

Tiktok Dependence: An Illusion of Reality in Indian Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Tiktok use have been under-studied especially in evaluating the contraindication of Tiktok dependence. Tiktok is a video sharing platform through which short videos have been virally circulated. In the application, the individuals enact to a song or a movie scene and circulate among their social media networks. Tiktok application have upshot in India compared to other social media application leading to increased number of younger adults shooting videos for various purpose. Even after the ban, the search for an application similar to Tiktok application have been on-going. Yet, the psychological state of individuals dependent on the application haven't been explored in a study. The objective of the paper is to understand the experience of using Tiktok application, reasons for use and the perceived benefits. The current study employed a thematic analysis of the participants accounts of their experiences of using TikTok. The study screened individuals through the video sharing application addiction scale (VSAA) after which 8 participants were recruited in the study. There were two major global themes which emerged from the study data: Personal and Decisional characteristics. The personal characteristics gives rise to individual factors, traits, motivation of use for fulfilling personal needs and general attitude towards the application. The decisional characteristics were based on the individual personal account and attitude which also takes into consideration of the social, emotional and cognitive elements leading to overuse of the application. The 16 personality factors of the 8 participants in the study were analyzed. The scores that showed lower in the personality factor continuum were (2) Reasoning, (3) Emotional stability and (13) Openness to change. The factors where the individuals showed higher scores were (11) Privatness and (12) Apprehension. All participants showed consistent scores in the factors mentioned above leading to coherence with the thematic patterns represented in their data codes. The key findings of the study were (1) relationship between personality traits and motivation of TikTok use, (2) the association of loneliness to sense of self leading to comfort seeking, (3) the need for distraction is seen

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important in their day-to-day life to avert negative state of mind and (4) the motivation to use is mediated by apprehensive nature of participants and the fear of missing out (FOMO). In conclusion, the study points out to the perceived feeling of happiness were from the genre choices which is reinforcing the behavior of participants to continue use instead of attending to the actual emotional states. The association of their emotional states is evaluated based on the virtual reality and the identity fusion leading to increased dissonance and decreased satisfaction in their general functioning. The present study has been instrumental in finding the association of personality traits to the dependence of TikTok application which is novel in the study of video sharing application platforms. The findings of the study highlight the presence of personality traits, distractive nature of application and the need to escape their current emotional state through the application. The themes emerged covers the cognitive, emotional and social factors in the use of TikTok and their personality association.

Keywords: *Social media addiction, Video sharing application, Personality, TikTok Dependence, Media Psychology*

Despite of the spike in the number of young users of TikTok (Feldkamp, 2021), there have been a paucity of studies to account for the detrimental effects of the TikTok use behavior especially from the perspective of personality traits. The need to understand these personality traits of the individuals dependent on the TikTok application is accounted in literatures and editorials (Montag & Hegelich, 2020). The participants account of TikTok use behavior is necessary to understand the reasons behind use and the corresponding detrimental effects of TikTok. Digital media use among millennials poses a threat due to the psychological repercussions of the exposure to the virtual social medium (Montag & Hegelich, 2020). As millennials have been primed into believing a social portrayal being equal to self-esteem, the identity differentiation has become fused (Wang, Gu, & Wang, 2019). One such application which acquired global popularity among all the social media application is TikTok. TikTok is a short video application which serves as a modality to shoot, share and publish videos on songs, stunts, dance, acting and humor etc. Video creation applications have become a viral trend among young millennials with a feature to edit videos in a presentable manner (Chen and Chung, 2019). This virtual self-portrayal has been made use by the digital marketing to influence audience into believing access, anonymity and lesser emotional exhaustion as a viable option (Meng & Leung, 2021). With the rise of the pandemic, the social media has taken over our lives with lesser need to attend to real life situations (Feldkamp, 2021). Social media platforms have been studied extensively among the young adults with showing positive correlation between the intensity of use and escapism. Escapism is defined as “as a means to distract oneself from real-life situations” thus leading to an unhealthy coping among young adults (Kumar & Prabha, 2019). A medium of escapism is provided by social media forums with an opportunity to edit self in a much desirable manner, simulate fake situations and portray a personality that is desired yet not be made applicable in real life. Therefore, this can be called as a fantasy lived experience through a medium which is unattainable but creates dissonance among individuals on being exposed to reality (Scherr & Wang, 2021). The shift in the portrayal of self in glimpse as in Instagram, Facebook etc. has been enhanced to a short-video medium with an opportunity to act a celebrity has led to even more dependence. This behavior is being maintained by peer approval, social approval and perceived validation leading to others dependent characteristics combined with identity fusion into virtual self and negative self-image. A negative approval from the audience (followers), decreasing counts of followers, negative comment or disapproval of the self can lead to

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depressive symptoms, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal behaviors (Montag, Yang, & Elhai, 2021) (Herrick, Hallward, & Duncan, 2021).

Evolution of tiktok among Millennials

One of the upshoot in the number of users were due to the global popularity that this application ignited and the ease of accessibility to publish into the wider social forum. In India, many of the TikTok users upon higher followers had wider acting opportunities in entertainment industry (“What is driving youngsters to Tik Tok? Experts raise red flags,” n.d.) (Kennedy, 2020). This has also reinforced the use of application to create content and to perform in a way that receives public attention. An application created for entertainment or leisure have become a tool for an entry into the entertainment industry as this shift had changed perspectives on the user motive (*What is TikTok? - The Fastest Growing Social Media App Uncovered*, 2019). Due to this motive, the level of dependence on the application, time spent and resources invested is higher which at times involves risky undertaking for shooting a video such as racing or standing on a cliff etc. When the application escalated in the year 2019, it has been widely used in US and India with having the highest users among all the social media platforms. The young users are said to be around the age of 12 to 13 while there was no parental supervision enforced by the application. A noticeable impact around the use of TikTok involved young users being exposed to sexual contents and violence which was detested by the public. TikTok application users which thereby invited increased attention and eventually a lot of followers to their social media account (Montag & Hegelich, 2020).

Personality Traits and Media Dependence

The study of personality traits and social media addiction have shown that individuals high in neuroticism, exhibitionism and narcissism have been seen to be addicted to the social media forum to derive others dependent validation (Omar, Omar, & Dequan, 2020). The sense of self is theorized to be deriving from social approval and through socially desirable self-presentation. The study conducted on the association between TikTok use and personality traits found similar findings with also showing higher scores in trait of openness to change. This has been true among all popular social media platforms (Meng & Leung, 2021). The studies usually employ a quantitative method of investigation with Big five personality factor questionnaire which is restrictive to the identification of specific traits that can be contributing for the TikTok use behavior. The social presentation behavior is also mediated by the individuals need to seek support and validation which otherwise is perceived to be unavailable in real-life settings. The social media especially a TikTok medium is said to be provided with multiple editing features to edit oneself in a presentable manner. Increased connection with strangers online also allows for a more strategic, idealized self-presentation. The individuals try to represent their true personalities based on the genres they use, the content they telecast and also the color, music and other layouts, which indicate their personality and most often individuals try to mask their true personalities (Montag et al., 2021).

Influence of Psychological Variables in tiktok Use

Numerous studies on online social media presentation implies that there are underlying psychological factors among adolescents who has a need to adhere to societal standards with issues in self-esteem and desire to gain attention through desirable presentation (Chua & Chang, 2016). The edited self-presentation is subjected to peer judgment while this also plays a part in their identity formation through the social feedback from peers. While desirable self-presentation theory by Goffman has been extended from general impression

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management to manipulating their image in a social platform through editing is a new era of social media presentation (Hogan, 2010). One of the downsides of the TikTok use is the development of interpersonal relationship by compensating for perceived social isolation with an underlying external motivator to achieve those deprived needs. While many individuals have been seen to be exposed to malicious content which then eventually will lead to increased disinhibitions even for controlled users (Montag & Hegelich, 2020). Apart from the external motivators, there are intrinsic traits which motivates an individual to present oneself in a particular manner on the online TikTok platform (Chen and Chung, 2019) and the corresponding choice of genre indicate the presence of personality traits in TikTok presentation. These personality traits analysis was not investigated in the literature on the study of TikTok behavior and the current paper takes the line of investigation on the personality analysis.

The present study

The present study is conceptualized under the constructivist paradigm of understanding participants experience of TikTok use and the reasons for the motivation to engage in repeated use of the application. The qualitative interview is conducted to address the study objective with also having equal focus on the presence of personality traits in the association of dependence on TikTok application. The social media presence is mediated by personality traits in many literatures but not been studied in association with TikTok or video sharing application. This is distinct from other social media application due to the social presence in the form of a short video with options that they can imitate a celebrity and edit in a presentable manner. The presence of social media is distinct in video sharing application where in a single post is around 1 minute as supposed to other social media platforms where there is a glimpse of the event presented in a picture format. The need to present oneself favorably and act in a way the celebrity has portrayed is seen important and eventually leading to increased pressure to impress the audience (the followers).

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The present study is based upon the constructivist paradigm in which the individual's lived experiences are being explored through the accounts of the participants on their perception of TikTok, reasons for use and perceived gain through the application. Based on the participants data, the generated themes will give rise to consistent pattern to show the presence of dependence and the associated psychological consequences through the thematic analysis. Due to the scarcity of studies pertaining to the exploration of mental states, perceptions and attitudes towards TikTok among young adults, thematic analysis is used due to the ease of the exploration of codes and to develop an association through emerging themes. The sample selected were college students who have been using TikTok for more than 3 years and the influence it has on their lives on a daily basis. They have been initially been screened for the intensity of usage using Video sharing application addiction scale (VSAA) which upon indicating higher usage were directed for inclusion into the interview group. The adolescents in the group responded to 16 personality factor questionnaires for their personality profiling alongside their interview.

Sample selection

The sample were selected from students of Dr. MGR Educational and Research Institute who were pursuing arts degree in various streams where they were chosen based on the requirements in the inclusion criteria. The study used a purposive sampling where in prior stage included screening 30 individuals using video sharing application addiction scale

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(VSAA) which screen individuals on three factors i.e., intensity, dependence and abuse. Among these individuals, 8 participants were chosen based on the scores mentioned in the inclusion criteria. These 8 individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide which was validated by three professors in the university.

Table 1 Demographic variables of participants

Initials	Gender	Age	Socio-economic status (SES)	Education
P	Female	22	Middle SES	BSc Yoga
D	Female	21	Middle SES	BSc Lab Technician
HR	Male	20	Middle SES	B. Arch (Architecture)
KCS	Male	20	Middle SES	B.A Economics
RG	Female	21	Middle SES	BSc Psychology
RA	Female	20	Middle SES	BSc Electronic Media
K	Female	21	Middle SES	B. Com General
S	Female	22	Middle SES	BSc Computer science

Inclusion criteria

- Young adults between the age range of 18- 25 years.
- Scored between 115 – 172 on video sharing application addiction scale (VSAA) which is considered high.
- Among the video sharing applications, those using TikTok application have only been considered.
- Have been using the application at least for the past 3 years.

Procedure

Initial assessment was done through online forms which has been circulated among the student groups in various departments. The video sharing application addiction scale was attached as part of the online google form along with the basic information sheet for future contact purposes. The consent was taken prior to the start of the study and the study objective is also sent along with the online google forms. When the sample size came to 30 with students split across the art streams, the level 1 of the study was terminated. The second level included identifying individuals from the pool of 30 who can be recruited for the qualitative interview. Total 11 individuals were filtered among those 8 consented for the level 2 of the study. The qualitative interviewing was done over a zoom call and the meeting was recorded with the consent of the participants for transcribing purpose. The study followed an interview guide validated through expert validation and data validation contained in a semi-structured format. Post-interview a 16 PF personality test was administered. Level 3 of the study included assessing the personality traits using 16 personality factor questionnaire (16 PF) by a certified psychologist and the corresponding analysis is generated. The results of the 16 PF questionnaire were discussed with the participants on request and the study results to be communicated to the participants via mail.

Tools

- Basic demographic profile sheet used for documenting and communicating the test findings.
- Consent sheet for the level 1,2 and 3 of the study undertaken.
- Video Sharing Application Addiction Scale (VSAA) (Nivedha *et al.*, 2020) – this tool has been validated among the young adults and has a reliability score of 0.98 and item total correlation significant at 0.01 level. This scale measures addiction level of individuals using video sharing applications such as TikTok, Moj, Helo,

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Dubsmash etc. on three factors i.e., intensity, dependence and abuse. This tool is used to screen individuals with high level of dependency on the application as part of screening for inclusion criteria.

- Semi-structured interview was validated based on the data validation from literatures and expert validation through professors in the university who have qualitative research experience.
- 16 personality factor questionnaire (16 pf) was used to assess their personality traits.

Data analysis

After the data collection process, the interview audio was transcribed into separate documents and the coding process was initiated simultaneously by the two primary researchers. Thematic analysis is the method of investigation used to generate themes pertaining to participants experiences with TikTok application. One of the researchers has prior experience in thematic coding and the corresponding coding process was validated through the researcher. The coding of 8 participants were done and separately classified. After classification, another coding process was undertaken to understand the line of enquiry in each participant's data with emphasize on forming coding categories. These coded categories are then subjected to theme generation through the categorization and line of enquiry. The themes therefore are being iterated to finalize the global and specific themes from the 8 participants. The final themes are the synthesis of the codes, primary themes and corresponding memos generated during the analysis/coding process.

Ethical consideration

Since the purpose of the study includes asking participants data in relation to correlating with their personality traits, the purpose was clearly stated in information sheet and the consent was taken. To maintain the identity and information of the participants, the university also holds account for the data obtained. The data is made available to the department head and the authors alone for ethical purposes which was enforced by the head of the department. In the account of acceptance in the study, the students were eventually guided through the levels of tests in the research process. The contact information was used to communicate the dates for further test interviews and to update on the results obtained on the study. The permission was obtained from the university office to undertake students for the research during their college hours and corresponding time was given for students to submit assignments/class lectures.

Validation

The interview guide was developed using the objectives and the data from literatures corresponding to the objectives. Three professors in the department of psychology were involved in the formation of the interview guide and expert validation was attained from the department heads. The revised interview guide is then had to go through department office for clearance for use with students. The three-level process of data collection was undertaken for screening using validated scale, interview and use of standardized test to assess the personality traits.

Table 2 Original Interview Guide

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- How long you've been using video sharing application and what are the application you have used in the past?
 - How long you have been using Tiktok application in particular?
 - If you have to describe your personality, how would you describe?
 - How do people perceive or describe your behavior in college or at work?
 - If you have to look at your behavior at home and at college? Do you show your real self? If not why? If yes, can you give an instance?
 - Have you participated in public performances and if you have participated how do people describe your performances as?
 - What inspired you to try Tiktok application?
 - What had been the thoughts before trying Tiktok application?
 - Were you having positive or negative opinions about Tiktok application?
 - What would say you have gained from Tiktok application?
 - What emotions you usually associate about the idea of using Tiktok?
 - For what reasons have you started using Tiktok?
 - Is your usage regular or based on some external reasons such as having nothing to do etc.? What are those external factors?
 - What would be your strong values or beliefs?
 - What is the general behavioral pattern you have noticed over the years?
 - When you are stressed, does Tiktok play a role in reducing that stress? Can you give an instance when it happened?
 - How did you decide to choose a genre and what are the factors that contributed to the choice of genre?
 - Were there any negative consequences in your life from using Tiktok?
 - Was there a shift from a specific genre to another genre? If so, why?
 - Any genre you like or dislike?
 - Any genre you wanted to try?
 - What genres of others you enjoy watching?
 - Which genres you prefer doing a video on and why is it that you prefer this genre?
 - What persuaded you to choose this particular genre?
 - What were your peer reactions initially when you used this particular genre?
 - Now that Tiktok is not there, what were your reaction when it was banned?
 - Did you find an alternative for Tiktok and what was it? Is it comparable or not to the previously used Tiktok?
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RESULTS

Participants in the study were considered based on the moderate to high scores in the addiction continuum on the video sharing application addiction scale (VSAA). The participants in the study were between the age range of 18 to 25 undergoing college education from Dr. MGR educational and research university, Chennai, India. The individual average use was between 3-5 years with approximately 4 to 8 hours a day. The users were college going students who report their unique experiences in each of their lives and user behavior is seen indicative of the individual's tendency towards dependence on the application based on the addiction scores. The objectives of the study include the factors that led to use of TikTok, the reasons behind the maintenance of behavior, the link between choice of genre and personality characteristics. This study also profiled the individuals' responses of their perceived perception of their personality using interviewing and the personality profiling by the standardized personality test i.e., 16 personality factor questionnaires. The themes that emerged from the 8 participants were transcribed and the data were generated into 2 global themes and 5 sub-themes. The global themes cover (1)

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Personal characteristics and (2) Decisional characteristic. The sub themes include personality self-description, motivation to use, emotional distress, social environment and cognitive elements leading to the use of TikTok application.

Table 3 Descriptions of Themes

Global Theme	Sub Themes	Description (Operational Definition)
Personal Characteristics	Self-description	Individual's account about one's behavior, emotions and thoughts comprising the personality traits based on their awareness about oneself and through the perceived perception of others.
	Motivated Behavior	Motivated behavior is defined based on an individual's persistence to maintain an existing behavior and having a desire to exercise/initiate a particular behavior.
Decisional Characteristics	Emotional Distraction	Distracting oneself from a difficult emotion which is usually perceived as unable to cope and hence using an external element to distract from negative emotion.
	Social Environment	The social climate in which the individual functions and the norms that is expected off the individual.
	Cognitive Elements	These include decisions to fulfill one's need, cost/benefit analysis of the application and the choices taken that are obtained from the application.

Personal characteristics

The global theme of personal characteristics generated through the thematic coding of 8 participants lead to persistent patterns of reporting their self-description of personality characteristics and the motivation in the maintenance of behavior in the use of TikTok application those that are individualistic to each participant characteristics. Yet, patterns have evolved in which their personal accounts of their personality and the reason for maintenance were fairly similar among the participants. This could be because of the homogenous selection of population leading to a fairly consistent pattern of results related to the objective under study.

Self-description

Despite of the use of a standardized tool to assess the personality traits of the participants, the primary attempt was made to understand the meta-awareness on their self-account of personal characteristics. This also helps in understanding the presence of favorable patterns in their response and awareness towards one's own self from the perspective of others. This is because social awareness deemed as important as these participants are regular social media users with higher dependence as screened by the video sharing application addiction tool (VSAA) and the identity associated with themselves might be from the ideal social media forum rather than with the immediate surrounding. While this personal awareness of one's personality could have led to seek coping which thereby had been utilized through the social presentation to create impression contrasting to those perceived as a deprivation in their personality. This deprivation is projected in a socially acceptable manner to overcome the underlying complexes. Homogenous selection of participants leads to certain commonalities in their responses especially in their description of their characteristics. The participants account of oneself were precise in most cases as these were compared with the standardized 16 personality factor questionnaire.

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“Oh, me, what kind of personality I am mmm., I am a jolly type, smile is my confidence and then I will be energetic, multi-tasker, and I like that ‘LLL’s’ Live, laugh, love I used to follow them in life” (R.A, Age 19). The personality description for this participant in the 16 PF questionnaire shows that she is high in warmth and high in openness to change while liveliness is fairly in the middle to high. There is not much deviance from the account that she has given about her personality characteristics.

“Others think I’m silent, If I am angry, I would lock myself in a room. If I’m tensed very much, I sometimes consume alcohol” (KCS, Age 20). His personality assessment showed scores high in vigilance, high in non-disclosing and high in tension or apprehension.

Motivated Behavior

Most participants have had a favorable perspective towards the application despite of seeing the negative consequences of TikTok use. The personal characteristics also has led some to become dependent on the application due to their favorability towards the application and the peer validation which served as a reinforcement for the maintenance of behavior. Participants report of their experience of using TikTok is seen as ‘Transformative’ as the fears and insecurities were being able to overcome by a medium which supposedly serves as a primary exposure with also positive validation from their peers. These personal characteristics of individuals who are socially withdrawn and apprehensive of one’s own self tend to overcome their weakness using the TikTok medium and associate the emotions to the application. The positive emotion experienced through the application and validation through positive feedback also served as an escape from the current difficulties. This creates dependence and eventually to seek validation only through a medium which is accessible and perceived as socially acceptable due to the norms in which the individual’s function, in this case it’s the peer group. This dependence is seen in the form of withdrawing from current responsibilities such as bunking classes, loss of the application created rage and impacted their mood to a considerable extent.

“I bunk classes to do TikTok” (KCS, Age 20). “I was literally broken in first week of TikTok ban and searched for alternatives badly” (D, Age 21).

“As I said I overcame my shyness and people recognized my talents. My opinion towards TikTok is positive because all my friends used it, I got famous in school and had lot of followers. When banned I was angry, I even tried VPN to get access to TikTok but they banned that option too. I was very vexed. Even if Instagram reels came, I couldn’t get popular like it was in TikTok” (KCS, Age 20).

“I choose TikTok When I am in Stress, it makes me happy all the time” (P, Age 20).

“I gained motivation because of TikTok” (K, Age 21).

“Whenever I’m off, it lifts my mood. Also, I started watching TikTok videos of friends and anyways I’m lonely. I choose comedy genre because it makes me happy” (R.G, Age 20).

Decisional characteristics

Decisional characteristics explore the social, cognitive and temperamental tendencies through which an individual might operate. An individual’s tendency to seek support from the TikTok application is moderated by three elements as represented by the themes. These involve, (1) Emotional distress faced by the participant on account of challenges faced on a daily basis, (2) social characteristics such as the environment of the individual within which they might operate, and (3) cognitive decision-making including perceptions, cost and benefits analysis and choice of genre to serve their need.

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Emotional Distraction

University students' responses to the actual use of TikTok has been reported as a modality that make themselves 'happy' and the use of the application helps them to escape the immediate environment which is seen as stressful and emotionally draining. 'Loneliness' and 'Boredom' is used synonymously by the participants to explain their reason for usage. Both these variables of emotions are seen as aversive and the application serves as an escape through living in through a virtual reality. Even if it is considered as a recreational activity, the extent to which the distress faced is seen to be avoided through the application which is the primary finding.

"Of course, I do all the time, when I am alone and feeling sad" (K, Age 21).

"I just started for entertainment only, now I am addicted for the application, I'm doing for my happiness" (P, Age 20).

"I download the TikTok videos and post them in stories when I am stressed, I try to distract" (KCS, Age 20).

These young adults' perception towards TikTok is favorable due to the distractive nature like any other social media while also being able to act in a virtual platform using genres that could change their current mood. The association of the emotion 'happiness' is being largely emphasized by also choosing genre such as humor, romance, dance etc. The perception of loneliness is highly detested by the participants and is usually associated to describe as a state of sadness. This association is cut-off by finding solace within a virtual community through which they perceive to be belonged and accepted.

"I was alone at home, so I started watching my friends TikTok videos and I started too anyways I'm lonely. I then became happy" (R.G, Age 20).

Those participants who had been chosen for the study based on the scores on their addiction scale had also a common side to their personality traits. They were seen to more apprehensive, private and low in reasoning. This apprehension is being carried over to their day-to-day behavior even in the use and plan of TikTok videos.

"I don't know whether it is right or wrong to do, Then I put everything in private draft and I have a fear whether strangers would see, I only accept friends to follow me and I don't add any strangers" (R.G, Age 20)

"No way I would use when I'm stressed, it makes me even more tensed" (R.A, Age 19)

Social Environment

Most participants have reported using the application due to peer influence and the unsaid expectation of having to use TikTok to be able to relate to the peers as they are said to be feeling left out. The peer influence is already established entity in the subject of social media addiction as the norms for acceptance and relatability comes through the commonality of social media presence among the millennial community. Apart from the peer influence, the herd perception of loneliness equated with sadness is believed to be not acceptable and a slight deviance from social activity is equated with feelings of worthlessness. The 'introversion trait' is also seen unacceptable as these millennials are trying to fit into the norm of increased social activity and larger peer group.

"My friends encouraged me a lot, to do TikTok videos" (K, Age 20)

"I am alone and feeling sad, I use TikTok. It helps me all the time to change my mood" (K, Age 20)

"I did not learn anything but whenever my mood is off, it lifts me up since I am anyway lonely" "I do with my friends, all of them do comedy genre and I also do with them" (R.G, Age 20)

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“I saw my friends doing and I always thought TikTok was fun” “My friends pushed me to use TikTok” “I’m silent and when I’m sad I lock myself” (KCS, Age 20)

“My sister got famous through TikTok and I started trying too” (P, Age 20)

The social environment here is instrumental in creating norms for acceptable traits and produces significant distress when the norms are being violated. This unsaid norm serves as the basis for the behavior and eventually reinforcing their acquired behavior by the acceptance of these norms.

Cognitive Elements

The data indicates that there is need based use among the participants as they overestimate the advantages over the disadvantages. The participants judge the use of application to be favorable due to the perceived benefits experienced through the course of the use of the application such as ‘overcome shyness’ ‘gain motivation’ ‘accepted by friends’ ‘overcome loneliness’ etc. (Data codes). This cost-benefit analysis lies in the decision making of participants in the use and abuse where the latter part of abuse and addiction is underestimated as each participant seems to be in control of their TikTok usage behavior. Those who reported addiction as a downside to the application, their account explained the possibility of others to get addicted and did not associate with their behavioral possibility. As these negative perceptions is more others-oriented making them believe that chances of them pursuing the same behavior is almost nil.

“The negative side of TikTok is uhm. Sharing personal information and addiction; I do for happiness and I learnt self-grooming a lot” (S, Age 22).

“We can easily get addicted to the application but I gained self-confidence and grooming through it” (P, Age 20).

“Most TikTok North Indians do, I hate them, Also, these bad and indecent TikTok video” (HR, Age 20).

Participants are also having a clear need to use the application as it is associated with their social status, acceptance, perceived failures and the possible favors from the application. Apart from the needs that are being fulfilled, the use of TikTok application is a considered a status quo within which the parameter of social acceptance is weighed among college going millennials.

“I’m happy because I like it when I get likes and appreciation” (KCS, Age 20).

“I started using while I am with my friends” (K, Age 21).

Finally, TikTok application as supposed to other social media platforms is seen favorable due to the editing options available in the platform. There is choice factor with possible options such in genre, filters, editing techniques and technical options etc. The videos can be edited in a way that is desirable and serves the purpose of their psychological need such as filters to enhance the looks, effects to make the video applaudable and the range of genre to make video contents and much more. These are some of the reasons stated by the participants as admirable by the use of TikTok application.

“TikTok helps as a platform to showcase talents, like original creators where people can sing, dance, edit video and so on” (HR, Age 18).

“It helped me showcase my videography skills, applied sometime in modeling and had my photos and video taken” (HR, Age 18).

“I prefer romantic genre because it suits me” (K, Age 21). “Dance videos, because I like, I choose based on my character” (RA, Age 19).

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“I do casual, pets related and humor because my friends appreciate when I do that” (S, Age 22).

Finally, the themes emerged indicate a possible correlation to the 16-personality factor questionnaire as well. The observed behavioral tendencies in the use of TikTok is due to the combination of personality factors, cognitive decision making and emotional elements. Based on these elements, the determination of use and abuse is reported through qualitative thematic analysis. The themes were indicative of the behavior of college going millennials attitudes towards the use of TikTok application and the consistent patterns in all the participants is indicative of higher validity in the data generation and analysis.

DISCUSSION

Thematic findings

This study investigated the influence of TikTok application leading to factors for addiction and dependence among the young adults to find a consistent pattern of themes through the qualitative thematic analysis. The objectives under study were participants account of their experiences and factors emerged for future investigations to employ in TikTok study. The second major objective is to investigate the possible correlation to the personality traits in the projection of self in a virtual video platform and corresponding relationship to the genre choices. The study found that, the themes are indicative of the relationships between the emotional, cognitive and social elements in the addiction of TikTok application leading to maintain the behavior of use and abuse. Another common theme is the influence of peer approval and validation being the primary factor for dependence on the application. As the social approval is gained and it is eventually reinforcing participants to obtain the psychological need which is otherwise considered absent in real-life settings. Therefore, the association of validation is then being taken as a token of appreciation to repeat their behavior and engage more in the same behavior. The themes highlight that the emotional states of participants as a sole reason for the initiation of the TikTok use as these are supposedly seen to be rewarding and mood lifting. The application is associated as an activity to escape the feeling of loneliness with also being appreciated by the social community that the individual belongs. Even though the participants perceive the risk of addiction, they are more likely to see themselves being in control of the use and perceive other's chance of addiction to the application to be higher.

16 personality factor findings

The 16 personality factors of the 8 participants in the study was analyzed. The scores that showed lower in the personality factor continuum were (2) Reasoning, (3) Emotional stability and (13) Openness to change. These factors where the individuals showed higher scores were (11) Privatness and (12) Apprehension.

All participants showed consistent scores in the factors mentioned above leading to coherence with the thematic patterns represented in their data codes. *Reasoning* is lower in all participants showing an inability of an individual to evaluate and find a conclusion for a problem or situation. The result indicates that the individuals who are addicted to video sharing application have lesser ability to reason and make productive realistic decisions. They might have problems in academic performance as they may have issues in performing to their standards. Due to the difficulty to maintain motivation and to take effective decisions, there can be an internal search for validation and escape to deal with the problems. *Emotional stability*, is low in all participants indicating rapid, intense mood changes and often over reactive to situations and events. They are more sensitive and also

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project their emotional state in the virtual platform to gain emotional validation which dismissed can have significant changes in the emotional reactions. Another way is by escaping emotions or dismissing the emotional state by engaging in distracting behaviors such as TikTok usage. *Openness to change* is significantly low in all the participants on their 16-personality factor analysis. The data shows that they prefer to do the same things which made them comfortable which is more stagnating and do not intend to change even when there is a need. Finding alternative coping to distract also is not appreciated due to this underlying trait and cumulatively leading to decreased chances to pursue healthy management of negative emotions. *Privateness* is higher in all participants even though they seek social support and social approval through a public platform. The individuals prefer to keep everything to themselves and will be reluctant to share information about their personal life where they are apprehensive about social judgment. The videos help as a modality to change their insecurities in a more acceptable manner according to the norms but unhealthy due to the idealistic projection of self. They might have issues with adaptability and have doubts recognizing themselves as one among the group. They are tactful and very calculative when handling life situations due to the fear of losing the hidden side of their personality. In *Apprehension*, the data shows individuals have high self-doubt and do not have the confidence to face the reality. They have the feeling of insecurity and have trust issues. These self-doubts can affect their views about others thus they do not intend to trust people easily. They are very sensitive to others opinion of themselves and also fear the consequences of their actions. They could be critical of their behaviors towards others and also have problem with social interaction and will be unsure of presenting themselves in society. These traits predispose them to seek attention in the videos they make and try to gain validation from peer groups.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The number of studies pertaining to the personality traits in literature is highly scarce with related video sharing application which is the purpose of the present study. The study of personality traits in relation to TikTok use were investigated using the Big five personality traits questionnaire with results showing higher usage with individuals higher in trait of openness to change. The desire to get more likes and popularity is being compared to the trait of exhibitionism, narcissism and openness to change (Meng & Leung, 2021). The current study investigated using the 16 personality factors indicating that individuals who engage more in TikTok use were low in openness to change and high in privateness even when the use of TikTok is above the normal range. Another study also investigated the correlation of TikTok use and the personality traits using Big five model stating that there is no correlation due to the generic nature of the Big five model questionnaire failing to cover intricate traits of the individuals (Omar and Dequan, 2020). Therefore, the current study employed 16 personality factors questionnaire to substantiate the lower and higher scores common to all participants. It is being substantiated with the data themes which indicates that the participants were not open to other coping strategies and their high scores in apprehension is another reason to not deviate from the standards set forth by the peer group. The choice of genre is also not preferred to be explored and want to stay within their stream of comfort. In one of the letters to the editor, the author speaks about the self-comparison orientation theory to help explain the nature of projection the TikTok users undertake to derive self-esteem from the projected virtual image. This is also seen as rewarding and in turn leading to higher levels of usage to the application (Kumar & Prabha, 2019). Most of the concerns raised by the authors and scientist in the study of social media addiction in video sharing platforms is the rise in addictive behaviors to these applications and the absence of literature to address the cause and effect of predicting behaviors. Therefore, the

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call for personality studies is pointed out in the letters to the editor throughout Asia and abroad due to the detrimental nature of TikTok use among adolescents who are the common users (Montag et al., 2021). A common pattern seen in this study of personality and TikTok is the escapism tendency and the immediate need to distract oneself from perceived negative state of mind. This escapism is often used to avert themselves from the negative emotions and in this data, it is to escape loneliness. Most participants report wanting to change their current mood and choose a genre which is usually associated with happiness such as romance, humor or dance etc. This association is also being equated to the favorable attitudes towards the application and eventual gains perceived through the application. A study conducted on Scherr and Wang in 2021 found that escapist addiction is one common reason for individual's motivation to use TikTok and also showing apparent socially rewarding self-presentation (Scherr & Wang, 2021).

The study is pointing to four main factors for TikTok use and the corresponding detrimental effects that will affect the psychological well-being of users in the long-term. First, there is a relationship between personality traits and the motivation of TikTok use. This motivation is arising from the emotional instability, cognitive rewards and social approval leading to consistent patterns of seeking support through the platform. Those who are low in reasoning and emotional stability and high in apprehension are vulnerable to develop addiction to an application which is socially rewarding. Second, the need for escaping the emotions especially aversion to loneliness and association of loneliness to sense of self-worth is common among the young adults. This is supposedly a common belief of young adults to glorify socialization and deriving pleasure from the social circle. Third, the need for distraction is seen as important in their day-to-day life and the higher number of things that are available to distract, the better emotional state is reported. While there are no participants who present any other distracting techniques which is also due to the perpetuating nature of the peer circle and peer validation. Finally, the motivation to use is also mediated by the apprehensive nature of the participants and the fear of loss of the status quo. The perceived feeling of happiness from the genre choices from the application is reinforcing the behavior of participants to continue use instead of attending to the actual emotional states.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The present study has been instrumental in finding the association of personality traits to the dependence of TikTok application which is novel in the study of video sharing application platforms. The study has used the 16-personality factor questionnaire as supposed to big five which is used in previous literature due to the specific trait analysis nature of 16 PF questionnaire. This aided in the investigation of emotional states of the individuals in the study along with the qualitative data codes. The need for the study is highlighted in many editorial reports due to the increased popularity of the application with young adults and adolescents and the restrictive nature of TikTok literature to user-gratification theory. The study can be taken forward in analyzing the presence of personality traits using quantitative and qualitative nature of investigation for future studies and to shed understanding on various aspects of psychological well-being and association to seeking support through the platform. The findings of the study highlight the presence of personality traits, distractive nature of application and need to escape the emotional state of the participants through the application. The themes emerged covers the cognitive, emotional and social factors in the motivation to the use of TikTok and the personality association.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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