have predominantly focused on the nature of incessant swiping and substantial durations that evoke addiction, which leads to cognitive damage. Future studies should examine how short-form video platforms impact individuals' cognitive abilities, such as attention span and self-regulation, to promote the healthy usage of short-form platforms. TikTok holds the key for predicting future social media landscapes. Garnering empirical evidence on the effects of short-form videos on consumer cognitive and psychological well-being will provide valuable insights for users and platforms to enhance the positive aspects of social media.

Authors' Contributions

Y.J.: Conceptualization, formal analysis, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. T.K.: Conceptualization, formal analysis, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. S.L.: Visualization, investigation and writing—review and editing. S.M.: Formal analysis and investigation. Y.S.: Conceptualization, methodology, supervision, and project administration.

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