



The Role of TikTok in Enhancing University Students' Confidence and Self-Esteem

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Abstract: This study explores TikTok's impact on enhancing university students' confidence and self-esteem, utilizing a mixed-methods approach comprising quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews among 300 students from a public university in Northeast Thailand. The research investigates how TikTok's unique features—such as challenges, duets, and personalized content—contribute to its potential as a transformative social media platform beyond mere entertainment. Findings suggest that active engagement, particularly content creation and social interaction, significantly boosts users' self-esteem and confidence. Additionally, TikTok's role in informal language learning emerges as a novel area for English Language Teaching (ELT), highlighting its capacity to empower users academically and socially. This study identifies both opportunities and challenges in using TikTok, offering insights into its balanced integration into educational frameworks.

Keywords: confidence, self-esteem, social media impact, TikTok, empowerment

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Introduction

In the digital age, social media platforms have profoundly reshaped the ways in which individuals interact, communicate, and perceive themselves. Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as a particularly influential force, capturing the attention of younger demographics with its unique blend of short-form video content. Known for its engaging and often ephemeral media, TikTok transcends traditional social media functions, offering unprecedented opportunities for self-expression and creativity (Smith & Davenport, 2021). Its rapid rise to cultural prominence is not solely attributable to its entertainment value but also highlights its potential as a powerful educational tool.

The distinctiveness of TikTok lies in its algorithm-driven content delivery system and interactive features such as challenges, duets, and live streams, which not only enhance user engagement but also foster a community-oriented environment. This platform enables users to explore and affirm

their identities in dynamic ways (Wilson & Brown, 2020), contributing to its explosive growth and ubiquitous presence across global youth cultures. As TikTok garners global popularity, its impact extends into domains of psychological well-being and self-confidence, making it a compelling subject for academic inquiry (Jones & Green, 2020).

This influence is particularly pronounced among university students, a group that navigates complex social and academic challenges. Social media can significantly affect these students' self-esteem and self-identity, aspects that are crucial during their formative university years (Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield, & Dapretto, 2016). TikTok, with its capacity to engage users in both light-hearted and profound ways, offers a rich tapestry of content that can affirm or challenge these personal explorations.

Moreover, the potential of TikTok as an educational tool is increasingly recognized in fields such as English Language Teaching (ELT). The platform's global reach and ease of content creation provide unique opportunities to integrate cultural and linguistic diversity into the classroom. Educators are beginning to explore how TikTok can be used to enhance language acquisition, engage with cultural trends, and even break down traditional barriers to learning (Gao & Zhang, 2020).

By focusing on these dimensions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of TikTok's dual role as both a social and educational platform. It contributes to the broader discourse on media psychology and education by investigating how TikTok can influence university students' confidence and self-esteem and support their language learning and cultural exchange processes. This research not only addresses the immediate impacts of TikTok but also its potential long-term effects on educational practices and psychological health.

Literature Review

Confidence and self-esteem are critical psychological constructs that influence individual behavior and social interactions within both psychological and educational contexts. Confidence, closely aligned with Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, is defined as the belief in one's abilities to accomplish tasks and meet challenges effectively (Bandura, 1997). Self-esteem, as described by Rosenberg (1965), encompasses an individual's overall subjective emotional evaluation of their own worth, which includes emotional states ranging from triumph to despair and affects attitudes such as pride and shame.

The impact of social media on these constructs has been a focal point of contemporary psychological research. Traditional platforms like Facebook and Instagram have been extensively studied for their effects on self-esteem, which are often mediated through mechanisms of social comparison and feedback loops (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006; Sherman et al., 2016). These platforms typically encourage users to present idealized versions of their lives, leading to negative self-comparisons among peers. This dynamic has been shown to potentially reduce self-esteem and increase feelings of inadequacy.

Conversely, TikTok introduces a different dynamic to the social media landscape. Its unique design promotes not only consumption but also active and creative user engagement. This includes participating in challenges, creating contents, and fostering interactions that are less about presentation and more about participation (Jin & Myrick, 2019). Such features can diminish the negative effects of social comparison by promoting a more inclusive and diverse content environment, which may, in turn, enhance users' self-esteem and confidence (Lee & Lee, 2020).

Unlike other social media platforms, TikTok's algorithm promotes content diversity and personal relevance, which can mitigate the intensity of negative social comparisons typically seen on

platforms like Instagram and Facebook. The quick, creative nature of TikTok contents, from dance challenges to educational snippets, encourages a level of spontaneity and authenticity that can be particularly empowering for young users, fostering both community engagement and individual creativity (MacKinnon, Kia, & Lacombe-Duncan, 2021).

Furthermore, TikTok's role in cultural dissemination is significant. It not only allows users to engage with global cultural trends but also to participate in micro-communities where niche interests and languages flourish. This aspect of TikTok is crucial in understanding its potential as an educational tool, especially in language learning contexts where exposure to varied linguistic environments can enhance learning outcomes (Zhao & Zapp, 2020).

Despite the growing body of research on social media impacts, studies specifically targeting TikTok's unique influence on psychological outcomes and educational practices remain limited. There is a particular deficiency in research exploring how TikTok, through its unique interactive and creative features, influences confidence and self-esteem among university students—a demographic that is both highly engaged with social media and notably vulnerable to its psychological impacts.

Additionally, while TikTok's potential as an educational tool is recognized anecdotally, empirical studies examining its efficacy in enhancing language learning and fostering cultural competence are sparse. This gap is especially pronounced in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), where the integration of digital tools is rapidly advancing but not well documented in academic literature.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how TikTok's distinctive social dynamics and content generation capabilities influence university students' self-esteem and confidence. It also explores TikTok's utility in ELT, aiming to understand how these elements can support language learning and cultural exchange, potentially revolutionizing traditional educational methodologies.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilizes a mixed-method approach to comprehensively assess the impact of TikTok on the confidence and self-esteem of university students, as well as its potential to enhance English Language Teaching (ELT) practices. By combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, the research aims to capture a broad spectrum of TikTok's influence, allowing for a more robust analysis of how digital interaction contributes to psychological and educational outcomes.

Participants

The participants consist of 300 university students aged between 19 to 22 years old from a public university in the Northeast of Thailand. These students were enrolled in a variety of undergraduate programs and were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse mix in terms of gender, academic discipline, and year of study. This diverse sampling is critical for exploring the varied impacts of TikTok across different student demographics.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Quantitative Surveys. This study employed a comprehensive survey instrument to measure TikTok usage patterns, including the frequency of use and types of engagement. Psychological constructs such as self-esteem and confidence were assessed using established scales: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and a self-efficacy scale adapted from Bandura's

General Self-Efficacy Scale (Bandura, 1997). To ensure a broad and representative sample, surveys were distributed electronically through university email lists and various social media platforms. The quantitative data collected from the surveys were analyzed using SPSS software. This analysis included descriptive statistics to outline basic user patterns and inferential statistics, specifically regression analysis, to explore the relationships between TikTok engagement and the psychological constructs of interest. The purpose of this approach was not only to identify potential correlations but also to assess the predictive impact of specific types of TikTok engagement on reported outcomes such as self-esteem and confidence.

Qualitative Interviews. In-depth qualitative insights were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their personal experiences and perceptions regarding their use of TikTok. These interviews were conducted using video conferencing tools to accommodate participants from various geographic locations and were audio-recorded with prior consent to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data. The qualitative data from the interviews underwent thematic analysis, a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data. NVivo software facilitated the organization and coding of the transcripts. The themes derived from this analysis provided a nuanced view that complemented and expanded upon the quantitative findings, illustrating the complex dynamics of TikTok's impact on users.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical oversight for the study was provided by the university's ethics committee. All participants were fully briefed about the aims of the study and their rights, including the assurance of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Written consent was secured from all participants, underscoring the study's adherence to ethical research practices.

Findings

The quantitative component of the study analyzed responses from 300 university students, offering a robust dataset to assess the impacts of TikTok usage. The findings are summarized in the following table and narrative descriptions.

Table 1

Main Aspects of TikTok Usage, Engagement Types, Perceived Social Support, and Self-Esteem/Confidence

Variable	Description	Result
TikTok Usage	Frequency of use	65% daily, 25% several times a week
Engagement with Content	Average daily usage time	40% spend 1-2 hours
	Viewing content	85%
	Liking posts	75%
	Commenting on posts	50%
Perceived Social Support	Posting original content	30%
	Feeling supported by the TikTok community	70% agreed or strongly agreed
Self-Esteem and Confidence	Increase in confidence since using TikTok	60% reported an increase
	Correlation between engagement and confidence	Significant ($r = .45, p < .01$)

Upon the quantitative data analysis from the survey, it is revealed that the majority of respondents (65%) reported using TikTok daily, with 25% using it several times a week. On average, 40% of the participants spent 1-2 hours on TikTok per day. As determined the engagement with content, viewing the content was the most common use of TikTok (85% of respondents), followed by liking posts (75%), commenting (50%), and posting original content (30%) respectively. In the realm of perceived social support, it divulged 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported by the TikTok community. Participants who engaged in posting the original content reported higher levels of perceived social support compared to those who only viewed content. In view of self-esteem and confidence, 60% of the respondents reported an increase in confidence since using TikTok. This increase was significantly correlated with the level of engagement on the platform ($r = .45, p < .01$), particularly among those who posted the original content.

The table indicates a significant positive correlation, suggesting that higher levels of active participation on TikTok (especially content creation) are associated with increased confidence levels among university students. This detailed breakdown helps to emphasize the impact of different types of engagement on TikTok in relation to confidence, providing a nuanced understanding of user interaction with the platform. Considered as the specific variable, it was found that TikTok Engagement on Self-Esteem and Confidence is significantly correlated with other variables as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Impact of TikTok Engagement on Self-Esteem and Confidence

Variable	Description	Result
Engagement Type	Content Creation	$\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$
	Commenting	$\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$
Frequency of Use	Daily Usage	65% of participants; $r = .45, p < .01$
Perceived Social Support	Reported by users	Positive correlation with self-esteem and confidence

According to Table 2, it exhibits engagement and psychological outcomes. Active participation on TikTok, especially through content creation and interaction such as commenting and participating in challenges, was significantly correlated with increased self-esteem and confidence levels. These activities are potent predictors of enhanced psychological well-being, underscoring the importance of active engagement over passive consumption. Considering the frequency of use, a significant portion of the participants (65%) used TikTok daily. This frequent engagement was positively associated with increases in self-reported confidence and self-esteem, highlighting the role of regular interaction with the platform in fostering psychological health. Perceived Social Support is another variable examined to explore the impact of TikTok Engagement on Self-Esteem and Confidence. Users engaging more intensively in posting and interacting with content reported higher levels of perceived social support from the community. This, in turn, was linked with higher self-esteem and confidence scores, indicating the value of a supportive community in enhancing personal well-being. These statistical outcomes illustrate that active and creative involvement on TikTok correlates strongly with positive psychological effects, emphasizing the platform's potential as a tool for personal development.

Upon qualitative findings, the thematic analysis of the interview data uncovered several key themes that elucidate the mechanisms behind the quantitative results, enriching our understanding of TikTok's impact, namely community and belonging, creative expression and validation, and learning and growth. Based on the community and belonging theme, numerous

participants expressed that TikTok facilitated a sense of community and belonging, which was crucial to their self-esteem. One participant described the experience as being “*part of a global village where I can share and be myself without judgment. This really boosted my confidence*” [translated from Thai], which highlighted the platform’s role in fostering inclusive social spaces, while the creative expression and validation theme revealed that many respondents highlighted the empowering nature of creating content on TikTok. “*When I post my videos, the feedback I get is not just likes or comments—it is encouragement that what I have to say matters. It is really uplifting*” [translated from Thai], shared a communications major. This theme underscores the importance of creative expression as a source of personal validation and psychological support.

Last but not least, the learning and growth theme divulged that TikTok was also noted as a valuable tool for learning new skills, especially language skills, which contributed significantly to academic and personal confidence. “*I have learned so much from TikTok—from language tips to cultural nuances that are not taught in textbooks. It makes me feel more prepared and confident in my studies*” [translated from Thai], remarked a participant studying international relations. This reflects the platform’s potential as an informal educational resource. These qualitative themes provide a deeper insight into how specific uses of TikTok contribute to improved self-esteem and confidence, supporting the quantitative findings and offering a comprehensive view of the platform’s multifaceted impact.

Regression analysis indicated a positive relationship between the level of active engagement on TikTok (e.g., content creation, commenting) and self-reported increases in confidence ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). Additionally, the feeling of social support from the TikTok community was a significant predictor of improved confidence among participants ($\beta = .28, p < .001$) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Positive Relationship in Increasing Confidence

Predictor Variable	Regression Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Active TikTok Engagement	0.32	0.05	< 0.001	[0.22, 0.42]
Perceived Social Support	0.28	0.04	< 0.001	[0.20, 0.36]

This table highlights the statistically significant positive relationships between active engagement on TikTok, perceived social support from the TikTok community, and self-reported increases in confidence among university students. These findings underscore the importance of active participation and community support in leveraging the platform’s potential for enhancing self-esteem and well-being.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the influence of TikTok on university students’ self-esteem and confidence, as well as its roles in English language learning and usage. The results underscore that not only passive consumption but also active engagement on TikTok—through content creation and commenting—substantially boosts self-esteem and confidence. This aligns with Sherman et al. (2016), who found that interactive engagement on social media platforms can lead to positive psychological outcomes. Moreover, the qualitative insights from this study highlight the importance of community and creative expression, which resonate with findings from Valkenburg et al. (2006), suggesting that social media can enhance feelings of belonging and personal efficacy when used creatively.

Furthermore, the role of TikTok as an informal learning tool, especially in language and cultural exchange, is an innovative finding that extends the current literature. This study found that TikTok not only bolsters confidence in using English but also enhances cultural understanding, echoing Gao & Zhang's (2020) observations on digital platforms' potential to facilitate immersive language learning experiences. These insights are particularly valuable, considering the scant literature on TikTok's educational implications compared to its entertainment value.

As considered theoretical contributions, the integration of social interaction and self-efficacy theories further enriches the academic discourse surrounding digital media use. This study illustrates how TikTok fosters a dynamic social environment that enhances self-esteem through mechanisms identified in social interaction theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Similarly, the positive reinforcement associated with content creation on TikTok supports Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997), as it enhances users' beliefs in their capabilities, particularly regarding language skills. These theoretical applications underscore the multifaceted impacts of TikTok, bridging social psychology and educational technology.

Practically, the findings suggest that TikTok can serve as a valuable tool in ELT settings. The platform's ability to engage students in producing and interacting with content can be strategically harnessed to improve language skills and cultural competencies. By integrating TikTok projects into curricula, educators can provide students with real-world applications of linguistic concepts, potentially transforming traditional language learning paradigms. Furthermore, TikTok's capacity for community building could help cultivate a supportive educational environment, enhancing communicative competence and reducing learning anxiety.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality or track the longitudinal impacts of TikTok usage on psychological and educational outcomes. Future research employing longitudinal designs could elucidate these dynamics more comprehensively. Additionally, the study's demographic and geographic specificity limits its generalizability. Subsequent studies should aim to include a more diverse and global sample to validate these findings across different cultural contexts and extend the understanding of TikTok's global educational potential.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has significantly illuminated TikTok's influential role in enhancing self-esteem and confidence among university students, while also bolstering their language learning capabilities. Grounded in the frameworks of social interaction and self-efficacy theories, the findings provide compelling evidence that TikTok, beyond being a mere platform for entertainment, serves as a powerful tool for educational engagement and personal development.

The integration of TikTok into daily activities offers students not only a medium for creative expression but also a supportive community that enhances their psychological well-being. This dual benefit is particularly pertinent in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), where TikTok has shown potential to transcend traditional educational methods by facilitating more dynamic, interactive, and culturally diverse learning experiences. The ability of TikTok to engage students in meaningful linguistic practices and cultural exchanges highlights its utility as an innovative educational resource.

However, while the benefits are notable, this study also acknowledges the complexity of social media's impact on youth. The positive aspects of TikTok can only be fully leveraged in educational settings if accompanied by strategies that mitigate potential risks such as cyberbullying, social

anxiety, and the pressure of social comparison. Educators and policymakers should consider these factors when integrating social media tools into formal education systems.

Future research should aim to address the limitations identified in this study by employing longitudinal designs that can provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of TikTok use on student outcomes. Such studies could help delineate the causal relationships between TikTok engagement and educational achievements, offering a clearer understanding of how these dynamics evolve over time. Moreover, expanding the demographic and cultural scope of the research would enhance the generalizability of the findings, allowing for a broader evaluation of TikTok's educational potential across different global contexts.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on the educational implications of social media and opens up new pathways for integrating digital platforms like TikTok into learning environments. By continuing to explore and understand the multifaceted roles of these platforms, educators can harness their full potential to enrich the educational landscape and foster more inclusive, engaging, and effective learning experiences.

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