Unveiling the Tapestry: Exploring TikTok Usage among Generation Z in Pakistan

Dr Maimoona Saleem[1] Dr. Sonia Sethi[2] Dr Rabia Naseer[3] Dr Adeeba Khan[4] Dr Syed Noman Mustafa[5]

Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, Islamia College Peshawar, Pakistan
Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, Islamia College Peshawar, Pakistan (Corresponding Author)
Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, Islamia College Peshawar, Pakistan
Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, University of Poonch, Rawalakot, Pakistan
Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, Islamia College Peshawar, Pakistan

Abstract*: This study digs into the complex web of TikTok use among Pakistan's Generation Z, looking at the underlying trends, driving forces, and outcomes. The research uses a qualitative methodology and asks 84 participants, all members of the Gen Z cohort, to respond to real-life scenarios presented as vignettes. Each participant read the vignette provided and then responded to a series of open-ended questions. Vignettes were used as a special lens to examine the complex world of TikTok participation. The research attempted to record genuine responses that resembled real-life behavior by placing participants in relevant circumstances. This approach helped illuminate the underlying dynamics that underlie participant engagement by facilitating a comprehensive understanding of their motives and interactions with the platform. Reflexive thematic analysis was performed on the obtained data to reveal the rich tapestry of participant insights. Five themes thus emerged, each of which provided insight into the intricate interactions between Generation Z, TikTok, and Pakistani socio-cultural dynamics. 1) Gratifications Sought by Pakistani Gen Z TikTok Users 2) TikTok is Warping our Perception of Ourselves 3) The Influence of TikTok Content on Morality and Ethics 4) TikTokers' Authenticity and Trustworthiness 5) The Ineffectiveness of Imposing Restrictions and Banning TikTok. The study's findings shed light on the factors that motivate Gen Z users of TikTok, from self-expression and amusement to social connection and cultural representation. The effects of TikTok's involvement are also investigated, revealing benefits like encouraging innovation and cultural preservation and drawbacks like privacy problems and the possibility of spreading false information. This research adds to the body of knowledge on social media engagement and young culture by exploring the nuances of TikTok use among Pakistan's Generation Z. Utilizing vignettes as a research tool gives a novel methodological angle that enables genuine and contextually based findings. These results provide insightful information for academics, decision-makers, and platforms looking to comprehend better and serve Pakistan's dynamic Generation Z cohort as the digital environment changes.*
Keywords: Pakistan's Generation Z, social media, TikTok, Vignettes

Introduction

Since their introduction approximately 20 years ago, social media services (SMS) have rapidly become ubiquitous across the globe. A survey found that about 4 billion people use at least one social media interface regularly. This represents roughly half the world's total population (48%) (Hootsuite, 2020). When blogging first appeared in the late 1990s, social media did not take long to catch on, and interest exploded when Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other early platforms appeared on the scene. Social media services provide a straightforward platform for users to communicate with one another. Everyone can utilize these technologies in their day-to-day lives if we make it possible for them to be accessed easily. According to what Li and Bernoff (2008) would explain in their book Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies, it is "power to the people."

In January of 2022, the entire population of Pakistan was 227.3 million people. Females make up 48.5% of Pakistan's total population, while males make up 51% of the country's total population (Morese et al., 2022). Most Pakistanis are still in their youth, as 51.7% of the country's population is under 25 (Index Mundi, 2019). The proliferation of diverse concepts and ideas has been made possible by the advent of digital communication, which eliminates the need for those in authoritative positions to exercise gatekeeping control over the messages and where they are sent. People of many ages, races, sexual orientations, and religious affiliations can now participate in communication without the constraints previously imposed by mass communication (Jamal, 2020).

Generation Z and I-generation, net-generation, and digital natives represent people born between the mid-1990s and the late 2010s. Generation Z encompasses the present generation of Pakistani youth. According to Prensky (2001), current youth are "digital natives" since they never knew life before the Internet. No previous generation has seen such easy access to technology at such a young age (Prensky, 2001). For Generation Z kids, multimedia innovations like tablets, smartphones, social networking, and flat-screen televisions have become accustomed to engaging and communicating in an ever-connected world.

There are currently more young people in Pakistan than ever, and this trend is anticipated to continue until at least the year 2050 (Ahmad, 2018). Generation Z in Pakistan was born into a world dominated by technology and the Internet, much like their contemporaries. People in this age are more capable of digesting information than any previous generation. Pakistani Generation Z consumers are active social media users, engaging with local and worldwide users and companies and exchanging information, photographs, videos, ideas, and views with individuals inside and outside Pakistan (Jamal, 2020).

The members of Generation Z already prefer to maintain their connections digitally, particularly through social media. Members are comfortable sharing their thoughts on various products and services and weighing the views of others (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Generation Z is already more invested in online communities than face-to-face gatherings and is a critical consumer of online content (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2017). What sets Generation Z apart from Millennials is how they interact with the Internet: rather than just seeking information, they are eager to impart their knowledge and experiences, especially the highlights (or at least the curated versions) of their lives (Pásztor & Bak, 2020). According to Lazányi & Bilan

(2017) people are more likely to put their faith in their peers than their elders. Thanks to technological advancements, they are the first generation to be global and maintain constant, cross-border communication via social media (Kapil & Rox, 2014). Nearly 40% of this generation suffers from FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) daily (making them hesitant to go without their phone for lengthy periods), and 5.5% are especially worried about not being able to check their mobile phone at any time (Pásztor & Bak, 2022).

There is a need for indigenous research that investigates the influence of TikTok influencers on the Generation Z population in Pakistan. This research would also examine TikTok's usage patterns, motivations, and impacts among this specific age group. Therefore, this research will significantly contribute to addressing this particular research gap.

Central Research Question

"What are the patterns, motivations, and impacts of TikTok usage among Generation Z in Pakistan?"

Literature Review

The Tiktok Community

TikTok has emerged as a highly popular and rapidly expanding social media platform since its inception in 2018, prompting numerous academic investigations into its usage and impact (Zeng et al., 2020). According to recent reports, TikTok has garnered over 3 billion downloads and boasts a monthly active user base of over 1 billion, making it the fourth most downloaded social media application (Bursztynsky, 2021; Iqbal, 2022; Jaffar et al., 2019). The application has garnered significant appeal among the younger demographic, with 41% of TikTok's user base comprising individuals aged between 16 to 24 years old (Weimann & Masri, 2020). As per the findings of Weimann and Masri (2020), a significant proportion of users within this age bracket, specifically 90%, engage with the platform daily. Additionally, according to Iqbal's (2022) research, individuals aged 16 to 24 who use TikTok dedicate an average of 52 minutes daily to the application. The aforementioned demographic cohort is commonly referred to as Generation Z. Individuals belonging to the Generation Z cohort are demarcated by their birth years, which fall between 1996 and 2009. According to Sladek and Grabinger (2014), the current generation exhibits a heightened interest in applications and technological advancements, owing to their unique upbringing with smartphones. It is noteworthy that TikTok garnered heightened public and scientific scrutiny amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, as Hellemans et al. (2021) reported. The platform's features, characteristics, and content have been expounded upon in numerous scientific papers.

The application's primary functionality is centered around its users' ability to view, generate, and distribute short video content. The videos, which typically last for approximately 15 seconds, are featured on the 'For You Page,' an area where users allocate most of their time (Scherr & Wang, 2021). Furthermore, the application incorporates social media features such as likes, followers, and comments, as noted by Ma and Hu (2021). The platform facilitates establishing connections among users by exchanging thoughts and ratings. As per Scherr and Wang's (2021) findings, TikTok's users can engage with content primarily generated and uploaded by other users.

Anderson (2020) claims that what is posted on TikTok may be characterized as

"creative chaos," meaning that the site allows users to submit content from various genres with little to no apparent structure or constraints. The company claims that its program, which includes algorithmic suggestions, popular hashtags, and challenges, is meant to induce sentiments of pleasure and inspire creativity in its users (Aloui, 2021). According to Bresnick's (2019) research, TikTok allows younger generations to communicate and share their creativity without being limited by the norms of older generations' online communities, narratives, or styles. Clips are brief videos that users may make using creative and inventive tools like filters, music samples, and rapid cuts (Weimann & Masri, 2020). Jia et al. (2023) researched the elements that affect continuous intention in TikTok. The researchers focused on how social influences play a role in this phenomenon. Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to examine the data. The study acknowledged the need to examine the factors affecting users' continued desire to use the TikTok platform. Understanding the contextual origins of two types of social influence was a primary emphasis of this research, and it was this understanding that led to the discovery of the influence mechanism that affects TikTok viewers' long-term intentions. The research looked at several factors affecting consumers' long-term propensity for TikTok. The physical attractiveness of TikTok content producers, audience participation, platform reputation, and content popularity were among the factors examined. This empirical research analyzed how different aspects of informational and normative social influence affect users' long-term commitment to the video-sharing platform TikTok.

Several scholarly works and analyses have underscored TikTok's prospective consequences and prospects concerning mental health. For example, several studies have recommended that the public health sector consider TikTok's health-related consequences and guide decision-makers, healthcare providers, researchers, and the general public ((Agater, 2022; Zenone, Ow & Barbic, 2021; Roth et al., 2021).

Yang, Zhang, and Zhang (2021) analyzed the frequency of mental health-related content on TikTok produced by untrained individuals and non-certified "mental health advocates." The study also evaluated the precision and consistency of this content with clinical data. It is important to acknowledge that the sources above do not focus on the impact of TikTok "blow-ups" on individuals' mental well-being.

Furthermore, scholarly investigations examine TikTok's overall influence on the mental well-being of adolescents and young adults. The studies above investigate diverse facets of TikTok, including its utilization, impact on academic performance and social interactions, and sway on adolescents and emerging adults (Dilon, 2020; Agater, 2022).

A study by Halim et al. (2022) investigated the determinants that impact the inclination of Generation Z to utilize the TikTok platform. The research examined the influence of perceived ease of use, enjoyment, and facilitating conditions on the intention to use TikTok. The study's objective was to understand better the factors that motivate Generation Z to adopt and utilize the TikTok platform.

TikTok content and the phenomenon of 'going Viral'
TikTok provides a platform for its users to acquire a substantial following and achieve widespread recognition quickly and rapidly. This phenomenon can be characterized as

achieving viral status. As noted by Nahon and Hemsley (2013), one of the defining features of this phenomenon is the rapid dissemination of information to a large audience. Content going viral is a possibility across multiple social media platforms. However, TikTok's algorithms exhibit a distinctive characteristic of prioritizing content display to non-followers, thereby increasing the likelihood of virality (Hellemans et al., 2021; LeCompte & Klug, 2021). The phenomenon of individuals or themes featured in viral content has been coined as "going viral" and described by Zeng et al. (2020, p. 1). According to Weimann and Masri (2020), the engagement rate, number of user shares, and utilization of specific hashtags or trends are potential indicators of a TikTok video's virality. Numerous scholarly investigations have highlighted the significance of TikTok's potential to disseminate messages to diverse audiences that may have yet to be reached through traditional means (Weimann & Masri, 2020; LeCompte & Klug, 2021). The study conducted by LeCompte and Klug (2021) examined the behaviors and incentives of social advocates utilizing TikTok. According to LeCompte and Klug (2021), certain activists have emphasized the significance of the distinctive phenomenon of achieving virality on TikTok as a means of expanding their outreach to a wider audience, thereby enabling them to disseminate their message beyond their immediate social network.

Theoretical framework

For many people, social media has replaced in-person contacts as a primary means of satisfying their need for social fulfillment. People of all ages are more comfortable spending hours in front of a screens rather than interacting with their peers in person. The whole experience of using social media is rewarding. Content pleasure, process gratification, and social gratification are the three main types here. The media's own informational and educational material satisfies in this way. Another source of pleasure is the act of perusing one's social media feeds. The media's capacity to facilitate communication through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok is a source of social satisfaction (Malloli, 2020).

Katz et al. (1973) posited that the gratifications theory is a framework that seeks to elucidate the reasons behind individuals' media consumption and the underlying motivations that drive such behavior. In brief, the theory delineates the elements of media that exert a satisfying influence on the consumer's psyche. In particular, social media has demonstrated novel forms of gratification and incentives for utilization, in contrast to conventional media. The fulfillment of the need for approval and recognition can be achieved through social media, as posited by Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020).

Hellemans et al. (2021) have researched the various gratifications that TikTok offers, including its potential to alleviate boredom, provide diversion, and serve as entertainment. Some studies have investigated the underlying reasons for the pervasive inclination to generate, post, and disseminate content among TikTok users. Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020) conducted a study on the gratifications derived by users of TikTok.

A study by Shao (2009) explored the impact of gratifications on social media users by examining three discrete behavioral groups of media users. The initial classification pertains to passive consumption, which encompasses individuals who read, watch, and view digital content. This user category is likely to derive satisfaction from leisure, amusement, and

entertainment, as these are potential sources of gratification. The second category of users is the participatory user. In this particular classification, individuals distribute, evaluate, endorse, and provide feedback on various forms of information. Therefore, social interaction, relationship establishment, and upkeep are potential forms of gratification. Finally, Shao (2009) introduced the contributory user as the third user behavior classification. This user group encompasses content creation, posting, and publication on behalf of other users. Hence, the gratifications individuals seek in this particular category may encompass the desire for fame, identity creation, social recognition, and self-expression.

According to Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020), TikTok enables users to foster their creativity, self-expression, and identity exploration. This is achieved through the act of publishing content on the platform. The factors above may be explicated through theoretical frameworks that posit two distinct incentives for publishing content on TikTok. Intrinsic motivation refers to the drive to engage in an activity for its inherent value instead of external rewards or pressures (Reiss, 2012, p. 152). This form of motivation is employed by users when they publish content on TikTok to construct and explore their identities. Extrinsic motivation is an alternative form of motivation. This approach is employed in cases where specific actions are incentivized (Reiss, 2012). Various incentives exist for engaging in actions such as posting, generating content, or leaving comments on social media platforms. According to Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020), TikTok users can receive recognition by receiving likes, views, and comments on their posted videos.

Yao's (2021) research centers on TikTok's creators and reveals that the platform's algorithms are designed to facilitate specific gratifications, such as the pursuit of fame and acknowledgment. The study notes that TikTok's algorithmic structure enables all users to potentially attain fame (Yao, 2021, p. 297). According to previous studies conducted by Omar and Dequan (2020) and Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020), an additional incentive for generating and participating in TikTok content is the desire for attention. Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020) noted that young adults strongly desire attention and social recognition. In contemporary times, the significance of achieving fame has escalated, particularly because the younger generation is constantly exposed to celebrity culture (Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020, p. 468). According to a study by Uhls and Greenfield (2012), there was a 40% rise in the inclination toward the significance of fame and the desire to attain it among adolescents. Attaining TikTok fame may be a launching pad for aspiring influencers, a coveted objective among many youthful TikTok enthusiasts (Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Omar & Dequan, 2020).

Conversely, the younger generation is engrossed in identity formation and conducts diverse identity trials on TikTok (Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020, p. 468). According to Statis et al. (2010), a frequently cited incentive for social media publishing is establishing identity and self-expression. Adolescents tend to exhibit greater self-expression in the online realm than their behavior in the physical world, owing to the distinctive attributes of the former such as anonymity, impersonality, and transience. This is attributed to the reduced likelihood of facing judgment, humiliation, or face-to-face interactions online, as per the findings of Odacı and Çelik (2016). Moreover, Omar and Dequan's (2020) research demonstrates that archiving serves as a driving force for TikTok publication. As Omar and

Dequan (2020) asserted, individuals can recollect significant events in their lives and retrospectively revisit their memories within their private domain.

Context of the Study

Social media's meteoric ascent has profoundly affected how people interact with and use news and other media types. Because of its original short-form video content, the video-sharing website TikTok has attracted a large following among members of Generation Z all around the world, including in Pakistan. This research will apply the Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G Theory) to investigate TikTok's popularity among Pakistan's Gen-Z. The research also dives into the effect of TikTok influencers on the Generation Z population in Pakistan, their use habits, reasons for using the app, and the results.

The U&G Theory is a theoretical framework used to investigate what drives people to choose certain forms of media and the satisfactions such forms provide. The video-sharing smartphone app TikTok evolved from its forerunner, Musical.ly. According to Matei (2010), audiences take an active role in picking the media they consume and are aware of the aspects that influence their tastes. Previous research on TikTok use has used the U&G Theory. Researchers studied the motivations, behaviors, and outcomes of platform use across content consumption, interaction, and production (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021). Using the U&G theory, this study will elucidate the motivations behind Generation Z's use of TikTok in Pakistan and the satisfaction it provides them.

The Impact of TikTok Influencers on Generation Z in Pakistan

Influencers have emerged on TikTok, where a new category of online personalities has gained prominence. These content creators have amassed substantial followings and exert considerable influence over their viewership. This study explores the patterns, motivations, and impacts of TikTok usage among Generation Z in Pakistan. Montag, Yang, and Elhai (2021) have posited that the subject matter is intricately linked to the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory. This is because influencers have the potential to serve as exemplars for their followers while also providing them with social support and information.

The present study examines the patterns, motivations, and impacts of TikTok usage among Generation Z in Pakistan. The nature of content that Generation Z is consuming in Pakistan on TikTok has the potential to result in moral implications. The impact of the diverse range of information available on the platform necessitates an examination of its influence on the ethical tenets and religious beliefs upheld by the populace of Pakistan. The present study investigates the ethical facets of content consumption, specifically emphasizing the plausible exposure to inappropriate or detrimental information and its influence on the dispositions and conduct of individuals who are part of the Gen Z demographic (Nichita, Enache, & Andreescu, 2021). A significant amount of current scholarly research has concentrated on the encounters of Chinese TikTok users, as exemplified by the publications of (Lu & Lu, 2019; Lu et al., 2020; Meng & Leung, 2021; and Omar & Dequan, 2020). Bosen and Kottasz (2020) have suggested that collective cultural values may impact the widespread adoption of social media. Conducting cross-cultural research on TikTok with a diverse user base is imperative. This qualitative study focused on a cohort of young individuals

who are active users of TikTok, a popular social media platform, and reside in Pakistan. The rationale for opting for a qualitative design was predicated on its ability to explicate distinctive and subtle manifestations of satisfaction (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

escapism

entertainment

social interaction

self-expression

Gratifications sought by Gen Z on TikTok

misinformation

Moral fabric of the youth

types of content prevalent

ethical dilemmas

potential exposure to harmful content

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content

relatability

perceived authenticity

Influence of TikTok influencers

Impressionable Gen Z

self-esteem

identity formation

social comparison

peer pressure

Conceptual Framework
Source: Author

Methods
Sample

The data were gathered in person. The study involved 84 participants who provided a significant amount of detailed data. The data revealed the respondents' intricate and sometimes conflicting perspectives towards TikTok. Furthermore, the data highlighted the role of motivations and perceptions in shaping these perspectives.

The study's sample comprised 84 young adults, 13 females and 71 males, ages 18 to 22. The study involved individuals enrolled as full-time undergraduate students at a public university in Peshawar, KP.

Table 1: Participants Demographics

S. No	Females	Males	Ages
1.	13	71	18 to 22.
Total	**84** full-time undergraduate students at a public university in Peshawar, KP.		

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the vignette-based technique explores and interprets contextualized phenomena to discover important elements and better understand how participants view sensitive situations or moral dilemmas (Barter & Renold, 1999). In addition, it facilitates reflective learning from experience, fosters discourse on professional solutions to challenging circumstances, and supports individualized actions to make sense of adversity. According to Flaskerud (1979) and Peabody et al. (2004), using a vignette-based approach is of particular interest in psychology, social science, education, medicine, and nursing. Individual or group interviews and focus group discussions have been used to gather data on individuals' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge (Gould, 1996; Hughes & Huby, 2002).

There is a huge variety of vignettes. A written narrative that is either hypothetical or fictitious that is delivered to participants along with a series of questions regarding the story is the vignette format that is the most classic (and arguably the most prevalent) version of the vignette. However, 'vignettes' may also be visual, or video recorded (McKinstry, 2000), and they can be given to participants on paper, on screen, or online. McKinstry also notes that 'vignettes' can be used in various contexts (Stolte, 1994; Vitkovitch & Tyrell, 1995; Taylor, 2006). They might also be comprised of 'real-life' stories, news items (for example, Gray, Delaney, and Durrheim, 2005), geographic data (for example, Gray and Manning, 2014), or examples culled from public health campaigns, art, or literature, among other possible sources.

The current study employed vignettes based using real situations observed in real life where a short story or narrative (the vignette) was presented to participants, who then responded in writing to a series of open-ended questions.

Data analysis

A qualitative research technique called reflexive thematic analysis is used to discover and analyze patterns in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) developed this technique. This method places a strong emphasis on the subjectivity of the researcher and seeks to unearth profound insights into intricate occurrences. Five themes were extracted from the data 1) Gratifications Sought by Pakistani Gen Z TikTok Users

2) TikTok is Warping our Perception of Ourselves 3) The Influence of TikTok Content on Morality and Ethics 4) TikTokers' Authenticity and Trustworthiness 5) The Ineffectiveness of Imposing Restrictions and Banning TikTok

Table 2: Final Themes

S. No	Themes
1.	Gratifications Sought by Pakistani Gen Z TikTok Users
2.	TikTok is Warping our Perception of Ourselves
3.	The Influence of TikTok Content on Morality and Ethics
4.	TikTokers' Authenticity and Trustworthiness
5.	The Ineffectiveness of Imposing Restrictions and Banning TikTok

Source: Author

Findings

Theme 1: Gratifications Sought by Pakistani Gen Z TikTok Users

Based on the findings, Generation Z users of TikTok in Pakistan are motivated by diverse gratifications. The participants emphasized the potential to communicate with acquaintances, loved ones, and even unfamiliar individuals through the interactive features of TikTok. The emergence of social contact has been identified as a significant outcome of this phenomenon.

As per the observations made by a participant,

"TikTok provides a platform for creative self-expression while facilitating interaction with like-minded individuals. The online platform provides a valuable prospect for individuals to expand their social network and foster a communal spirit."

(Respondent 09, Female, Age 21, 8th semester)

Furthermore, the participants expressed their contentment with the ability to detach from actuality and indulge in leisure activities. TikTok's vast array of concise videos offers a limitless source of amusement, enabling users to engage in humor, music, and dance to alleviate the stresses of their daily routines.

One of the participants provided their rationale, stating,

"When experiencing negative emotions, I use TikTok and watch funny content. The contemplation of it promptly elevates my mood and provides a temporary escape from my concerns."

(Respondent 22, Male, Age 21, 8th semester)

The participants emphasized additional sources of satisfaction, such as chances for self-expression and creative expression. The user-friendly attributes of TikTok, including its filters, effects, and editing options, allow individuals within the Gen Z demographic to showcase their talents and articulate their unique perspectives.

One of the participants expressed the following view,

"TikTok serves as my creative outlet. I possess the capability to create videos that accurately reflect my personal identity and areas of interest. It allows me to articulate my thoughts and feelings in a manner that is authentic to my personal identity."

(Respondent 32, Female, Age 21, 7th semester)

Furthermore, the participants emphasized that the platform fulfills the need for acquiring information

and enhancing knowledge. Individuals who demonstrated a keen interest in acquiring novel skills or staying abreast of contemporary developments expressed a strong inclination towards the educational content, tutorials, and informative videos TikTok provides on its platform.

As one participant commented,

"I tend to follow accounts that provide useful tips and informative content. According to one of the participants in the study, the experience was akin to having a personal mentor readily accessible."

(Respondent 11, Female, Age 21, 8th semester)

Theme 2: TikTok is Warping our Perception of Ourselves

The study's participants noted that although TikTok has undeniably exerted a substantial impact on them, this does not necessarily imply that it is entirely devoid of adverse consequences. The respondents expressed that one of the most concerning implications of the influence of TikTok is its potential to distort our self-perception. The app's algorithm is tailored to the individual user's interests and delivers a consistent flow of carefully curated information. This content frequently emphasizes the most visually appealing and seemingly flawless aspects of existence.

As one respondent said,

> *"TikTok bombards us with flawless and highly edited images. This causes me to question my own appearance. It is disappointing to see how effortlessly other people match the beauty standards that society has established, especially when I know that I do not satisfy those standards myself."*
>
> *(Respondent 02, Female, Age 21, 8th semester)*

The participants said that constantly being exposed to meticulously crafted content may engender a sense of insufficiency and low self-regard among individuals, potentially giving rise to spurious ideals of physical attractiveness.

Furthermore, the respondents reported that TikTok's emphasis on viral challenges and trends induces conformity to a particular manner or conduct, engendering a sense of social coercion to conform and gain social approval. The respondents said that persistent exposure to meticulously curated information is slowly distorting their perception of reality, posing a challenge in distinguishing between the virtual and tangible worlds.

Another respondent concurred with this perspective, stating,

> *"The magnitude of pressure to conform to a particular appearance on TikTok is substantial. The prevalence of seemingly perfect physical attributes among individuals prompts me to contemplate the extent of my societal worth."*
>
> *(Respondent 12, Female, Age 19, 7th semester)*

Theme 3: The Influence of TikTok Content on Morality and Ethics

Several respondents expressed apprehensions regarding the potential influence of content shared on TikTok on Generation Z's ethical and moral values in Pakistan. While certain participants expressed concerns regarding the potential negative impacts of the influence, others emphasized the importance of exercising proper discretion and utilizing it appropriately.

As noted by a respondent,

"Undoubtedly, TikTok is exerting an impact on our moral compass. The content displayed on the platform frequently endorses values incongruent with the cultural norms we uphold, including the

commodification of women, materialism, pranks, bullying, and disrespect towards the elderly."
(Respondent 80, Male, Age 20, 7th semester)

Another respondent echoed the same sentiment and stated,
"The continuous existence of vulgar vocabulary, sexually alluring choreography, and inappropriate dares on TikTok is eroding our ethical values. Ambiguous behavior blurs the distinction between socially acceptable norms and prohibited actions, thereby complicating the determination of ethical boundaries."
(Respondent 10, Male, Age 19, 7th semester)

The perspectives above highlight concerns regarding the potential impact of TikTok content on shaping Generation Z's moral and ethical values in Pakistan, potentially resulting in a decline of conventional societal norms and values. Despite the statement above, it is imperative to note that not all participants exhibited a negative outlook.

A respondent expressed a divergent perspective that contrasted with those of his peers and articulated,
"TikTok is only a medium; its use is entirely up to its users. While there may be some controversial material, not everyone will be badly impacted. We must sift through the noise and zero in on material encouraging optimism, originality, and social consciousness."
(Respondent 22, Female, Age 20, 7th semester)

This attitude reflects the idea that users may limit the potentially damaging effects of TikTok material by exercising discretion and personal responsibility in mitigating the potential adverse impact that TikTok content may exert on moral and ethical values.

Theme 4: TikTokers' Authenticity and Trustworthiness

The participants provided valuable insights regarding their viewpoints on the genuineness and reliability of TikTok content creators whom they prefer to follow, as well as the potential impact on impressionable youth who may emulate individuals who lack authenticity. The findings illuminate the complex interplay between TikTok content creators and their viewers, revealing the factors influencing content providers' perceived genuineness and reliability on the platform. The participants in the study emphasized the importance of TikTokers' ability to convey genuine experiences and emotions, while the respondents highlighted the significance of establishing a connection with the content.
As expressed by one respondent,
"People on TikTok who are genuine and relate their personal experiences have my confidence. It gives off a more genuine and approachable vibe."
(Respondent 39, Male, Age 20, 7th semester)

This suggests that people in the Gen Z demographic place a high importance on information that matches their own personal experiences. The participants provided valuable insights regarding the negative consequences of utilizing inauthentic practices, specifically fabricating personal tragedies to attract and retain audience attention. Additionally, the findings reveal the potential benefits of

establishing genuine connections with viewers to increase engagement and the unethical nature of resorting to deceitful tactics to boost one's views and followers.
According to one participant,

"Exploiting personal tragedies solely for the purpose of gaining views on TikTok is a discouraging practice. This constitutes a clear violation of trust and has a detrimental impact on the overall reputation of the platform. I strongly prefer to subscribe to content providers who exhibit authenticity and transparency by sharing their genuine personal experiences."
<div align="right">

(Respondent 33, Male, Age 20, 7th semester)
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Another respondent said,
"The TikTokers are essentially leveraging the emotions and empathies of their TikTok audience through their video content. It is imperative for social media platforms to address this form of fraudulent behavior."
<div align="right">

(Respondent 15, Male, Age 20, 7th semester)
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Theme 5: The Ineffectiveness of Imposing Restrictions and Banning TikTok

All participants agreed that banning TikTok does not provide a viable solution to the diverse range of issues at hand. The respondents expressed concerns regarding matters of freedom of speech, avenues for creative expression and cultural exchange, and the potential negative impact on mental well-being. The findings suggest that instead of implementing complete bans, tackling the hazards associated with TikTok through focused instruction, initiatives promoting digital competence, and legal structures that promote judicious usage and security is imperative.
According to a respondent,

"Banning TikTok may not be a viable solution. This platform allows individuals to express themselves, exhibit their skills, and establish global connections. It furnishes us with a distinctive creative avenue exclusive to our generation. Banning it would impede our ability to express ourselves and constrain our potential for development."
<div align="right">

(Respondent 25, Female, Age 19, 7th semester)
</div>

According to the participants, the platform has the potential to enable the manifestation of inventive concepts, the dissemination of cultural knowledge, and the augmentation of voices from marginalized communities. The participants emphasized the necessity of targeted instruction, initiatives promoting digital proficiency, and established guidelines to tackle issues surrounding TikTok, including those pertaining to psychological well-being and confidentiality. Implementing these measures by the authorities would enable the preservation of the beneficial aspects of TikTok for the Generation Z demographic and forthcoming generations while simultaneously encouraging the app's safe and responsible usage.
Another respondent commented:

"While it is true that using TikTok may become addictive and influence one's mental health, the solution is not to completely ban the app. Concentrating on teaching users about responsible use, fostering healthy behaviors, and developing a supportive online community is more productive. It would just encourage consumers to look for other platforms, some of which may not have the same safety protections in place if it were banned."

(Respondent 05, Male, Age 20, 7ᵗʰ semester)

Discussion

The present study sought to investigate the TikTok use trends, underlying drivers, and possible repercussions among Pakistan's Generation Z population. A research topic that sought to understand the many facets of TikTok use and its ramifications for a certain demographic group served as the study's main driving force. The study investigated the many motives motivating the use of TikTok and its influence on people's attitudes and behaviors using the theoretical framework of the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory. The four themes that emerged from the data are carefully examined in the current discussion section, which also clarifies how they align with other studies and addresses any contradictions that were found.

It was crucial to get insight into the gratifications sought by Pakistani Gen Z TikTok users in order to understand their motivations, preferences, and engagement patterns. Previous research demonstrating that entertainment and escapism are important motivators for Pakistani Gen Z TikTok users is bolstered by the findings of this study. (Fatherlaus & Winter, 2021) found that social media users, especially those on TikTok, like the option to take part in content that is both interesting and different from their usual routine. These findings corroborate those of a previous study (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020) that showed TikTok to be a valuable resource for members of the Generation Z cohort in terms of identity formation and exploration. Pakistani members of Generation Z who use TikTok do so in search of supplementary gratifications, such as interaction. A study by (Lampe et al., 2020) suggests that the site's community-building abilities stem from its users' ability to interact using tools like duets, stitching, and comments. TikTok is a digital community where users can share and discover short, entertaining videos on various themes, including instructive ones. Pakistani Gen Z, who used the video-sharing app TikTok did so for fun and to connect with their peers. They are curious, nevertheless, and want to learn more. This study's findings align with those of Lampe et al. (2023), who found that TikTok provides users access to this material. Creators routinely release DIYs, hacks, and instructional videos aimed at Gen Z because they recognize the generation's need for quick and simple access to information.

Another finding of this investigation pertained to the influence of TikTok content on the ethical and moral values of members of Generation Z in Pakistan. The findings indicate that the exposure to TikTok content resulted in a phenomenon where ethical boundaries became less distinct as users replicated and participated in activities demonstrated on the platform. The present study's results corroborate prior research conducted by Scalvini (2020) and Chauhan et al. (2022), which also reported a comparable impact of social media platforms on the ethical decision-making processes of individuals. Although there are apprehensions about the potential adverse impact of TikTok on the ethical values of

susceptible adolescents, it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of divergent perspectives on this matter. The content available on TikTok has the potential to foster positive ethical values. The attribute of authenticity, which is commonly associated with the content on TikTok, has been found to correlate with factors such as psychological well-being and self-esteem (Barta & Andalibi, 2021). This underscores the significance of further investigating the ethical aspects of TikTok content and its influence on the moral reasoning of its users in subsequent research.

Another salient theme that surfaced from the data pertained to the influence of TikTok on individuals' self-concept. The study's findings indicate that the Generation Z demographic in Pakistan is significantly impacted by the idealized self-presentation and beauty standards propagated on the social media platform TikTok. This discovery is consistent with prior studies conducted by Mink and Szymanski (2022) and Harriger, Thompson, and Tiggemann (2023), which have demonstrated the adverse impact of social media on individuals' body image dissatisfaction.

In contrast to the belief that TikTok exclusively distorts our self-perception, Roth et al. (2021) investigated the favorable facets of TikTok. The study revealed that TikTok has the potential to offer avenues for self-validation and communal bonding through engagement in TikTok challenges, thereby potentially enhancing individuals' self-concept and overall welfare. Regardless of the nature of the challenge in which they participated; the respondents expressed that engaging in online challenges is a pleasurable experience that imbues them with self-assurance. In summary, the adolescents in question allocate significant amounts of time to TikTok due to the attraction of online challenges and the corresponding affective states.

The third theme from the collected data pertained to the genuineness and reliability of TikTok content creators. The findings indicate that the Generation Z demographic in Pakistan holds varied perspectives on the authenticity of content creators on the platform. Several participants raised apprehensions regarding the genuineness of TikTok content, as they opined that numerous creator portrayed a distorted version of reality solely to garner popularity. The present discovery aligns with the investigation carried out by Dias and Duarte (2022), which underscores perceived authenticity on social media platforms.

The final theme analyzed the efficacy of implementing restrictions and banning TikTok. The findings indicate that despite attempts to impose limitations or bans on TikTok in specific circumstances, the Generation Z demographic in Pakistan discovered alternative means of accessing the application. The present discovery corroborates prior investigations, such as the study by Wang (2020), which illustrated the difficulties in effectively regulating social media platforms. This shows that restricting measures on their own may not help reduce users' time on TikTok. Instead, a more holistic strategy is required, one that addresses the underlying motivations and requirements of the users.

Implications

Implications from the User's Perspective

The study findings indicate that TikTok significantly impacts the self-expression, creativity, and social connectedness of the Generation Z cohort in Pakistan. This can be observed from the standpoint of the application's users. Some individuals may perceive the attempted ban by the PTA as a limitation on their entitlement to freedom of expression and their ability to utilize a powerful platform. Hence, policymakers must consider the integration of users in the decision-making process and actively involve them in the development of Social Media Literacy (SoMeLit) initiatives to ensure that their perspectives are acknowledged, and their needs are fulfilled.

Implications from Parents' Perspective:

The online experiences of parents exert a considerable influence on those of their offspring. The findings of this research underscore the necessity for parental oversight and comprehension regarding the utilization of TikTok among individuals belonging to Generation Z. Rather than solely relying on a banning; governmental bodies should prioritize the empowerment of parents by equipping them with knowledge and resources to enhance their comprehension of the TikTok platform, its associated risks, and how to guide their children in utilizing it responsibly. This may involve providing parental training programs, conducting educational campaigns, and disseminating materials related to online safety.

Implications from Policymakers' Perspective:

It is incumbent upon policymakers to address the challenges associated with using TikTok while simultaneously considering the broader societal ramifications of its usage. The research findings underscore the imperative for a multifaceted approach encompassing regulatory measures, educational initiatives, and active involvement of relevant stakeholders. It is imperative that policymakers prioritize developing and implementing comprehensive social media literacy initiatives aimed at equipping users with the necessary skills to navigate and engage with platforms such as TikTok in a critical manner. As a result of this particular approach, the Generation Z cohort in Pakistan is poised to reap the advantages of a digital realm that is more secure and enlightening.

Limitations and Future Research

The scope and generalizability of this study should be considered in light of its qualitative nature and the sample of 84 participants drawn from a public sector institution in Pakistan. It's worth noting that the results may not generalize to all members of Generation Z in the country Acknowledging that the outcomes may differ from the broader Generation Z demographic in Pakistan is imperative.

The sample size could potentially limit the scope and comprehensiveness of the findings. The study utilized vignettes obtained from 84 distinct participants. A larger sample size could have yielded a more comprehensive understanding of the patterns, motives, and impacts of TikTok utilization among Generation Z in Pakistan.

The contextual elements of a given situation refer to the various factors and circumstances surrounding it and influence its meaning and interpretation. These can include social, cultural, historical, and political factors and individual perspectives and experiences. Understanding the contextual elements of a situation is crucial for accurately interpreting and analyzing it, making informed decisions, and taking appropriate actions. Given that the study was carried out exclusively at a particular public institution in Pakistan, the outcomes may have been influenced by specific contextual factors unique to that geographical area. The contextual factors that may be considered include regional culture, educational background, and socioeconomic status. It is imperative to consider these facets as potential limitations that could impact the applicability of the findings.

The methodology exhibits certain constraints. Engaging in a discourse regarding any conceivable limitations in the research methodology employed in this investigation is imperative. In contrast to other qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews or focus groups, vignettes can limit participants' ability to articulate their perspectives and experiences fully.

Recommendations for further research Generating ideas for future research can be beneficial in

enhancing the discourse on limitations. Within this particular context, potential recommendations include proposing larger sample sizes, integrating diverse demographics, employing mixed-method approaches, or conducting comparative studies for generalizable findings.

Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze Generation Z users in Pakistan regarding their TikTok habits, causes, and consequences. Pakistani Generation Z uses TikTok similarly to their Western counterparts, particularly to get various gratification. The participants all agreed that banning the app was not a feasible solution. However, they have also voiced concerns about the platform's content and potential influence on vulnerable youth. They have also questioned its conformity to Islamic doctrine. The participants agree that creating policies, programs, and rules that promote responsible behavior and guarantee security is critical.

The findings of this study underscore the necessity of enhancing digital literacy and providing education to individuals belonging to Generation Z regarding the potential hazards associated with the utilization of TikTok. One potential strategy for addressing negative health outcomes and fostering a constructive digital milieu is to instruct youth on the responsible use of digital platforms. Participants also marked the need for content that follows Islamic teachings and helps constructively foster the growth of impressionable young, illustrating the need f or such content.

The results indicate that implementing educational initiatives and other interventions may be beneficial in addressing the apprehensions of Generation Z regarding the utilization of TikTok in Pakistan. This approach promotes the responsible generation and consumption of content on the platform. The program's main objectives should encompass equipping users with the necessary knowledge to mitigate potential risks, fostering the growth of their analytical abilities, and furnishing them with the requisite resources to make informed judgments regarding the information they encounter. Furthermore, it is deemed crucial to set up governing bodies to keep track of the platform and ensure it respects its user base's religious and cultural norms.

To conclude, the results of this study offer novel and significant perspectives on the utilization of TikTok among Generation Z individuals in Pakistan. This attests to the value of imparting digital literacy skills, urging responsible use, and safeguarding vulnerable youths from inappropriate content. Developing a TikTok space that values user well-being, safety, and conformity to Islamic values is attainable. Education, programs, and legal frameworks that consider all parties' concerns and principles will help offer this intended outcome.

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