The Impact of TikTok Usage on University Students' Academic Performance and Moral Development

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Abstract
This study investigates the effect of TikTok usage on students' academic performance and moral development at university level. This study used a survey (questionnaire) method to collect the data. The research sample comprised 400 students from the public and private sector universities in Faisalabad, Pakistan. This study's main objectives were to determine the level of use of TikTok, academic performance and moral development of students of higher level. Find the impact of use of TikTok on academic performance and on moral development and to determine the effect of different variables (age, gender, program faculty and institute) on use of TikTok and moral development. The 21st version of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was utilized for the analysis. In this study descriptive statistics were displayed, and an independent sample t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and regression were used to identify the difference according to gender, age, faculty, degree-level, university and sector. Coefficient results indicated that TikTok and academic performance have a direct correlation while TikTok and moral development have an inverse relationship. Regression results indicated that when level of use of TikTok increases by one unit the academic performance increases by 0.50 units while and moral development decreases by 0.62 units.

Keywords: TikTok, University Students', Academic Performance, Moral Development

Introduction
Education is fundamental in shaping an individual's future, laying the groundwork for success and numerous opportunities. Abdul, (2023). It enhances intellectual development and fosters critical thinking (Hanssen & Solvoll, 2018), while also being key to mastering modern technology. In this regard, advancements in technology have significantly improved access to

education (Brahm & Scherzinger, 2023). In today's digital age, a survey has shown that nearly 4 billion people regularly engage with at least one social media platform, with university students increasingly gravitating toward TikTok (Wang, 2024). TikTok's popularity stems from its ability to connect users with relatable creators and simplify complex ideas into short, engaging videos (Adawiyah, 2020). By 2020, TikTok became the most downloaded social media app and, by 2021, had more than 1 billion monthly active users, making it the most widely used platform by January 2023 (Adawiyah, 2020). However, despite its educational potential, the platform exposes users, especially younger ones, to a mix of positive and negative content, which can be harmful (Aggarwal, 2020). Excessive use can also distract students from their academic responsibilities as they explore personal satisfaction and goals (Barry, 2024). Widely used by students, particularly those in higher education, the platform allows them to easily create and enjoy short videos (Amin, 2023). Although some students leverage TikTok for educational purposes, many become distracted, negatively affecting their academic focus (Anggi, 2021).

While several studies have explored TikTok's growing popularity among students, deeper insights into its impact are still needed. This research will examine how TikTok usage influences university students' academic performance and moral development. This study aims to help students understand TikTok's educational potential, promoting more intentional and creative usage. It will also aid educational institutions in developing policies on app usage and provide valuable guidance for policymakers to monitor content, ensuring that students' moral values are upheld. Furthermore, it will offer insights to Pakistan's social media and communication regulators on the ethical dimensions of TikTok content. This study will assist students in recognizing TikTok's academic potential, encouraging them to use it thoughtfully for creative purposes. It will also support institutions and policymakers in establishing guidelines and overseeing content to maintain high educational and creative standards at the university level.

Research Questions
These are some research questions of use of TikTok on academic performance and moral development of students at university level:
1) What is the academic level of students at university level?
2) What is the level of use of Tiktok among students of university level?
3) What is the level of morality among students at university level?
4) What is the impact of use of Tiktok on the academic performance of students at university level?
5) What is the impact of use of Tiktok on moral development of students at university level?
6) What is the effect of different variables (e.g., age, gender, program, faculty and institute) on the use of Tiktok?

Literature Review
This section outlines the theoretical framework of the study, drawing on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)Scherr, S., & Wang, K. (2021). which explains how individuals actively engage with media to fulfill specific needs and

desiresOriginally proposed by Lazarsfeld and Stanton in the 1940s, UGT remains relevant today, particularly in Pakistan's expanding higher education sector, which has advanced alongside technology (Nieminen, 2023). Globalization fosters the exchange of ideas and cultures, extending social connections beyond borders (Kustiawan, 2022). Social media, a collection of internet-based applications, enables the creation and sharing of user-generated content (Itani & Dingus, 2017). The growing dominance of social media has, in many cases, replaced traditional media (Harriger & Kunz, 2023). Popular platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok have become integral to daily life, with TikTok rapidly emerging as one of the most widely used apps (Al-Maroof, 2021).

Launched by the Chinese company ByteDance in 2016 as Douyin and rebranded as TikTok outside China, the app quickly gained popularity (Wang, 2020). By 2018, it became the most downloaded mobile app globally, allowing users to create and share 15–60 second videos, customized with filters, music, and effects (Mazumdar, 2022). Studies show that the majority of TikTok users are under 35, comprising a large portion of the youth population. However, the platform has faced temporary bans in countries like Indonesia (2018) and Pakistan (2020) due to concerns about offensive content(Qureshi, 2022). TikTok has grown in popularity among students for both entertainment and learning, though many report losing focus on academic tasks while using the app (Liu, 2021). During the pandemic, it served as a source of entertainment and information, though some students struggled to transition back to academic routines (Wang, 2024).

TikTok's short videos, aligned with micro-learning principles, make learning engaging and fun, fostering creativity and curiosity in an interactive environment (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020). It also serves as a useful tool for language learning, improving literacy and communication skills, while keeping students motivated and preventing boredom (Bruya & Tang, 2018). The platform's multimodal nature—combining visual, auditory, and spoken elements—has proven effective in enhancing students' interest in reading (Plank, 2022).

While TikTok has educational potential, concerns about its impact on mental health and body image persist (Rahel, 2024). Moral reasoning generally involves applying logic and ethical theories, like deontology or utilitarianism, to specific situations or dilemmas (Nuis, 2023). In this context, moral behavior refers to actions toward others that intend to impact them either positively or negatively (Tetteng, 2024). Moral values act as guiding principles that help individuals differentiate between right and wrong (Thomson, 2021). Research indicates that TikTok is influencing all of these aspects of moral development among higher-level students. Prolonged social media use has been linked to stress, and TikTok videos that promote unrealistic beauty standards can negatively affect young women's body image (Biddle, 2020). Some students also participate in unethical or culturally inappropriate challenges (Valkenburg, 2022). TikTok's unique algorithm curates content based on not only user preferences but also physical traits like race or age (Martoredjo, 2023). Despite this, the platform has been praised for expanding users' perspectives, increasing awareness of social issues, and fostering recognition of geographic and ethnic diversity (Lei& Wuthrich, 2024).

Methodology
Research Design
This study employs a quantitative approach, which utilizes systematic methods to gather data in numerical or mathematical form. A descriptive research design was implemented, with the study adopting a descriptive survey method. Data was collected using a questionnaire.

Population and Sample
The research population includes BS, MPhil, and PhD students from social sciences, physical sciences, and management sciences departments in public and private universities in Faisalabad. A total of 400 students were chosen from four universities—two public and two private universities.

Table 1: Sample Distribution Depending on Background Variables

Background	Variables	N=400
Gender	Male	181 (45.3%)
	Female	219 (54.8%)
Age	18-22	174 (43.5%)
	22-26	107 (26.8%)
	26-30	73 (18.3%)
	30+	46 (11.5%)
Faculty	Social Sciences	132 (33.0%)
	Physical Sciences	102 (25.5%)
	Others	166 (41.5%)
Degree Level	BS	259 (64.8%)
	M.Phil.	85 (21.3%)
	Ph.D.	56 (14.0%)
University	GCUF	125 (31.3%)
	UAF	96 (24.0%)
	TUF	77 (19.3%)
	RIUF	102 (25.5%)
Sector	Public	223 (55.8%)
	Private	177 44.3%)

Sampling Technique
Data was collected from 400 male and female BS, MPhil, and PhD students across public and private universities in Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Participants, aged 18 and above, were from the Social Sciences, Physical Sciences, and other faculties. The study used a non-probability convenient sampling method.

Instrument
The TikTok questionnaire was created by combining items from three standardized questionnaires, resulting in 35 items across categories like usefulness, time, enjoyment, addiction, content type, and engagement (Carpenter & Toma-Harrold, 2024; Qin et al., 2022; Tuck & Thompson, 2024). Confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL 8.8 found no items below the 0.3 loading threshold, so none were removed. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).Additionally, a

self-developed questionnaire was used to measure moral development, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using SPSS. After removing six items with double loading, a 25-item questionnaire was finalized, covering moral reasoning (10 items), moral values (7 items), and moral behavior (8 items), all measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Table 2: Factor Loading of Items of Use of TikTok

Factor Loading

Items	Usefulness	Time	Enjoyment	Addiction	Content Type	Level of Engagement
U1	0.80					
U2	0.80					
U3	0.57					
U4	0.93					
U5	0.69					
U6	0.97					
U7	0.83					
T1		0.68				
T2		0.87				
T3		0.90				
T4		0.84				
T5		0.74				
T6		0.66				
E1			0.71			
E2			0.92			
E3			0.78			
A1				0.71		
A2				0.54		
A3				0.60		
A4				0.60		
A5				0.80		
A6				0.81		
A7				0.92		
A8				0.70		
CT1					0.72	
CT2					0.98	
CT3					0.87	
CT4					0.80	
LE1						0.72

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Vol. 3 No. 3 (March) (2025)

LE2	0.60
LE3	0.57
LE4	0.89
LE5	0.53
LE6	0.51
LE7	0.66

Table 3: Factor Loading of Items of Moral Development

Items	Factor Loading Moral Reasoning	Moral Values	Moral Behavior
MR1	0.81		
MR2	0.71		
MR3	0.70		
MR4	0.62		
MR5	0.62		.
MR6	0.57		.
MR7	0.71		
MR8	0.51	.	
MR9	0.57		
MR10	0.60		
MV1		0.81	
MV2		0.77	
MV3		0.72	.
MV4		0.67	
MV5		0.67	
MV6		0.54	.
MV7		0.58	
MB1			0.78
MB2			0.74
MB3			0.73
MB4			0.69
MB5			0.52
MB6			0.47
MB7			0.45

Data Gathering
Data were collected manually with approval from university authorities. The researcher personally visited two public and two private universities and also

Vol. 3 No. 3 (March) (2025)

shared a Google Form link with students via WhatsApp.

Data Analysis
The researcher employed both descriptive and inferential statistical methods for data analysis. Descriptive statistics calculated frequencies, means, and standard deviations, while inferential statistics included t-tests, one-way ANOVA, correlation, and regression analysis, all conducted using SPSS software.

Findings and Discussions

Table 4: A descriptive analysis of academic performance of students

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
CGPA	400	2.70	3.92	3.48	.25

Table 4.1 shows the academic level of students (M =3.92, SD = 0.25) demonstrates that the academic level of students is quite good.

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis of the factors of Use of TikTok

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Enjoyment	400	1.00	5.00	3.44	1.04
Content Type	400	1.00	5.00	3.22	0.93
Time	400	1.00	5.00	3.12	0.83
Addiction	400	1.00	5.00	3.03	0.86
Level of Engagement	400	1.00	5.00	3.01	0.90
Usefulness	400	1.00	5.00	2.86	0.89
Use of TikTok	400	1.00	5.00	3.11	0.62

Table 4.2 reveals that enjoyment (M = 3.44, SD = 1.04) is rated higher than usefulness (M = 2.86, SD = 0.89), indicating that students find TikTok more enjoyable than practical. The overall average TikTok usage score is 3.11 (SD = 0.62), suggesting that most students actively engage with the app.

Table 4.3: *Descriptive Analysis of the Factors of Moral Development.*

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Moral Behavior	400	2.14	5.00	3.66	0.72
Moral Values	400	1.86	5.00	3.63	0.78
Moral Reasoning	400	1.60	5.00	3.49	0.82
Moral Development	400	2.15	5.00	3.60	0.73

Table 4.3 shows that Moral Behavior has the highest score (M = 3.66, SD = 0.72) and Moral Reasoning the lowest (M = 3.60, SD = 0.82). The overall moral development score (M = 3.60, SD = 0.73) suggests most students exhibit strong moral development.

Vol. 3 No. 3 (March) (2025)

Table 6: Impact of Use of TikTok on Moral Development

Model	R	R^2	$R^2_{adjusted}$		
	-0.62[a]	0.38	0.38		
	Unstandardized		*Standardized*		
Coefficient	B	SE	b	t	p
(Constant)	3.64	0.18		20.22	0.00
Use of TikTok	-0.90	0.15	-0.62	-6.00	0.00
ANOVA	SS	df	MS		
Regression	114.00	1	114.00		0.00[b]
Residual	185.00	398	0.46		
Total	299.00	399			

Table 7: Impact of Use of TikTok on Academic Performance

Model	R	R^2	$R^2_{adjusted}$		
	0.50[a]	0.25	0.25		
	Unstandardized		*Standardized*		
Coefficient	b	SE	B	t	p
(Constant)	3.32	0.06		55.33	0.00
Use of TikTok	0.35	0.02	0.50	17.50	0.00
ANOVA	SS	MS	df		
Regression	2.75	2.75	1		0.00[b]
Residual	8.25	0.02	398		
Total	11.00		399		

Table 8: Effect of Gender on Use of TikTok

	Gender	N	M	SD	Sig.	T	DF
Usefulness	Male	181	2.84	0.85	0.37	-0.41	398
	Female	219	2.87	0.92			
Time	Male	181	3.06	0.80	0.56	-0.41	398
	Female	219	3.16	0.85			
Enjoyment	Male	181	3.41	1.00	0.29	-0.59	398
	Female	219	3.47	1.07			
Addiction	Male	181	2.98	0.89	0.48	-1.17	398
	Female	219	3.08	0.83	.		
Content Type	Male	181	3.12	0.93	0.61	-1.94	398
	Female	219	3.31	0.93			
Level of Engagement	Male	181	3.02	0.90	0.92	0.29	398
	Female	219	2.99	0.90			
Use of TikTok	Male	181	3.07	0.62	0.59	-1.20	398
	Female	219	3.15	.63			

Table 4.6 explores gender differences in TikTok usage through an independent t-test. The findings indicate no significant differences between genders, as all p-values are above the 0.05 threshold. While the T-values highlight the direction and magnitude of the differences, none are statistically significant.

Table 9: Post Hoc Test Table Difference in the Usefulness to Use of TikTok./Age wise

D Variable	I Age	J Age	MD (I-J)	Sig.
Usefulness	30+	18-22	-0.63[*]	0.00
		22-26	-0.55[*]	0.00
		26-30	-0.59[*]	0.00

Table 4.7 compares the perceived usefulness of TikTok across age groups. The 30+ age group views TikTok as less useful compared to younger groups (18-22, 22-26, and 26-30). Significant differences are found, with older participants perceiving TikTok as less valuable than younger ones.

Table 10: Faculty Wise Comparison of Use of TikTok

		SS	DF	MS	F	P
Usefulness	Between Groups	4.16	2	2.08	2.63	0.07
	Within Groups	314.14	397	0.79		
	Total	318.30	399			
Time	Between Groups	0.54	2	0.27	0.39	0.68
	Within Groups	276.87	397	0.70		
	Total	277.42	399			

Enjoyment	Between Groups	2.62	2	1.31	1.20	0.30
	Within Groups	433.64	397	1.09		
	Total	436.27	399			
Addiction	Between Groups	3.97	2	1.99	2.69	0.07
	Within Groups	293.24	397	0.74		
	Total	297.21	399			
Content Type	Between Groups	2.48	2	1.24	1.41	0.25
	Within Groups	349.44	397	0.88		
	Total	351.92	399			
Level of Engagement	Between Groups	1.05	2	0.52	0.64	0.53
	Within Groups	323.10	397	0.81		
	Total	324.15	399			
Use of TikTok	Between Groups	1.59	2	0.80	2.03	0.13
	Within Groups	155.88	397	0.39		
	Total	157.47	399			

Table 4.6 presents ANOVA results for TikTok usage factors across different faculty groups, showing no significant differences in TikTok usage among participants from various faculties.

Table 11: Post Hoc Test Table of Usefulness and Content type to Use of Tiktok./ Degree Wise.

D variable	I Age	J Age	Md (I-J)	Sig.
Usefulness	Ph.D.	BS	-0.74*	0.00
		M. Phil.	-0.81*	0.00
Content type	Ph.D.	Bs	-0.45*	0.00
		M.Phil.	-0.39*	0.04
Use of Tiktok	Ph.D.	BS	-0.26*	0.01
		M.Phil.	-0.27*	0.03

Table 4.9 shows pairwise comparisons based on degree level. Ph.D. participants rate TikTok's usefulness significantly lower than BS and M.Phil. students. They also score lower on content variety and overall TikTok use compared to both groups, indicating that Ph.D. scholars find TikTok less useful, watch less diverse

content, and use it less frequently than other degree-level students.

Table 4.10: *Post Hoc Test Table of Enjoyment, Addiction and Content Type./University Wise.*

D Variable	I Age	J Age	MD (I-J)	Sig.
Enjoyment	TUF	UAF	-.586*	0.00
Addiction	RIUF	GCUF	-.332*	0.04
Content Type	UAF	RIUF	-.502*	0.00

Table 4.10 shows pairwise comparisons between age groups for different factors. TUF participants find TikTok significantly less enjoyable than UAF participants, RIUF participants are less addicted to TikTok compared to GCUF participants, and UAF participants engage with less diverse content than RIUF participants.

Table 12: Sector Wise Comparison of Use of TikTok

		N	M	S.D	Sig.	T	df
Usefulness	Public	223	2.90	0.90	0.91	1.01	398
	Private	177	2.80	0.89			
Time	Public	223	3.13	0.79	0.07	0.27	398
	Private	177	3.10	0.89			
Enjoyment	Public	223	3.57	0.98	0.00	2.73	398
	Private	177	3.28	1.11			
Addiction	Public	223	3.06	0.85	0.25	0.81	398
	Private	177	2.99	0.88			
Content Type	Public	223	3.14	0.95	0.98	-1.97	398
	Private	177	3.33	0.92			
Level of Engagement	Public	223	3.06	0.95	0.05	1.23	398
	Private	177	2.94	0.83			
Use of TikTok	Public	223	3.14	0.59	0.00	1.04	398
	Private	177	3.08	0.68			

Table 4.11 compares TikTok-related factors between public and private university students. Public university students enjoy TikTok significantly more and use it more frequently than private university students, both with p-values of 0.00. They are also slightly more engaged with TikTok (p = 0.05). However, there are no significant differences between the groups in terms of usefulness, time spent, addiction, and content variety.

Conclusion
TikTok usage is high among university students, and the mean score for moral development is statistically significant, showing strong moral development overall. However, there is an inverse relationship between TikTok usage and moral development, with 38% of the variance in moral development linked to

TikTok use. Factors like addiction and perceived usefulness contribute to this negative relationship, as increased TikTok usage is associated with decreased moral development.TikTok usage shows no significant gender or faculty differences. The 30+ age group and Ph.D. scholars find TikTok less useful than younger and lower-degree students, respectively. TUF participants enjoy TikTok less than UAF participants, while RIUF participants are less addicted than GCUF participants. Public university students enjoy and use TikTok more frequently and are more engaged than private university students, though differences in usefulness, time spent, addiction, and content type are insignificant.

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Vol. 3 No. 3 (March) (2025)

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