

The Level of Awareness of Mental Health and Its Impact on Tiktok Users

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ABSTRACT

In this era of globalization, social media platforms have become a universal space for communication, self-expression, and community building. Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as a global phenomenon, captivating millions with its short-form videos and diverse content. This research examines the impact of TikTok content on the mental health of users who are 18 and older. With over 1 billion users worldwide, including users from Malaysia, it has become a dominant force in public culture, sparking worries among families, lawmakers, and therapists about its impact on mental health. There has been a significant increase in depression among Malaysians since 2019, where another study revealed that about 1 million individuals aged 15 years and older were suffering from depression, with the number of people with depression having doubled from 2019 to 2023. However, considering the wide range of content on the platform about mental health, it is still unclear how much of an awareness TikTok users have of mental health education. To investigate the awareness of mental health among TikTok users, particularly in the Malaysian context among the users aged 18 and above, a research was conducted by employing a quantitative approach using Google Forms. This study successfully collected responses from 401 respondents representing diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, beliefs, and educational levels. The results indicate a significant level of awareness among TikTok users regarding mental health issues, attributed in part to the abundance of mental health-related content on the platform ($m = 3.08$, $m_2 = 3.04$). In conclusion, the study shows that users accept TikTok as a platform to spread awareness and as a significant platform to talk about mental health and provide support to the community globally.

Keywords: TikTok, Mental Health, Awareness, Mental Health Education, Content

INTRODUCTION

Social media includes various technologies that allow users to share ideas and information (D'Souza, 2024). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube have over 5 billion users, accounting for roughly 62% of the world's population. According to DataReportal, as of January 2023, TikTok ranks sixth with 1.05 billion users worldwide. Social media platforms are often categorized into six types: social networking, social bookmarking, social news, media sharing, microblogging, and online forums (Dollarhide, 2024). These diverse platforms serve a wide range of purposes and user interests, appealing to hobbyists, professionals, entertainers, politicians, and charities alike. Governments also use social media to convey vital information during emergencies. TikTok, launched in September 2016, is a popular social media app that enables users to create, watch, and share short videos via mobile devices or webcams. Known for its addictive quality and high engagement, TikTok features personalized feeds of quirky short videos set to music and sound effects. While its short-form video format is ideal for entertainment and comedy, it is increasingly becoming a platform for infotainment. Influencers with a steady audience share advice, tips, and self-promotion. Popular topics for informational videos include beauty, fashion, personal finance, budgeting, and cooking. Additionally, the platform is used for product promotion and sales.

As TikTok gains more popularity among youth, there is growing concern among parents, policymakers, and clinicians about its impact on young people's mental health. For adolescents, finding community and validation on TikTok is both normal and essential for their development. However, Anne Marie Albano, PhD, director of the Columbia University Clinic for Anxiety and Related Disorders, notes that youth with social anxiety or depression may spend more time online and reduce face-to-face interactions, exacerbating feelings of alienation, hopelessness, and anxiety (Albano, 2024). Albano also points out that the "culture of comparison" on social media platforms like TikTok can be challenging for young people, who may compare themselves unfavorably to others, increasing their risk of depression and isolation. Despite concerns, some clinicians believe the effects of TikTok are still not fully understood. Jaclyn Halpern, PsyD, director of the SOAR program at Behavioral Medicine Associates, acknowledges the potential risks of TikTok, including exposure to inappropriate content and online predators, but also recognizes that research has shown both risks and benefits for youth using social media platforms (Halpern, 2024). Research by Piacentini at the UCLA Child OCD, Anxiety and Tic Disorders Clinic suggests that TikTok content may worsen symptoms in some patients (Piacentini, 2024). Cyberbullying, social exclusion, and drama on these networks have been linked to higher rates of mental health issues in adolescents. Halpern's research also indicates that children with complex mental health conditions or environmental stressors may experience temporary increases in emotional symptoms after using TikTok. A key benefit of discussing mental health on TikTok is that users are exposed to various conditions. Peter Wallerich-Neils, known as Peter Hyphen to his 416,000 followers, began posting about his ADHD diagnosis, helping others recognize they are not alone in their struggles. Many young people find the validation they need on TikTok. During the pandemic, Wallerich-Neils used the platform to share his experiences with ADHD, connecting with many who related to his journey. Kojo Sarfo, MD, a mental health nurse practitioner with over 1.9

million followers, credits TikTok with creating supportive spaces for those with mental health conditions, which is particularly important in communities where mental health is rarely discussed or considered taboo (Sarfo, 2024). This research aims to explore the level of awareness about mental health among TikTok users and its impact on their mental well-being. Given the dual nature of TikTok's influence, both beneficial and potentially harmful, it is crucial to understand how the platform affects its users' mental health. This study will examine the extent to which TikTok users are informed about mental health issues and how this awareness influences their experiences and behaviors on the platform.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In recent years, the rise of TikTok has revolutionized the landscape of social media, becoming a global sensation with its unique format of short-form videos. This platform has not only served as a source of entertainment but has also emerged as a significant medium for disseminating information on various topics, including mental health.

However, the rapid increase in depression cases in Malaysia, with the number doubling from 2019 to 2023, raises critical concerns about the potential impact of TikTok on users' mental health (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2023; Lee, 2023).

The alarming trend of mental health issues in Malaysia necessitates an in-depth examination of how TikTok influences mental health awareness among its users. Despite the abundance of mental health-related content on the platform, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the level of awareness it generates and its actual impact on the mental well-being of users. This study specifically focuses on Malaysian TikTok users aged 18 and older to fill this gap in knowledge.

Understanding the relationship between TikTok usage and mental health awareness is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into the influence of social media on public health behaviors and attitudes. Secondly, it helps identify the potential of TikTok as a tool for mental health education and advocacy. Thirdly, the findings can guide content creators and mental health professionals in developing effective strategies to leverage TikTok for enhancing mental health literacy and support.

Preliminary findings indicate a significant level of mental health awareness among TikTok users, largely driven by the platform's abundant mental health-related content. These findings suggest that TikTok serves not only as an entertainment medium but also as a crucial resource for mental health education and support.

The implications of this research are profound. TikTok's potential as a powerful tool for mental health advocacy is evident. By fostering a supportive community and disseminating accurate information, TikTok can contribute to early intervention and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues. The study's outcomes can guide the development of responsible mental health content and inform effective mental health campaigns, ultimately leading to a more informed and mentally healthy community.

In conclusion, this research underscores the significant role of TikTok in enhancing mental health awareness among its users. It emphasizes the need for continued efforts to improve the platform's capacity for mental health education and advocacy. Addressing

misinformation and fostering professional collaborations are crucial steps toward leveraging TikTok for positive mental health outcomes. Understanding and utilizing the potential of social media platforms like TikTok can play a pivotal role in shaping a more mentally healthy society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey distributed via Google Forms to collect data from 401 Malaysian respondents aged 18 and above. The forms were distributed across the internet through many social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram. The survey measures users' awareness of mental health issues, their engagement with mental health content on TikTok, and the perceived impact on their mental well-being.

Sample

This study employed a method known as purposive sampling to select participants. The respondents were required to be at least 18 years old to ensure that they had the necessary maturity and experience with social media, specifically TikTok. Additionally, all participants needed to have an official TikTok account to guarantee the legitimacy and accuracy of the survey responses. The respondents were gathered from various regions across Malaysia, with only Malaysian citizens allowed to participate in accordance with the research objective of understanding the impact of TikTok on Malaysian users. The selection criteria were designed to provide a comprehensive and representative sample of the Malaysian TikTok user base. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) guidelines, a population the size of Malaysia's would require a minimum of 384 respondents for the results to be considered reliable. This study exceeded that minimum, successfully obtaining 401 respondents. This sample size surpasses the required threshold, ensuring a 95% confidence level in the accuracy and reliability of the findings. By adhering to these stringent sampling criteria and exceeding the necessary respondent count, this research paper aims to provide a robust and credible analysis of the awareness and impact of mental health issues among TikTok users in Malaysia. The use of purposive sampling and the careful selection of a representative sample are critical to achieving the study's objectives and ensuring the validity of the results (Ridzuan, Ridzuan and Ridzuan, 2018).

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The demographic section has 10 items that are related to the study objectives in terms of research which acknowledge the background and ethnicity of the respondent specifically by providing options as their to multiple-choice answer (MCQ) questions. For awareness and effectiveness, we also provide 10 questionnaires. For this section, we are using a rating scale from one to four to measure to what extent they thought about the mental health issue. For example, the rating scale will start from (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree. The questionnaires(Google Forms) that are given to the publics were easy to interpret due to the direct questions, and answers were provided because we want to prevent hardship and confusion.

Data Analysis

This research utilized a quantitative approach to assess mental health awareness and its effects on TikTok users. Using Raosoft Calculator Software for sampling, a population of 30 million in Malaysia, or 12 million social networking site (SNS) users corresponds to a sample size of 377 respondents with a 95% confidence level (The Research Advisors, 2006). The study included 401 participants, chosen through a multistage sampling method involving cluster and purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted using a cross-sectional survey and a structured questionnaire. The collected data were entered and analyzed using SPSS (Abdul Rauf Ridzuan et al., 2015).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Section A: Demographic Profile

Table 1.0 Demographic Profile

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	125	31.2%
Female	276	68.8%
Age		
18-27 years old	372	92.8%
28-37 years old	17	4.2%
38-47 years old	5	1.2%
48-57 years old	5	1.2%
58 years old & above	0	0%
Ethnicity		
Malay	365	91%
Chinese	17	4.2%
Indian	11	2.7%
Others	8	2.1%
Region		
Northern Region (Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Perak)	81	20.2%
East Coast (Pahang, Terengganu, Kelantan)	30	7.5%
Central Region (Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Selangor)	141	35.3%
Southern Region (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor)	134	33.4%
Sabah and Sarawak	15	3.7%
Household Income		
B40	236	58.9%
M40	124	30.9%
T20	41	10.2%

Level of Education		
SPM	50	12.5%
STPM	5	1.2%
Diploma	230	57.4%
Bachelor's degree	108	26.9%
Master's degree	8	2%
How long do you use TikTok in a day?		
Less than 30 minutes per day	46	11.5%
1 to 2 hours per day	114	28.4%
3 to 4 hours per day	129	32.2%
More than 5 hours	112	27.9%
Do you think TikTok may have influences your emotions/feelings positively?		
Yes	304	75.8%
No	15	3.7%
Maybe	82	20.4%
Do you think TikTok may have influences your emotions/feelings negatively?		
Yes	187	46.6%
No	78	19.5%
Maybe	136	33.9%
Do you feel TikTok has benefited you?		
Yes	314	78.3%
No	9	2.2%
Maybe	78	19.5%

The demographic profile reveals that the majority of respondents are female (68.8%) and young, with 92.8% aged between 18-27 years old. Ethnically, the sample is predominantly Malay (91%), with smaller representations from Chinese (4.2%), Indian (2.7%), and other ethnicities (2.1%). Regionally, most participants are from the Central (35.3%) and Southern (33.4%) regions, followed by the Northern region (20.2%), the East Coast (7.5%) and Sabah and Sarawak (3.7%). In terms of household income, the largest group falls within the B40 category (58.9%), indicating a lower-income bracket, while 30.9% belong to the M40 group, and 10.2% are in the T20 group.

The demographic profile indicates that the highest level of education among respondents varies, with 57.4% holding a diploma, 26.9% possessing a bachelor's degree, 12.5% having completed SPM, 2% holding a master's degree and 1.2% having completed STPM. Regarding TikTok usage, 32.2% of respondents use the app for 3 to 4 hours per day, 28.4% for 1 to 2 hours, 27.9% for more than 5 hours and 11.5% for less than 30 minutes daily. A significant majority (75.8%) believe TikTok positively influences their emotions or feelings, while 20.4% are unsure, and 3.7% disagree. On the other hand, 46.6% think TikTok negatively affects their emotions, 33.9% are unsure, and 19.5% do not believe it has a negative impact.

Additionally, 78.3% of respondents feel that TikTok has benefited them, 19.5% are unsure, and 2.2% do not feel it has benefited them.

Section B: Acceptance of TikTok as a Platform for Spreading Information Regarding Mental Health

Table 2.0 Acceptance of TikTok as a platform for spreading information regarding mental health

ITEMS	MEAN
I often engage with mental health content on TikTok	2.86
I have encountered mental health-related videos on TikTok that positively impacted my understanding	3.02
I feel comfortable discussing mental health topics on TikTok	2.88
I would like to see more educational content about mental health on TikTok	3.24
I think TikTok has a responsibility to provide mental health education to its users	3.22
I feel TikTok has influenced me to be more aware of my own mental health	3.19
I am confident in TikTok's ability to handle sensitive or triggering mental health content	2.99
I believe TikTok accommodates different demographics or cultural considerations in mental health content effectively	3.08
I am satisfied with the privacy and confidentiality measures for individuals engaging with mental health content TikTok	3.05
I am concerned about the potential spread of misinformation or harmful content related to mental health on TikTok	3.23
OVERALL	3.08

In Section B of the questionnaire, we presented eight key aspects (ITEMS) within Table 2.0 to delve into the acceptance of TikTok as a platform for spreading information regarding mental health. The main reason to assess the respondent was their acceptance towards the spreading regarding mental health in TikTok. As already stated in Table 2.0, the findings show that many people that answer the questionnaires accept the fact that TikTok platform as a place to spread regarding mental health issues. Overall, considerable portion (M=3.08) TikTok users believe that TikTok accommodates different demographics or cultural considerations in mental health content effectively. In summary, these results together emphasize the view that TikTok is seen as a suitable space for talking about mental health. People see its ability to have a good effect and also point out where the platform should be careful, especially about false information and the way it deals with delicate topics. This study underlines the need for ongoing work to improve the quality and security of mental health posts on TikTok to fulfil the desires and requirements of its varied audience.

Section C: Effectiveness of TikTok as a Platform to Open Up a Significant Space for Discussing Mental Health and Provide Support to Communities Globally

Table 3.0 The Level of Effectiveness of TikTok as a Platform to Open Up a Significant Space for Discussing Mental Health and Provide Support to Communities Globally

The Level of Effectiveness of TikTok as a Platform to Open Up a Significant Space for Discussing Mental Health and Provide Support to Communities Globally	Mean
I have noticed an increase in discussions around mental health topics on TikTok.	3.02
I followed TikTok creators specifically for their content related to mental health.	2.79
I believe TikTok has a role in reducing the stigma surrounding mental health.	3.11
I have reached out to a mental health professional or support service based on content I saw on TikTok.	2.73
I think TikTok's portrayal of mental issues accurately reflects real-life experiences.	3.05
I think TikTok could improve its support for users struggling with mental health issues.	3.20
I believe TikTok effectively fosters a supportive or inclusive community around mental health discussions.	3.12
I believe TikTok takes appropriate measures to ensure the safety or well-being of individuals engaging with mental health content.	3.11
I am satisfied with the variety of mental health content available on TikTok.	3.12
I am aware of TikTok's efforts to collaborate with mental health professionals or organizations.	3.16
OVERALL	3.04

From the table above the highest mean is ($M=3.16$) which refers to the answer which is TikTok users are aware of TikTok's efforts to collaborate with mental health professionals or organizations. TikTok users know that the platform is working with mental health professionals and organizations. This shows TikTok's commitment to creating a safe and supportive online space. By teaming up with mental health experts, TikTok offers users helpful resources and support. This effort improves user trust and engagement, highlighting the importance of mental health in today's digital world. The overall mean is ($M=3.04$) which shows that the level of effectiveness is very high. TikTok is generally seen as moderately effective in opening up significant space for discussing mental health and providing support to communities globally. Users recognize its role in reducing stigma, fostering supportive communities, and collaborating with mental health professionals, but there is room for improvement in supporting users struggling with mental health issues.

CONCLUSION

This research underscores TikTok's pivotal role in raising awareness about mental health among its user base. The study reveals a robust acceptance of TikTok as a platform for disseminating mental health information, with users expressing a strong preference for more educational content on the topic ($M=3.24$). This positive reception underscores TikTok's potential to serve as a catalyst for spreading awareness and understanding of mental health issues among its diverse user demographics. Central to the findings is the recognition among users of TikTok's efforts to collaborate with mental health professionals, which has significantly enhanced user trust and engagement ($M=3.16$). This collaboration reflects TikTok's proactive approach in ensuring the credibility and reliability of mental health information shared on its platform. However, the study also highlights concerns among users regarding the potential spread of misinformation and the handling of sensitive content related to mental health on TikTok ($M=3.23$).

These concerns underscore the need for TikTok to strengthen its content moderation policies and ensure accurate information dissemination to mitigate any harmful effects. Additionally, users emphasize TikTok's responsibility in safeguarding user privacy and maintaining cultural sensitivity in its mental health content ($M=3.05$ and $M=3.08$, respectively). These factors are crucial in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where users feel safe to engage with mental health topics openly. Demographic insights into the user base reveal a predominantly young, female, and Malay demographic, with varied educational backgrounds and income levels. Most users engage with TikTok daily, believing it positively impacts their mental health, though concerns about its potential negative effects also exist. In conclusion, while TikTok is recognized as an effective platform for promoting mental health awareness, continuous efforts to address concerns about misinformation, enhance content sensitivity, and ensure user privacy are essential. By doing so, TikTok can further strengthen its role in supporting mental well-being and providing valuable educational resources to its global community of users.

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