

Tiktok Utilization Among Cebuanos

Dr. Lester Kyle Paes

Cebu Normal University
paeslesterkyle@gmail.com

Mr. Clark Jude Suhot

Cebu Normal University
judesuhot3455@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study uses a qualitative design that is anchored on the theories of Jay Blumler and Denis McQuail's Uses and Gratification Theory, Neil Postman's Media Ecology Theory, and Harold Lasswell's Hypodermic Needle Theory. This study analyzes the tiktok application utilization among Cebuanos. Specifically, it looks into the level of users' consumption, ways the tiktok applications are being utilized, effects of TikTok on the behavior of the users, and proposed course of action. Based on the findings, the level of user consumption on TikTok is only 10-45 minutes per day and is being utilized mainly for entertainment, education, updates and information, and business that causes a behavioral change in the users through a slight neglect to responsibilities but also makes users more interactive with other people. Based on the findings, the proposed course of action are promotion of media and information literacy, censorship, stricter policies, and time limitation. It is suggested that the government with the help of parents shall intervene in risky trends on the platform while journalists and educators may use the platform to debunk misinformation so that users shall be critical thinkers when consuming the contents on the platform, and the users shall be reminded of their responsibilities in household, studies, and at work.

Keywords: *actions, consumption, effects, tiktok, utilization*

Introduction

One of the most popular social media platforms currently is TikTok. It has a massive user base of 1.5 billion active individuals, the majority of whom are children and adolescents. The application is owned by a Chinese company named Bytedance and became one of the most used applications in the world during the surge of the coronavirus disease 2019 or the COVID-19 pandemic (Weimann and Masri, 2020).

The new social media platform's content is short-form mobile films, and the app's core is creative expression, giving users the tools to create exciting, interesting content. Users may soundtrack noises into the film by searching via a library of music possibilities, and they can also interact with other people through duets and answers. They may participate in challenges, perform dances associated with internet memes, or engage in comedic content creation (Herrman, 2019). TikTok is a video production application that utilizes audiovisual controls to generate looping 15-second clips. Its editing features include in-camera speed adjustments, image-

tracking composites, collaborative split-screen functionality, and a condensed video timeline (Kurzrock, 2019). The accessibility of these features enables users to produce engaging and captivating content, contributing to the platform's widespread appeal among content creators globally. TikTok's distinctively entertaining format differentiates it from other social media platforms, attracting a vast and diverse audience worldwide (Mohsin, 2021). The user-generated content (UGC) model empowers individuals to create and share their experiences, reinforcing the significance of influencer and content marketing as key strategies in social media-based promotions.

TikTok entered the social media landscape in September 2016 and rapidly emerged as a dominant platform in the realm of social content sharing. Its appeal grew significantly among teenagers and young adults worldwide, particularly after numerous celebrities quickly established their presence on the app. By June 2021, TikTok had amassed approximately 1 billion users globally, including 150 million users in China who accessed the platform through its localized version, Douyin (Dean, 2021). The app has experienced remarkable growth across various Asian countries, including Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. This rapid expansion has contributed significantly to its global success. Notably, TikTok reached this milestone in just three years, whereas Instagram required nearly six years to achieve a comparable number of active users, and Facebook took four years to reach a similar scale (Iconosquare, 2021).

TikTok users demonstrate a strong engagement with the platform, spending an average of 52 minutes per day on the application. Recent research indicates that children between the ages of four and fifteen dedicate approximately 80 minutes daily to using TikTok.

A China-based App Store data research firm reports that approximately 200 million Americans actively use TikTok. The United States leads the global ranking for TikTok downloads this year, followed closely by Thailand, Vietnam, Germany, Canada, and Indonesia. With a user base exceeding 1 billion across more than 150 countries, TikTok remains a dominant platform worldwide.

The Philippines ranked 11th in terms of TikTok downloads, suggesting that "Filipinos may have already downloaded the app before 2020," according to the survey. Despite this, TikTok continues to be the most downloaded entertainment application in the country, surpassing streaming services such as Netflix and Viu. Furthermore, during the government-imposed lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok served as a platform for positivity and inspiration among Filipinos, as noted by Tiffany Diep, TikTok's Head of Public Relations for the Philippines and Emerging Markets in Southeast Asia.

A review of related literature indicates that existing research on TikTok consumption analysis has primarily focused on studies conducted in China, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Additionally, research on TikTok's perceived popularity has been documented in a study by a student at Bangkok University in Thailand. However, within the Philippine context, there remains a lack of scholarly investigation on this topic. This gap in research serves as the foundation for the present study.

Conducting this study is essential to examining the extent of TikTok usage among users in Cebu, Philippines, and their behavioral responses to the platform. Moreover, the study aims to offer insights into the responsible use of TikTok, contributing to a more informed and mindful engagement with the application.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the TikTok application utilization among Cebuanos, particularly users aged 18 years and above, where people are most likely responsible enough for using the application (Conan, 2009).

In times where self-entertainment during quarantine and/or isolation is needed to prevent the negative mental implications of COVID-19, TikTok becomes a source as well as a platform for expression.

Thus, it is important to conduct this study to provide a clear understanding of the TikTok application and its users.

This study was anchored on the theories of Jay Blumler and Denis McQuail's Uses and Gratification Theory, Neil Postman's Media Ecology Theory, and Harold Lasswell's Hypodermic Needle Theory. It aimed to analyze the TikTok application utilization among Cebuanos. Specifically, it seeks to answer the level of users' consumption, ways the tiktok applications are utilized, Tiktok affects the behavior of the users, and a course of action may be proposed.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative method to gather rich data information and reach the objectives with regard to the topic of the consumption of users' TikTok application. Questionnaire was used in gathering the data for this study. In addition, the method suited the study because it is more on the descriptive information of the topic. The gathered data was analyzed and dissected to determine the level of consumption of TikTok, why these users utilize the application, and the effects of using the application on their behavior. The respondents of the study were the 60 TikTok users in Cebu. Aside from survey results, the data were triangulated using Content Analysis is then used to further support the study. The study also adopted the following findings of the level of internet consumption: Heavy, moderate, and light. A pilot test with 20 respondents was done to strengthen the questionnaire before the administration of the final instrument.

Results and Discussion

Levels of TikTok Consumption

This section shows the level of consumption of TikTok users.

Table 1. *Levels of Users' Consumption per Day*

Average time consumption per day	Frequency (Total N=60)	Percentage	Interpretation
10-45 minutes	36	60	Light consumption
1-3 hours	21	35	Moderate consumption
4-8 hours	3	5	Heavy Consumption

The data presented above demonstrate that 60 percent of the respondents use TikTok for only 10-45 minutes per day while 35 percent consume 1 to 3 hours and only 5 percent consume 4 to 8 hours. The majority of the respondents are light users. This finding stays true to the recent study in the United States where the majority of users or 32.9 percent are also light users however moderate users in the United States differ from the current findings which 35 percent while in the US it only shows 13.5 percent ("Share of Time Spent Among TikTok Users in the United States Engaging With Social Media Apps as of February 2023," 2023).

The majority of the videos they watched were entertainment content such as comedy like stand-up shows of the Dry Comedy Bar, Jo Koy, and Gabriel Iglesias, music such as the songs of famous artists like Ariana Grande, Shawn Mendez, and Dua Lipa, micro vlogs of famous YouTubers like Bella Porch and her cousin Bretman Rock who can be followed through the handles @bellapoarch and @bretmanrock respectively, content creation of TikTok personalities like the dance siblings Ranz Kyle and Niana Guerrero who can be followed through their handles @ranzkyle and @nianaguerrero, the Pambansang Uga Rowel Divina who can be followed at @rowell_divina, the Mima Sassa Gurl @itssassagurl, and the true to life reenactment of common people by Telma who can be followed at @Telma-trunt, and short clips from famous films and their trailers such as Marvel films like Avengers. Some also include educational content such as

tutorials of various topics like cinematography and smartphone photography and factoids – a short form of facts and information - such as spotting fake news by Jacque Manabat who can be followed through her handle @jacquemanabat.

The figures also show that the majority or 65% of users are female and only 28.3 percent are male. 6.6 percent of them are non-binary. Similar to a recent finding in the United States where 61 percent are also female and only 39 percent are male ("Distribution of TikTok audiences in the United States as of June 2023, by gender," 2023.). Most of the users are young adults aging from 20 to 25 years old which accumulated 75 percent while only 8.3 percent are teens aging from 18-19 years old and adults aging from 31 to 40 years old only five percent. Most of the respondents are already members of the working class while some of them are still students and only a few are entrepreneurs. The majority of the respondents are female young adults because they tend to share more about their personal lives due to the nature that women are more vocal, expressive, and willing to share resulting in a longer time spent on the app.

Moreover, the majority of the respondents are only viewers of the content on TikTok and only a few are content creators or startup business owners.

Hypodermic Needle theory suggests that social media users are bombarded with content even without their permission resulting in more time spent on the application. The user interface of TikTok is strategically designed to attract and engage users. TikTok uses a simple swipe interaction where users can use their fingertips to navigate through the app. TikTok also has an infinite news feed where users consume a wide variety of content depending on their likes which TikTok uses for their algorithm.

Most videos found on TikTok encourage the users to be interactive which the Hypodermic Needle theory also explains in which the contents consumed by the users influence their behavior (Bajracharya, 2018).

The results show that most of the respondents are only light users because they are only viewers of the content on TikTok. While a small number of respondents mentioned that they are content creators on TikTok making them spend longer time on the app due to the nature of their business. Some of them are entertainers while some of them are startup business owners taking advantage of the audience on the platform.

Ways of TikTok Utilization

This section shows how TikTok is being utilized by its users.

Table 2. *Reasons for Tiktok Consumption*

Reasons for Usage	Frequency (Total N=60)	Percentage	Rank
Entertainment	36	60	1 st
Education	16	26.7	2 nd
Updates/Information	5	8.3	3 rd
Business	3	5	4 th

Table 2 shows that over 56 percent of the respondents are utilizing TikTok as a means of entertainment, more than 23 percent of the users use it for educational purposes while only 5.5 percent mentioned they use it for updates and 2 percent use it for business.

During the pandemic, Cebuanos were forced to stay at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Because of this, people turned to their devices for entertainment. TikTok began its global rise. TikTok reached 109 million users in the Philippines alone and a total of over 1 billion monthly active users according to Reuters. People turned to TikTok as a diversion from the crises that the pandemic brought.

The pandemic also had a vast impact not only on the physical aspect such as the transition from face-to-face to virtual interaction but also in terms of the psychological aspect. According to a recent study, negative psychological effects heightened during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Villani et al., 2021) which resulted in people demanding more entertainment than they found on TikTok.

Entertainment content that users usually watch on the application includes comedy, music, micro vlogs, content creation, and film. Education garnered over 23 percent. This is due to students shifting from face-to-face to online classes. The Department of Education along with the Commission on Higher Education adapted three modes for distance learning which are synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid distance learning in which students learn with the use of their devices (Commission on Higher Education, 2020). Sometimes students prefer to watch content rather than read the educational materials provided by their teachers which TikTok also offers or for people to satisfy their intellectual needs. Journalists like Jacque Manabat also take advantage of the audience in TikTok to inform, educate, and engage. Ms. Manabat uses the platform to inform her followers to verify information and how to fact-check in the form of short videos or bite-sized information and promote public awareness (ABS-CBN, 2022).

TikTok was utilized as means of social networking such as staying up to date with friends and the latest trends. It is also the leading trendsetter platform where people can follow challenges and crazes. Startup business owners also take advantage of the TikTok Live feature to promote their businesses. More so, users also enjoy exclusive features from TikTok such as interactive filters and effects, video editing, unique forms of reactions, duets, hashtags, and live video streaming.

According to Uses and Gratification Theory, because of people's demand for entertainment, education, updates, and business most especially during the pandemic's trying times, people resort to using TikTok to satisfy and fulfill the aforementioned reasons.

Katz and Blumber mention that the Uses and Gratification Theory also explains why the users behave the way they do because it satisfies their deepest desires. For instance, the pandemic has been hard on people resulting in an increased level of stress and anxiety (Panchal et. al., 2023), as a result, people turn to TikTok for entertainment to lessen the said feeling.

Effects toward Users Analysis Phase

This section analyzes the before and after behavior of users upon the arrival of TikTok in their lives.

Based on the results, there is a slight shift towards people's behavior when using TikTok. Table 3 demonstrates that when talking about their responsibilities, they tend to spend time on the app rather than their real-life responsibilities. However, when it comes to their relationship with their families, friends, and relatives they are more likely to interact with them upon using TikTok.

Before the arrival of TikTok in the respondents' lives, the data shows that 71.7 percent of them attended to their responsibilities while 20 percent mentioned they could sometimes attend to them, and only 8.3 percent rarely attended to their responsibilities. However, after downloading TikTok, there's a slight shift in their behavior towards their responsibilities. The percentage of people who can attend to their

responsibilities decreased from 71.7 percent to 65 percent. This is because they tend to consume a certain amount of time on the app than in real life. Since the majority of the respondents are only viewers of the app, only a small change to their behavior is noticed.

Table 3. *TikTok User's Behavior Analysis*

	Behavior	Before TikTok	During TikTok	Interpretation
Behavior towards responsibilities	Can attend to	71.7%	65%	Slight neglect of responsibilities
	Can sometimes attend to	20%	30%	
	Can rarely attend to	8.3%	5%	
Behavior towards family, friends, relatives	Enjoys having them around	48.3%	51.6%	Becomes more interactive.
	Enjoys with or without them around	35%	30%	
	Enjoys being alone	16.6%	18.3%	

The table also shows that 48.3 percent of the respondents enjoy having other people around, 35 percent mentioned they are okay with or without them, and only 16.6 percent mentioned they prefer to spend more time being alone.

When it comes to the respondents' relationship with their families, friends, and relatives, TikTok serves as a common denominator for their bonding activities causing a positive change from 48.3 percent to 51.6 percent who mentioned they enjoy having other people around. There are challenges and trends on TikTok that they enjoy following from the interactive filters to the dance crazes people make. Users enjoy using TikTok especially when they share their laughter with other people.

According to Media Ecology Theory, upon examination, TikTok's contents are generally entertainment which has paved the way for people to bond even more. Contents on TikTok encourage its users to interact with other people. Not only do people enjoy using TikTok in their households but also public places such as plazas, malls, and other establishments. This style of content shapes the environment of their users from less to more interactive communities. Some local government units and other institutions even post TikTok competitions to engage their citizens.

Media Ecology also analyzes the contexts of the platform being used. In this case, TikTok is analyzed on how it affects the communication process with the users. The platform is strategically designed so users can easily navigate and use the application. This promotes more audience to the app.

TikTok also offers a duet feature that allows their users to post side-by-side videos from one more TikTok content creator which is another popular feature TikTok is known for.

The most viewed content in the app is comedy which accumulated 80 percent. Comedy includes short videos, skits, and stand-up entertainment.

The Course of Action Towards Behavior

This section provides a proposed course of action for the effects of TikTok.

Table 4. *Proposed Course of Action*

Course of Action	Percentage	Rank
Media and Information Literacy	61	1 st
Censorship	23	2 nd
Stricter Policy	13	3 rd
Time limitation	3	4 th

The table above shows that the majority or 61 percent of the respondents propose to implement proper media and information literacy to TikTok users. Meanwhile, 23 percent mentioned that there should be proper censorship of content published in the app while 13 percent recognized the importance of implementing stricter policies and only 3 percent said that the time spent on the app should be limited.

According to the respondents, the education and government sectors, with the help of the church, can help promote media and information literacy so people will be educated on content found on the platform. TikTok moderates and controls the content that is posted on its platform. The government together with the help of TikTok can implement and develop policies to create a safer environment both in the physical and virtual world. Parental guidance is also advised especially for users who belong to a younger age group. Parents and/or guardians can also limit the time spent by the children so they can focus more on real-life activities and most especially, can attend to their responsibilities.

According to a recent survey conducted by Greater Manila Area Entertainment, there are negative implications of using TikTok which include: 1. People treat fame as validation, 2. Compromised privacy, 3. Easily becomes addictive, and 4. It is prone to accidents.

Some assume that popularity is their passport to being accepted by society because of influencers who earn instant recognition for posting strange films. As a result, people make films solely to stand out and get all the attention they think they need, no matter how destructive they are. Since many of these videos are shot in private spaces, such as homes, it's more possible that personal space has been revealed to their followers. Being too open about every nook and cranny of their home can encourage crooks to hatch nefarious schemes, jeopardizing theirs and their family's safety. They are also more vulnerable to fraud and scams as a result.

TikTok challenges can also go to extremes leading to harming oneself. A 2020 viral craze said to originate from Venezuela showed three people jumping next to each other as the other representatives kick the middle person leading to a dangerous fall that would cause head injuries or sometimes instantly lose their consciousness. A 16-year-old girl in Brazil lost her life due to this dangerous challenge. An 18-year-old girl attempted to do the KiKi challenge. The trend entailed jumping out of a moving car and dancing alongside to "In My Feeling" song by Drake while the car continued moving, the teenager is critically injured after climbing out of the moving car and smashed her head on the road and had to spend days in the intensive care unit where she also relearns how to walk (Kitching, 2018). In the Philippines, an innocent 4-year-old girl almost lost her life trying to copy a TikTok video. The mother saw her daughter hanging in her bedroom using a curtain blind cord. She also emphasized, in an interview with Asia One, the importance of parental supervision in monitoring the content their children engage with. Among other dangerous TikTok trends are putting Viagra in drinks, licking toilet seats on public establishments to prove COVID doesn't exist, and blackout challenges where people hold their breath until they pass out.

It's easy to become addicted to watching videos on the app. While this may appear to be amusing at first, it can lead to major problems in the future, particularly for children. They'll be more interested in watching videos than finishing their homework or doing housework.

Countless videos exist in which the producer challenges himself to perform perilous exploits for the pleasure of his or her audience. However, this could be harmful for young users because these challenges can lead to accidents and injuries if viewers are not given enough caution and advice.

Individuals who possess media literacy skills are better equipped to analyze and interpret the messages they encounter. Given the vast array of information sources available today, media literacy enables consumers to distinguish credible sources from misinformation and effectively navigate the media landscape to uncover factual content.

TikTok along with other social media platforms has a team of content moderators in place that ensures the content published on their platforms is not offensive or upsetting. This method also protects the users from possible bullying or trolling by some irrational users.

Social media platforms have their policies that users must adhere to. Some users are no longer aware of these policies due to the behavior of not reading the end user license agreement.

Parental control software offers functionalities such as blocking specific websites, setting time limits, and tracking the online activities of young users. Monitoring a child's account information and openly communicating this supervision can help ensure their safety while navigating digital platforms. Encouraging a healthy conversation on why these children see certain things on the platform so they can better understand the contents.

The aforementioned course of action will help alleviate these effects of TikTok.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that TikTok is mainly used for entertainment causing them to slightly neglect responsibilities but also makes them improve their interactions with other people. As a result, government with help of parents may intervene on risky trends on the platform, Journalists and educators may use the platform to debunk misinformation, and Users are reminded to be critical thinkers when consuming the contents on the platform, Students may use TikTok in making their projects and tasks from their lessons.

References

- ABS-CBN. (2022, April 8). *Over 1,600 students learn from pinoy media congress digital caravan of ABS-CBN and PACE*. <https://corporate.abs-cbn.com/newsroom/news-releases/2022/4/8/thousands-pmc-digital-caravan-abs-cbn-pace>
- Bajracharya, S. (2018, January 7). *Hypodermic needle theory of communication*. Businessstopia. <https://www.businessstopia.net/mass-communication/hypodermic-needle-theory-communication>
- Commission on Higher Education. (2020). *Guidelines on the implementation of flexible learning* (CMO No. 4 s. 2020). <https://chedro3.ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CMO-No.-4-s.-2020-Guidelines-on-the-Implementation-of-Flexible-Learning.pdf>

- Conan, N. (2009, October 7). *When does responsibility begin? 16, 18, 21? Talk of the Nation*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113579236>
- Dean, B. (2021). *TikTok user statistics (2021): How many people use tiktok?* Backlinko. <https://backlinko.com/tiktok-users>
- Herrman, J. (2019, March 10). *How tiktok is rewriting the world*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/10/style/what-is-tik-tok>
- Iconosquare. (2021). *50 important tiktok statistics for 2021*. <https://www.iconosquare.com/blog/50-important-tiktok-statistics-for-2021>
- Kitching, C. (2018, August 1). *Teenage girl critically injured after KiKi challenge stunt goes horribly wrong*. The Mirror. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/us-news/kiki-challenge-drake-fan-critically-13013965>
- Kurzrock, E. (2019). *Intensified play: Cinematic study of tiktok mobile app*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335570557_Intensified_Play_Cinematic_study_of_TikTok_mobile_app
- Mohsin, M. (2021, February 16). *10 tiktok statistics that you need to know in 2021*. Oberlo. <https://www.oberlo.com/blog/tiktok-statistics>
- Panchal, N., Saunders, H., Rudowitz, R., & Cox, C. (2023, April 25). *The implications of COVID-19 for mental health and substance use*. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>
- Statista. (2023). *Distribution of tiktok audiences in the United States as of June 2023, by gender*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1398182/tiktok-us-audience-by-gender>
- Statista. (2023). *Share of time spent among tiktok users in the United States engaging with social media apps as of February 2023*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1377051/us-tiktok-users-time-spent-social-media-apps/>
- Villani, L., Pastorino, R., Molinari, E., Anelli, F., Ricciardi, W., Graffigna, G., & Boccia, S. (2021). *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on psychological well-being of students in an Italian university: A web-based cross-sectional survey*. *Globalization and Health*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-021-00680-w>
- Weimann, G., & Masri, N. (2020, July). *Hate on tiktok. Global network on extremism & technology*. <https://gnet-research.org/2020/07/07/hate-on-tiktok>