**The Impact of Tik Tok on Mental Health**

Thilini Weerakkody

EDUC 408

**Abstract**

This correlational study surrounds the impact of Tik Tok use on adolescent anxiety. The study hypothesizes that Tik Tok has a negative effect on adolescents' mental health. The data is survey research based, consisting of 16 items concerning mood, time spent on TikTok, and etc. Due to the sampling method and small sample size, as well as confounding factors of measurement errors, the study fails to reject the null hypothesis and identify a clear correlation; however, the study parallels the findings of current research on online behaviors and adolescent mental health, offering insights into the impact of Tik Tok in adolescents’ anxiety.

*Keywords: TikTok, anxiety, young adults, social media*

**The Impact of Tik Tok on Mental Health**

**Introduction**

Current research reveals that young adults' participation in social media such as Tik Tok has increased in recent years (Primrack, 2017). Platforms like Tik Tok are utilized for communication, entertainment, and education. The heightened use of these social media modes reveal both positive and negative impacts. Youth are able to engage with peers with increased frequency, immediacy, and intensity which proves vital amidst the isolation of COVID-19. Moreover, these platforms may be utilized for amusement, pleasure, and information in a period of time with increased depression, anxiety, and confusion (Nesi, 2020). Despite the array of benefits, research suggests that social media outlets like Tik Tok may pose a risk to youth and adolescents.

Due to the relative newness of Tik Tok, there is little to no research specifically surrounding the platform; however, research studies that have included Tik Tok as one of the social media platforms that participants engage with displays a connection between Tik Tok and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Primrack, 2017). Findings suggest that increased levels of mental health concerns are attributed to a variety of things, including, but not limited to cybervictimization, social exclusion, online conflict, depictions of risky behaviors, social comparison, displacement and addiction/overuse. Youth and adolescents exposed to cybervictimization, or online bullying, exhibit heightened rates of self harm, suicidal ideation, and internalizing/externalizing issues. Furthermore, increased online engagement is coupled with alleviated peer influence. Consequently, situations of social exclusion, depicts of violence, alcohol, and suicide, and other forms of social comparison present increased importance to these youth and adolescents (Nesi, 2020). According to a 2020 study on the impact of social media on youth mental health, 400 youth hospitalized due to harm to self or others were asked about the impact of social media on their actions. 14.8% of youth reported engaging with online content promoting suicide and 16.6% identified veiwing content surrounding self harm two weeks prior to their admission (Nesi, 2020). Studies suggest that this negative exposure coupled with displacement and excessive screen time present the major concern. Findings state that long periods of time on platforms like Tik Tok promote laziness and sedentary lifestyles (Matthew, 2020). Adolescents engage in social media instead of productive activities associated with wellness including eating, sleeping, hobbies, in person social interactions, exercise and ect.-- this phenomenon is referred to as displacement (Matthew, 2020).

This paper aims to explore how the social media platform Tik Tok may increase anxiety for adolescents. Despite the lack of literature surrounding the impact of Tik Tok on adolescent mental health, findings suggest that social media platforms may cause increased expressions of anxiety, depression and other mental health symptoms. Consequently, it is hypothesized that Tik Tok, like other media outlets, contributes to increased levels of mental health symptoms like anxiety.

**Method**

**Participants**

The data captures the lived experiences of late-adolescents in the course Education 408 at UNC Chapel Hill. This sample is intended to represent the population of adolescents in America engaging with Tik Tok. A total of 59 participants were surveyed in this study; however, only 14 subjects used Tik Tok. All findings surround the responses of these 14 participants. All subjects were adults between the ages of 18-22, predominantly composed of female presenting, white students. The sample was pooled from an Human Development and Family Studies course. Consequently, there is a high likelihood that the majority of the students are Human Development and Family Studies Majors or Education minors.

**Design**

This correlation study utilized data based on survey research. The research aimed to understand the impact of Tik Tok use on adolescent anxiety. Researchers hypothesized that Tik Tok had a negative impact on adolescents, increasing rates of anxiety with heightened use. The survey consisted of 16 items, or questions, concerning TikTok and mental health. The topics offered in the items ranged from mood, time spent on TikTok, etc. Each question was given with four answer choices and presented in the same order. This approach both increases the feasibility of replication as well as eradicts possible response and question order bias. Additionally, there were no double-barreled questions--participants were only asked about one thing during each item. All identities were protected contributing to low levels of response bias. The elimination of these biases ensured that this study presented high levels of internal validity.

**Procedures**

The intention of the survey was to understand the effects of Tik Tok on adolescents’ anxiety. Symptoms of anxiety included stress, irritation, worry, shortness of breath, lack of motivation, and ect. A sample of college students were chosen to capture this population because of increased Tik Tok engagement on campus. Subjects were given a link and asked to participate during a Education 408 class. Each survey was composed of 16 items. Sensitive questions were asked in a sensitive manner with a focus on diversity and inclusion. Prior to the survey, participants were informed that their answers were anonymous and their identities were protected in the report. Additionally, subjects were allowed to give informed consent and not participate in the study if they wished. The survey takes about 5 minutes to complete; however, participants had no time limit. The first item asked was “Do you use Tik Tok?” Depending on the participant's answer, the participant continued or the survey ended. Individuals who had used Tik Tok continued the survey and their data was utilized in the research. After data was collected, the findings were published for class use.

**Measures**

***[Independent Variable]****.*

The independent variable intends to represent people who use Tik Tok. This definition serves as the operational definition measured on a scale of the numbers of numbers a participant spends on Tik Tok. The operational definition appropriately reflects the underlying construct of Tik Tok use, presenting high levels of construct validity in the data. Furthermore, in the study, the independent variable is discrete and constant. Participants are only included in the study if they use Tik Tok.

***[Dependent Variable]****.* The dependent variable is a construct with discrete responses. The dependent variable represents the participants levels of anxiety or outcomes of anxiety. The variable is difficult to measure and observe due the subjective nature of anxiety. Specifically, this variable surrounds the impact of TikTok on individuals mental health.

**Results**

The data from our study remains inconclusive, suggesting a need to reframe the research methods and analysis. The data presented as mean and standard deviation for the independent variable and dependent variable reveal that data was processed incorrectly. The mean for the dependent variable holds on average of 1.55 and a standard deviation of 0.24; however, the independent variable consistently offered the same number: 3. Consequently, the average is 3 and the standard deviation is 0. Variable one was a constant number. Due to the presence of a constant, it is not possible to calculate a correlation which suggests that data analysis applied to this research is incongruent to the format of the findings. Figure one displays the relationship discussed above, revealing the constant nature of variable 1.

Furthermore, the calculated r value is 0.0616; however, the critical value given the degrees of freedom is about 0.532. R is less than our critical value which displays that the findings are not statistically significant. The data lacks evidence that the correlation is different than zero. The null hypothesis which states that tik has no effect on mental health cannot be rejected. As a result, there is no evidence to corroborate our hypothesis.

**Discussion**

The findings from the study were found to be inconclusive and statistically significant; however, several of the participants reported that Tik Tok negatively affected their ability to stay on task. This effect is notable because it involves the definitions of anxiety used in the study. Symptoms of anxiety included stress, irritation, worry, shortness of breath, lack of motivation, and ect. Additionally, the study presented low levels of bias. Social desirability bias is low because no subject offered personal information such as their name. All responses were anonymous contributing to good, low impression management. Despite the low levels of impression management, self deception positively may still occur because people feel compelled to represent themselves positively; however, this bias is also decreased by the use of anonymity. There is little to no question or response order bias in the findings. All questions were presented in the same order. Moreover, these items were sensitive with awareness to loaded or leading questions.

Though the findings presented low levels of bias, data analysis proved the need to further research and measurement error. The research only captured the experiences of 14 subjects and the sample was extracted from a single classroom. The study must conduct more randomized work in order to reduce sampling bias and fully generalize the results among the population. Additionally, measurement error was pervasive with the results revealing a drastically low r-value compared to the critical value. The data used presented a constant for the independent variable which was incompatible with the data analysis approach used leading to inclusive correlation findings.

**References**

MATHEW, J., TJ., V., & K.J., S. (2020). Maintaining mental health of adolescents and children during COVID -19. *Mukt Shabd Journal,* *IX*(V), 578-583. doi:http://shabdbooks.com/gallery/62-may-2020.pdf

Nesi, J. (2020). The Impact of Social Media on Youth Mental Health. *North Carolina Medical Journal,* *81*(2), 116-121. doi:10.18043/ncm.81.2.116

Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., Escobar-Viera, C. G., Barrett, E. L., Sidani, J. E., Colditz, J. B., & James, A. E. (2017). Use of multiple social media platforms and symptoms of depression and anxiety: A nationally-representative study among U.S. young adults. *Computers in Human Behavior,* *69*, 1-9. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2016.11.013

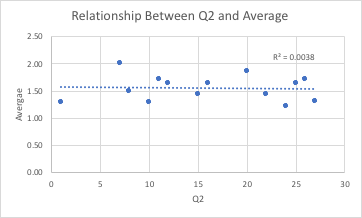
Table 1. Table of Experimental Data on Independent and Dependent Variables

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Participants** | **Independent Variable** | **Dependent Variable** |
| Participant 1 | 1 | 1.4 |
| Participant 2 | 1 | 2.066666667 |
| Participant 3 | 1 | 1.6 |
| Participant 4 | 1 | 1.4 |
| Participant 5 | 1 | 1.8 |
| Participant 6 | 1 | 1.733333333 |
| Participant 7 | 1 | 1.533333333 |
| Participant 8 | 1 | 1.733333333 |
| Participant 9 | 1 | 1.933333333 |
| Participant 10 | 1 | 1.533333333 |
| Participant 11 | 1 | 1.333333333 |
| Participant 12 | 1 | 1.733333333 |
| Participant 13 | 1 | 1.8 |
| Participant 14 | 1 | 1.428571 |

*The graph aboves displays independent and dependent variables for each participant throughout the experimental process.*

**Figure 1**

*The relationship between Q2 and Averages of Variables*



*The figure above displays the correlation between Q2 and averages which displays the correlation between the two variables. The r-value of 0.0038 is depicted in the figure above which offers an analysis of the statistical significance of the data.*