# UNVEILING THE TIK TOK TREND: EXPLORING USAGE PATTERNS AND IMPACT ON MALAYSIAN YOUTH

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**Abstrak** As users are more immersed with social media since the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok is becoming one of the popular platforms for young users to attain entertainment, acquire knowledge, share information as well as interact with others. In specific, this study aims to understand the TikTok usage patterns among Malaysian youth between 18 to 25 years old and its impact to these users. The study focuses on the significant rise in TikTok usage that is driven by engaging short-form videos to ease boredom during lockdowns. This study examines both positive outcomes such as enhanced creativity and self-expression, and negative consequences such as exposure to inappropriate content and privacy concerns. In-depth interviews were conducted on 15 active TikTok users who are also content creators with a minimum of a thousand followers. Findings showed that Malaysian teens use TikTok for economic, entertainment, education, self-development, socializing, and creativity purposes. They described various usage reasons under each of the category. While the negative impacts identified include addiction and wasting time, fake information and safety issues, bullying and social issues, emotional well-being, health, and racial issues. A new finding from this study shows that TikTok is used for socializing, for example making new friends, sharing experiences, delivering messages, and expressing views and opinions. Additionally, concerns about emotional well-being and health, like effects on emotions, lowering self-esteem, and physical ailments such as headaches and back pain were noted. This study provides insights into the complex dynamics of TikTok usage among Malaysian youth, contributing to the understanding of their digital behavior and broader social media trends.
**Keywords**: *Digital Behavior, Impact, Malaysia, TikTok, Youth*

## INTRODUCTION

With the widespread use of Internet and mobile smartphones, our daily lives are more digitized through the emergence of several social media applications. Of late, social media are widely used by all kinds of users across the world, with popular ones such as Facebook (social networking site), Instagram or YouTube (multimedia sharing application) and many more (Yang, 2020). Today, TikTok has become one of the world's fastest growing social media. This is after it gains popularity in China among the young users. Owned by ByteDance, a technological giant in China, TikTok was formerly known as Douyin when it was first founded in September 2016 (Hassan, 2020). The application then expanded its reach globally in 2017, where ByteDance offers an international version of Douyin for iOS and Android, where it is now known as TikTok. According to Iqbal (2024), TikTok broke into the international market

as they purchase Musical.ly for $1 billion in November 2017. This helps to add 80 million users, especially in the US.

TikTok has become one of the most downloaded applications in both 2019 (693 million) and 2020 (850 million) due to the expansion from Douyin to TikTok (Iqbal, 2024). Particularly, TikTok achieved more than one billion downloads in 150 countries globally and in 75 languages in just two years, making it a formidable competitor to firms such as Netflix, YouTube, Snapchat, and Facebook (Weimann & Masri 2020). According to Yang (2020), TikTok is ranked at seventh place internationally among the top 10 downloadable applications (Yang, 2020). Moreover, Dellato (2021) asserted that TikTok has achieved one billion active users in every month, making it one of the fastest-growing social media platforms in the world.

Explicitly, TikTok encourages sharing of information and lets people from all walks of life tell their stories in new and captivating ways. During the first years of its introduction, TikTok is known as a video-sharing app that focuses on lip-syncing and dancing videos (Khalid, Adnan & Mohamed, 2023). Now, with users from around the world, TikTok is an avenue for different culture, bringing together a wide variety of views and experiences, encouraging diversity and creativity. Ultimately, TikTok is a short-form video platform that allows users to share knowledge, tell stories, and support causes through interesting content with music, visual effects, and more. It makes content creation accessible to everyone, from amateurs to celebrities; and gives everyone an equal shot at going viral. It is also rooted with stickers, graphic effects, filters, texts and voice-over features to make the content more interesting for the users or audiences (Saheera et al., 2023).

TikTok is also known for its significant elements of advanced algorithm and user-friendly design, making it easy for users to find videos that they really like. This kind of innovation not only makes the app more enjoyable to be used but also helps share a wide range of stories and perspectives enriching conversations worldwide. In specific, TikTok fully focuses on algorithm to foster feeds and social experiences, such as the For You Page (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Its algorithm defines the content that a user will view and receive, being highly customized for each user for their niche interest (Khalid et al., 2023).

In addition, users can produce and share short videos on TikTok, ranging from a few seconds to several minutes (Zhu et al., 2020). Users can upload a video of up to 60 seconds, including music samples, filters, short cuts, stickers, and other imaginative extras (Weimann & Masri 2020). Thus, TikTok is a home to a wide variety of communities that cater to hobbies including sports, comedy, food, fashion and beauty, and more (TikTok Newsroom, December 22, 2020). The fresh, innovative, and fast-moving content has captivated young audiences globally (Weimann & Masri 2020).

### Tik Tok in Malaysia

Social media has become an essential part of the society with its usage and prevalence significantly increasing since its inception and further expansion during the COVID-19 pandemic (Regasa & Ettisa, 2023). Experts have observed a global increase in internet usage following the COVID-19 pandemic (KOSMO!, 2023, May 11). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in social media usage among teens and young adults, which could be either helpful or harmful (Najib, Othman, Sulaiman, Tenda, & Zabidi, 2023).

Recently, there is about 28.68 million users on social media in Malaysia, or 83.1% of the nation's population (Howe, 2024). Furthermore, Wion News reported that Malaysia ranks second in the world for social media usage, with Malaysians averaging the use of eight different social media platforms. On average, Malaysians spend about 8 hours and 6 minutes daily on the internet (KOSMO!, 2023, May 11). Malaysia stands as a testament to this digital connectivity with a staggering 97.4% of its population, totaling 33.59 million people having

internet access, and 28.68 million individuals constituting 83.1% of the populace maintaining a social media presence. Moreover, social media has transitioned into a vital tool for maintaining interpersonal connections in Malaysia with personal relationships taking the center stage. Not only that, 57.5% of users engage in social media for leisure, while 44.4% rely on it for staying informed (Howe, 2024).

TikTok has emerged as the darling of Malaysian social media users, capturing 21.9% of the market share with its captivating short-form videos (Howe, 2024). Its allure is further highlighted by the fact that users spend an average of 38 hours and 49 minutes per month on the platform surpassing other social media platforms in terms of engagement and advertising reach (Howe, 2024). Consequently, in Howe's (2024) report, as of January 2024, TikTok is ranked second most favorite social media platform in Malaysia at 21.9%. Likewise, Howe (2024) classified TikTok at fourth rank (68.8%) for the most used social media platform in Malaysia. This prevalent appeal positions TikTok as an impending leader in the country's social media landscape.

## TikTok Usage among Malaysian Youth

The meteoric rise of TikTok in Malaysia can be traced back to the Movement Control Order (MCO) period which commenced in March 2020. Faced with enforced lockdowns, many Malaysians turned to the app as a means of alleviating boredom, staying entertained, and bonding with their families. It has become one of the most popular social media platforms among youths. The phenomenon was so significant that even the then Minister of Higher Education, Dato' Dr. Noraini Ahmad organized a TikTok competition to engage youths during the MCO era (Mohd Izzat, 2020). In essence, TikTok became more than just a social media platform; it became a lifeline for youths during lockdown, offering a space to have fun, socialize, and share their everyday experiences, including their online learning activities.

According to Kemp (2022), there's 14.59 million TikTok users in Malaysia aged 18 years old and above. As of June 2023, a demographic analysis revealed that TikTok users in Malaysia spans from various age groups, with the most significant reach observed among individuals aged 19 to 25 (35.6%), closely followed by the 26 to 32 (29.04%) and below 18 (19.22%) (Statista, 2023). Thus, we can infer that the user base of TikTok in Malaysia is skewed towards the young users such as teenagers and young adults.

The above statistics is similar to past international studies whereby TikTok was used as a go-to platform among youths for creation and sharing of short-form videos as well as adding filters, backgrounds and other enhancements to improve their videos (Qaribu et al., 2024). TikTok is considered relevant to young users due to its simple user interface and wide selection of trendy and appealing music, making it an ideal app to express themselves and communicate with others creatively. In Malaysia, the youths utilize TikTok for personal usage including entertainments, opinions, news, lifestyle and more (Saheera et al., 2023). Based on past findings, Malaysian users consume TikTok for entertainment (87%), while 85% use it for watching videos, taking photos and attaining information, provide knowledge (60%), socialize (41%) and showcase talents (14%) (Hao, Chien & Xuan, 2022). Not only that, TikTok is also used to promote businesses, products and services.

## Impact of TikTok Usage among Malaysian Youth

While using TikTok is beneficial to young users in terms of entertainment, obtaining information and perspectives and more, TikTok can lead to favorable or unfavorable effect on youths, either positive or negative including risky consequences (Saheera et al., 2024). In the positive consequence, TikTok may benefit young users in terms of portraying their abilities

and talents. However, Bernama (2021) stated that TikTok has the potential to expose young users to inappropriate or sexually explicit contents for sexual grooming from predators. Moreover, with oversharing of information in TikTok, young users such as teens are also susceptible to privacy invasion or unsafe conditions. There are also other drawbacks such as negative comments and cyberbullying. On the other hand, TikTok may be addictive for some users as it is perceived to be time-consuming, potentially harming their future development and performance in academic or career (Liang, 2021). However, the impact of TikTok usage among teenagers is still limited in its focus. Henceforth, based on the above-mentioned review, this current study aims to explore on the causes and effects of TikTok usage among youths, particularly teenagers in Malaysia.

## *TikTok Content by Influencers*

In TikTok, contents such as short-form videos, images and text attract users towards a certain perspective, issue or even brand and products promotion that can be found on the platform. In this platform, influencer's contents are one of the persuasive elements that affect youths' usage, decisions or purchasing decisions.

In Malaysia, there are many TikTok influencers or content creators that are developing to entice the users. Particularly, there are several top influencers on TikTok that can influence the young users of Malaysia. According to Aj Marketing (2024), among the top 20 influencers in Malaysia are:

i. Angel Lowee, 24 years old, with 10.4M followers. She creates contents on Lifestyle, Dance, and Fitness. She's also a fashion, beauty, and travel icon known for her lavish lifestyle. Her videos show her love for fitness and health.

ii. Roshan Jeet, 20 years old, with 7.8M followers. He often posts about Comedy and Music and is famous for his parody videos. His creative mind and witty lyrics make his contents stand out. Roshan takes inspiration from his followers through the Q&A feature on TikTok to make his next hit video. He's also a scriptwriter who creates skits about mundane day-to-day activities.

iii. Jeff Yuman, 23 years old, with 3.7M followers. He posts Comedy and Entertainment videos. Jeff's journey began in 2019, and it only took one skit to get him millions of followers. His prank video where he pretended to drop his phone in the toilet gained him a lot of traction. Jeff is known for his comedic videos and card tricks which always leave his followers amazed.

iv. Ahmad Akid, also known as Akiddos, 24 years old, with 2.7M followers. He often posts about Music, Dance, and Entertainment. Akiddos creates parodies of hit drama scenes, recreates viral TikTok trends, and showcases his singing and dancing talents. He has collaborated with several big brands such as Cetaphil, Pepsi, and Lazada. His recommendations to his followers have helped these brands gain huge traction and exposure.

v. Mia Sara Nasuha, 18 years old, with 2.2M followers. Her contents include Movies, Comedy, and Entertainment. She shares vlogs, comedy skits, dance videos, and song lip-syncs with her followers.

vi. Erissa Puteri Hashim, 21 years old, with 1.4M followers. Her topics are on Music and Entertainment. She's known as a music influencer on social media, sharing covers of popular songs, dances, and product reviews. Her talent and charming personality have won the hearts of many on TikTok.

vii. Yana Strawberry, 21 years old, with 980.6K followers. She creates Comedy and Entertainment videos. Yana gained popularity through her hilarious parody short

videos often depicting the everyday scenes in Malaysia with a comedic twist. Her skits with friends are a hit among her followers, and she also collaborates with brands to make video recommendations to her audience.

## *Theoretical Underpinnings*

This study does not adopt a specific theory or conceptual model as its central foundation because the primary aim is to explore the lived experiences, motivations, and outcomes of TikTok usage directly from the perspectives of Malaysian youth. Since the nature of this research is exploratory, the intention is to allow themes and meanings to emerge naturally from the voices of the participants rather than framing their experiences within predefined theoretical boundaries. By doing so, the study prioritizes authenticity and avoids imposing external interpretations that may limit the discovery of nuanced or unexpected insights. The findings generated can later serve as a basis for identifying suitable theoretical linkages or developing a more refined conceptual framework in future research.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design to explore on TikTok usage among Malaysian youths, specifically focusing on teenagers who actively use the platform and produce content. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 respondents aged 18–25. They were selected using purposive sampling that fulfils the respondent's criteria set as well as to ensure diversity in gender, ethnicity, and location. The number of respondents was determined based on data saturation obtained during the data analysis process (Baker & Edwards, 2012). According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), the minimum sample size for qualitative research is 12, as saturation often occurs around this number in a homogeneous group during in-depth interviews (Latham, 2019). Similarly, Baker and Edwards (2012) suggest that the sample size can range from 12 to 60 respondents, with 30 being a moderate number. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Ethical approval was obtained, and all respondents provided informed consent prior to participation.

## *Respondent Criteria*

1. Respondents must have a TikTok social media account, are content creators and active TikTok users.
2. Respondents should be diverse in terms of location, gender, and ethnicity and Malaysian citizens.
3. Respondents should be teenagers aged between 18 and 25 years old.
4. This study will not include respondents under 18 years old as the focus is not on children. According to the Child Act 2001, a child is defined as anyone under 18 years old.

**Table 1.1**: Demographic Profiles of Respondents

| Respondent | Age | Duration of TikTok Usage | No. of Followers | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 22 | 5 Years | 1.5K | Female |
| 2 | 21 | 5 Years | 12.5K | Male |
| 3 | 22 | 3 Years | 18K | Female |
| 4 | 21 | 4 Years | 1.5K | Female |

| 5 | 23 | 6 Years | 63K | Female |
| 6 | 24 | 6 Years | 120K | Male |
| 7 | 20 | 6 Years | 195K | Male |
| 8 | 21 | 8 Years | 10K | Male |
| 9 | 20 | 4 Years | 5000 | Female |
| 10 | 22 | 5 Years | 8.3K | Male |
| 11 | 24 | 6 Years | 110.3K | Male |
| 12 | 24 | 4 Years | 1.5K | Male |
| 13 | 22 | 6 Years | 65K | Male |
| 14 | 19 | 2 Years | 1.5K | Female |
| 15 | 19 | 3 Years | 1.4K | Female |

# RESEARCH FINDINGS

## *Usage of TikTok among youth in Malaysia*

The findings showed that TikTok users use this platform for several main purposes, which also have positive effects on young users, such as entertainment, knowledge or education, creativity or art, socializing, self-development, and economic benefits. Further examination of these major categories reveals many subtopics. Below are the subtopics listed by the respondents under each major category.

Table 1.2: Themes and Subtopics of TikTok Usage among Malaysian Youth

| Themes | Subtopic |
| --- | --- |
| Economy | • Income |
| | • Gifts |
| | • Can promote products |
| Entertainment | • Enjoyment |
| | • Stress relief |
| | • Relaxation |
| Knowledge/Education | • Sharing knowledge |
| | • Gaining knowledge |
| | • Learning new things |
| | • Boosting self-confidence |
| Self-Development | • Motivating oneself |
| | • Finding inspiration |
| Socializing | • Making new friends |
| | • Sharing experiences |
| | • Delivering messages |
| | • Expressing views and opinions |
| Creativity/Art | • Showcasing talent and creativity |

Particularly, entertainment is the main reason why teenagers in Malaysia use TikTok. According to them, this social media platform offers a variety of content to watch after a tiring day of studying or working. Respondents stated that the content they receive is diverse, and videos with funny content, dances, songs, and recordings of events are very entertaining for them. Some respondents are entertained by reading comments on videos uploaded on TikTok. Others are entertained by reading comments on the content they upload themselves.

*"I am actually entertained by reading the comments given by my followers... very creative"* (Respondent 2).

*"I can relax and unwind listening to or watching whatever I like on TikTok. These short videos give me a lot of entertainment with various choices in just 5 minutes"* (Respondent2).

*"TikTok is a stress relief buster for me"* (Respondent 11).

Using the platform for gaining knowledge or education recorded 27% of responses. In this category, respondents stated that they share a lot of knowledge with other TikTok users, gain new knowledge by watching contents uploaded by others, and learn many new things. Respondents agree that this platform provides them with a lot of information on various topics, including learning something new, facts about certain things, unknown facts, and trivial matters that are new knowledge.

*"It's fun to learn new things, like incidents of missing planes before the MAS plane incident"* (Respondent 8).

*"Every day I learn new things. For example, through influencer videos showing and asking random people about flags of other countries... My god, now I know how weak my geography knowledge is"* (Respondent 9).

*"I use the platform to get information that makes my daily life easier. TikTok gives new ideas on trivial things like solving small problems in life that we never thought of"* (Respondent 6).

Respondents also mentioned that TikTok provides opportunities to showcase their hidden talents and creativity. They are often too shy to perform in front of others but have talents that can benefit others and themselves.

*"I am actually afraid to meet people. But I love dancing, so I wear a mask and dance. People don't know me, but I can show my talent. I don't feel shy and am satisfied"* (Respondent 5).

Some respondents try to showcase their talents on this platform because they don't get the chance to do so in daily life. They stated that their purpose in showcasing their talent is for self-satisfaction, and some have even managed to generate income after showing their talents on this platform.

*"I am good at makeup, but never got the chance to do makeup for others because no one knows about my talent... So, I made tutorial videos and showed the public that I can do it... Then out of nowhere, someone contacted me for my makeup services... I was like wow... my talent is acknowledged by people"* (Respondent 11).

Social media users also mentioned that TikTok is the best place to show their creativity, including producing videos.

*"Since using this platform, I feel I have become more creative. I can edit videos, add special effects, creative transitions, sound, music, and many more. It's fun to see my own work"* (Respondent 3).

Using TikTok for socializing only recorded responses from five people, but they provided various reasons for using this platform to socialize, such as making new friends, sharing experiences, delivering messages, and expressing views and opinions. Respondent 11 uses this media to make new friends with the same interests.

> *"I have made many new friends who share the same interests as me. I like to upload content about the scenery of my hometown... Some fans of my videos have started to follow me because we share the same interest in making content about the environment in our residential area" (Respondent 1).*

> *"Honestly, after using TikTok, I have made many friends from all over the world. If our content is similar to other content creators or if people like it, many will contact us... It's really fun" (Respondent 3).*

> *"I am a passive person in real life, but I use TikTok to voice my opinions and give my views on issues that bother me. TikTok makes it easy to express our opinions, and our voice has value on this platform" (Respondent 10).*

Self-development is also one of the reasons why respondents use TikTok. Respondents mentioned that their motivation increases when they receive positive comments from other TikTok users after uploading the contents they are interested in.

> *"I am very enthusiastic and motivated to create more content. The comments give me new ideas and improve the way I create content in the future" (Respondent 2).*

Some respondents stated that watching videos on this platform also inspires them to improve themselves, try new things in life, be brave to voice out, love animals, and more.

> *"I get a lot of inspiration from watching TikTok videos. Honestly, anything we watch can give us inspiration" (Respondent 6).*

Respondents also get inspired on how to interact with other races in the country after engaging in this platform.

> *"I watch content from other races, which gives me knowledge about the lives of other races in this country and inspires and gives me ideas on how to interact with them" (Respondent 15).*

Under the economic category, respondents stated that they can earn a large sum of income when asked to review products and promote items due to having many followers. Respondents also mentioned that they enjoy doing live sessions where they receive gifts that can be converted into money.

> *"I get paid because I have many followers, and some ask me to promote their products. Sometimes I do live sessions, and followers give gifts" (Respondent 2).*

> *"I earn a lot of money... Just do product reviews, and I get money and free items" (Respondent 8).*

> *I can promote my products and sell them... I sell hijabs (Respondent 7).*

### *Impact of Using TikTok among Malaysian Youth*

Discussions about the negative effects mentioned by teenagers using TikTok include Addiction and Wasting Time, Fake Information and Safety, Bullying and Social Issues, Emotional Well-being, and Racial Issues. Some respondents stated they had no comments as they did not see any drawbacks or negative effects from using the platform.

**Table 1.3**: Themes and Subtopics of TikTok Usage Impact among Malaysian Youth

| Themes | Subtopic |
|---|---|
| **Addiction and Wasting Time** | • Can be too distracting |
| | • Addicted |
| | • Wasting time |
| | • Hard to focus on other things |
| **Fake Information and Safety** | • Lots of fake news |
| | • Upload anything without filtering |
| | • Safety and Privacy Issues |
| **Bullying and Social Issues** | • Bullying |
| | • Body Shaming |
| | • Sexual Harassment |
| | • Toxic |
| **Emotional Well-being** | • Affects emotions |
| | • Lowering self-esteem |
| **Health** | • Headache, back pain |
| **Racial Issues** | • Divides races |
| **No Comment** | • No comment |

Nine respondents agreed that addiction and wasting time are the main negative impacts faced by teenagers in the country. Within this category, several issues were highlighted: being too distracted, addicted, wasting time, and difficulty in focusing on other things. Respondents noted that using the platform can be very distracting due to the many videos uploaded.

> *"There's so much to watch... I only intended to watch for a bit, but suddenly, one to two hours have passed... sometimes it feels like a waste of time" (Respondent 1)*

Respondent 12 also agreed that spending too much time on social media is a waste of time.

> *"There are many other things to do like exercising, but it's fun watching TikTok... wasting time on these video" (Respondent 12).*

Respondents 15, 12, 9, and 8 agreed that spending too much time on the platform can lead to addiction.

> *"At first, I didn't realize I was addicted to TikTok. But when I spent 2 to 3 hours on it daily, neglecting important things, I realized I was addicted" (Respondent 12).*

Regarding Fake Information and Safety, issues such as uploading anything without filtering, and safety and privacy were raised.

> *"There's a lot of fake news... if you don't read carefully, like checking the source or date, you'll often read false information" (Respondent 1).*

> *"No one verifies the authenticity of the news, so everything gets uploaded without filtering" (Respondent 1).*

Safety and Privacy Issues were also mentioned.

> *"Everything is shown. There was a challenge... like unboxing something on the first night... everything is shown to the world" (Respondent 4).*

For Bullying and Social Issues, and Emotional Well-being, each had the agreement of five respondents. Here are some responses:

> *"Bullying on social media is severe; sometimes we don't even realize we are being bullied. Like if we make a mistake on the road and someone records and uploads it on TikTok, then people comment harshly on it... that's bullying" (Respondent 5).*

> *"Body shaming happens every day, affecting not just women but men and children too" (Respondent 14).*

> *"Maybe because I seem very outgoing on TikTok, someone called me a cheap woman and invited me to a hotel" (Respondent 10).*

> *"There are many toxic people here who can crush your spirit" (Respondent 4).*

For Emotional Well-being, the respondents noted that their emotional disturbances are not only intentional but also unintentional from TikTok users.

> *"When I post pictures and videos, and not many people like or comment... I feel embarrassed and hurt. It feels like no one notices me. I feel restless, always thinking about why not many people like my posts" (Respondent 18).*

> *"When no one responds to my posts, it makes me feel unworthy, and I lose the motivation to post anything again" (Respondent 14).*

Racial issues were also mentioned by the respondents. They felt that since the platform has no filtering, anyone can upload anything even if the content is inappropriate and offensive to certain races.

> *"Even though TikTok removes these contents after reports, it's already too late..." (Respondent 9).*

One respondent mentioned that watching too many videos on the platform caused him headache as well as neck and back pain.

> *"I get distracted watching TikTok. I only stop when I start feeling pain. Maybe it's from looking at too many things. Also, holding the phone in a bent position causes neck pain. But this is my own fault, not TikTok's... hahaha" (Respondent 6).*

Respondents 9 and 10 also mentioned racial issues.

> *"Netizens freely upload all kinds of content, not realizing that certain topics can hurt particular races. They upload everything without thinking" (Respondent 10).*

Respondents 2, 11, and 13 did not want to comment on the negative aspects of social media use. Instead, they shared the opinion that as users, it's our responsibility to protect ourselves and avoid the negative effects.

*"We need to control ourselves. The platform is just a tool. We need to use it wisely to avoid causing trouble for ourselves" (Respondent 13).*

Three respondents did not want to comment on the negative aspects of TikTok, stating that there will not be any problem if the platform is used for good.

*"Even without TikTok, there are many other social media platforms that can bring more harm. Use it wisely to find the good. It's all in our hands. We need to control ourselves" (Respondent 11)*

## DISCUSSION

The exploration of TikTok usage among Malaysian youths has unveiled several key themes and subtopics, revealing the multifaceted nature of the platform's impact. Entertainment emerges as a predominant theme, with Malaysian youths engaging with TikTok primarily for relaxation and stress relief. This aligns with findings from Kaur (2023) and Mekler (2021), who noted that students are drawn to TikTok for its enjoyable and stress-relieving content. Zhao Ying (2021) further highlighted TikTok's convenience in delivering entertainment, while Manggo et al. (2022) underscored the platform's role in allowing young users to express their creativity, thereby enhancing its entertainment value.

Economic opportunities also play a significant role in TikTok usage. Many respondents use the platform to promote products or businesses, reflecting the effectiveness of influencer collaborations in marketing, as emphasized by Martini, Suardhika, and Dewi (2022). Kaur (2023) discussed TikTok's potential for income generation, indicating its growing economic impact on the younger generation. This aspect demonstrates TikTok's evolving role beyond mere entertainment, offering practical benefits such as business promotion and income opportunities.

Self-development is another critical area where TikTok proves influential. Respondents use the platform to boost self-confidence, seek motivation, and find inspiration, consistent with Fauzi, Azman, and Aziz's (2022) research on TikTok's role in building social confidence. Yang (2023) elaborated on how positive feedback from posts triggers dopamine release, contributing to a sense of pleasure and validation for teenagers. TikTok also facilitates creativity and art, with Martini, Suardhika, and Dewi (2022) noting that it empowers users to create and share short videos. Babul Bahrudin (2024) echoed this view, emphasizing TikTok's role as a free space for self-expression and learning. Fauzi, Azman, and Aziz (2022) highlighted TikTok's effectiveness in exploring talents, especially for those without traditional promotion avenues. Tik Tok is a preferred tool to highlight talent and find following and audience without barriers of national boundaries or limitation of physical and local interferences (Patel & Binjola, 2020).

Educational purposes constitute another significant theme. Respondents utilize TikTok for sharing knowledge and learning, aligning with Yang's (2023) suggestion that short videos can be valuable for studies, depending on their usage. The platform's evolution into a search engine for younger users further illustrates its educational potential.

A new finding from this study is the use of TikTok for socializing. Respondents mentioned about making new friends, sharing experiences, and expressing views through the platform. This aspect of TikTok adds a professional dimension to their social interactions, highlighting its role in building and maintaining social connections.

However, the study also reveals several negative impacts associated with uncontrolled TikTok usage. Addiction and time wastage are prominent concerns, with TikTok's endless stream of short videos leading to distraction and neglecting other important activities. Yang (2023) highlighted that teenagers with developing self-control are particularly susceptible to addiction, stressing the need for improved self-discipline and time management. Educators and parents can play a pivotal role in helping teenagers establish boundaries and use the platform responsibly.

The spread of fake information and risks to safety and privacy are additional concerns. TikTok's ease of sharing unverified content can lead to misinformation and unnecessary distress. Users need to develop critical thinking skills to navigate credible information, and TikTok should enhance its content monitoring and verification processes to ensure user safety.

TikTok is an application that is being used a lot; thus, it causes many criminal acts such as defamation, cybercrime, and cyberbullying (Pandela, & Riadi, 2020). Cyberbullying is a significant issue, with reports of body shaming, sexual harassment, and toxic behavior. Fauzi, Azman, and Aziz (2022) highlighted rude and disrespectful comments on TikTok, while the tragic case of Rajeswary Appahu (Muzaffar, 2024) underscores the severity of cyberbullying. Raising awareness and implementing robust reporting systems are crucial for addressing this issue. Encouraging a culture of kindness and respect online is essential to mitigating cyberbullying.

TikTok's impact on emotional well-being is complex. While some teenagers benefit from increased self-confidence and creative expression, others face a decline in self-esteem due to negative comments and unrealistic beauty standards. The pressure for likes and followers can induce anxiety and stress. Promoting mental health awareness and encouraging supportive interactions can help mitigate these issues.

Physical health concerns such as headaches, eye strain, and back pain from prolonged screen time are also notable. These issues can develop into more serious conditions if not addressed. Regular breaks, balanced lifestyles, and good posture practices can help prevent long-term health problems.

Lastly, racial issues on TikTok, such as the derogatory term 'Type C,' highlight the platform's role in both exacerbating and addressing racial tensions. TikTok must enforce strict policies against hate speech, and users should be more conscious of the content they share. Promoting cultural sensitivity through educational content can foster a more inclusive online community.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that TikTok can be a multifunctional and relevant platform in the daily lives of teenagers in this country. The research findings indicate that TikTok plays an important role in the lives of Malaysian teenagers for various purposes and benefits, including entertainment and socializing. The findings also highlight the potential of TikTok as a platform that can generate income if used correctly. In conclusion, while TikTok offers numerous opportunities

for creativity and entertainment, teenagers need to be mindful of its potential negative impacts. Responsible usage, guided by proper education and awareness can help maximize the benefits of the platform while minimizing its drawbacks. Parents, educators, and the platform itself have roles to play in ensuring that TikTok remains a positive and safe space for the young users.

## DECLARATION

### *Ethics approval and consent to participate*

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee. All participants were consenting adults who voluntarily agreed to take part in the interviews. The research did not involve vulnerable populations or the collection of sensitive personal data. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and only general thematic insights were used in the analysis to ensure the privacy and well-being of all individuals involved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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