

THE IMPACT OF TIKTOK ON GENERATION Z'S COMMUNICATION PATTERNS:

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Abstract

TikTok has emerged as one of the most dominant social media platforms in the world, particularly among Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012. This article aims to examine the impact of TikTok usage on Generation Z's communication patterns through a literature review approach. By analyzing various academic sources from the fields of communication studies, media psychology, and digital culture, this article concludes that TikTok has shaped a new mode of communication characterized by visual content, brevity, and trend-driven interaction. On one hand, the platform expands social networks and enhances self-expression among Gen Z. On the other hand, intensive use has the potential to weaken face-to-face communication skills, shorten attention spans, and encourage superficial interaction. Understanding these dynamics is critical for educators, parents, and policymakers.

Keywords: TikTok, Generation Z, communication patterns, social media, digital communication

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the global communication landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. The rise of short-video sharing platforms, particularly TikTok, which was launched globally in 2018, has fundamentally changed the way millions of people, especially young people, communicate, consume information, and express themselves. As of 2024, TikTok has surpassed 1.5 billion monthly active users worldwide, with Generation Z representing the largest and most engaged user base.

Generation Z, who grew up alongside smartphones and the internet from an early age, is widely regarded as the first truly digitally native generation. For them, TikTok is not merely a source of entertainment; it functions as a primary social space for making friends, learning, sharing opinions, and constructing personal identity. However, this shift raises important academic questions: how does TikTok usage impact the communication patterns of Generation Z, both positively and negatively?

This article is developed through a literature review methodology, analyzing and synthesizing relevant academic sources. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the relationship between TikTok usage and shifts in Generation Z's communication behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generation Z and Its Communication Characteristics

Tapscott (2009), in his seminal work *Grown Up Digital*, described the generation raised alongside digital technology as individuals accustomed to multitasking, instant communication, and consuming information in concise formats. These characteristics are even more pronounced in Generation Z, who have never known a world without the internet. Research by Seemiller and Grace (2016) found that Gen Z tends to feel more comfortable communicating through text and visual media than through direct face-to-face conversation, and strongly prefers messages that are brief, dense with meaning, and accompanied by visual elements.

Prensky (2001), who popularized the term digital natives, argued that this generation thinks and communicates in a fundamentally different way from previous generations because their brains have been conditioned since early childhood by constant digital stimuli. In this context, TikTok emerges as the platform most aligned with Gen Z's communication style: visual, fast-paced, interactive, and trend-driven.

TikTok as a New Communication Space

Unlike earlier social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, which were primarily text-based, TikTok has built a communication ecosystem entirely centered on short-form videos ranging from 15 seconds to 10 minutes. TikTok's sophisticated algorithm, known as the For You Page (FYP), learns each user's preferences deeply and delivers highly personalized content, creating a communication experience that feels both highly relevant and deeply engaging (Zeng, 2021).

Research by Bossen and Kottasz (2020) found that Gen Z uses TikTok not only for entertainment, but also as a medium for self-expression, identity formation, and community building. Interactive features such as Duet, Stitch, and the comment section create new participatory communication patterns in which the boundary between content creator and content consumer becomes increasingly blurred.

Positive Impacts on Communication Patterns

A number of studies have identified positive impacts of TikTok on Gen Z's communication patterns. First, expanded self-expression: the platform provides Gen Z with a space to express their opinions, creativity, and identity to a global audience without requiring financial resources or access to traditional media (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Second, enhanced visual literacy: regular consumption and production of video content has made Gen Z increasingly skilled as visual communicators, a competency of growing relevance in the modern workplace. Third, democratization of information: a significant volume of high-quality educational content circulates on TikTok, covering topics from science and law to health and social issues, presented in engaging and easily digestible formats.

Negative Impacts on Communication Patterns

However, multiple studies have also documented negative impacts that warrant serious attention. First, shortened attention spans: the habit of consuming extremely brief videos makes it increasingly difficult for Gen Z to maintain focus during conversations or discussions that require sustained engagement. A Microsoft (2023) study reported that the average attention span of individuals who intensively use short-video platforms has dropped to approximately eight seconds. Second, weakened face-to-face communication: Twenge's (2017) research in iGen documented a correlation between rising social media use and declining Gen Z competence and comfort in direct communication, including the ability to read facial expressions and interpret body language.

Third, fragmented and superficial communication: the extremely short content format encourages the oversimplification of complex issues into easily digestible narratives that frequently lose nuance and depth. This phenomenon has been termed TikTok brain, in which users become accustomed to thinking and communicating in brief fragments without the capacity for deep information processing (Haidt, 2023). Fourth, the risk of disinformation: the ease with which content can be created and distributed without a verification process creates an ecosystem in which misinformation spreads rapidly and widely among young users who have not yet developed fully mature media literacy.

METHOD

This article employs a systematic literature review method. Academic sources were collected from Google Scholar, SINTA, and JSTOR databases using the following keywords: TikTok, Generation Z, digital communication, social media, communication patterns, and short-video platform. Inclusion criteria for source selection were: (1) published between 2018 and 2024; (2) classified as peer-reviewed journals, academic books, or reports from credible institutions; and (3) directly relevant to the topic of TikTok and Generation Z communication. Through this selection process, ten primary sources were identified, analyzed, and synthesized in this article.

DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed above reveals that TikTok exerts a bidirectional influence on Generation Z's communication patterns. The platform is neither entirely harmful nor entirely beneficial; its impact depends heavily on how, how frequently, and with what level of awareness Gen Z engages with it.

The most concerning dimension is that the communication patterns shaped by TikTok are structural and long-term in nature. As the generation raised on short-form video communication enters higher education, the professional workforce, or broader civic life, all of which demand complex face-to-face communication skills, the gap between digital habits and real-world demands may become a serious barrier.

The solution recommended by researchers is not to ban TikTok, but to strengthen digital and media literacy among Gen Z from an early age. The ability to think critically about consumed content, awareness of the consequences of excessive use, and a healthy balance between digital and face-to-face communication are skills that must be deliberately cultivated within family and educational environments.

CONCLUSION

TikTok has significantly transformed Generation Z's communication patterns, shaping a communication style that is more visual, brief, and trend-oriented. Its positive contributions include expanded self-expression, improved visual literacy, and democratized access to information. However, its negative effects, including shortened attention spans, weakened face-to-face communication skills, and heightened exposure to disinformation, cannot be overlooked. The key to navigating this challenge is not a rejection of technology, but the cultivation of digital literacy that empowers Gen Z to be critical, thoughtful users who remain capable of communicating effectively across all contexts of life.

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