

Motivational and Psychological Factors in Affecting the Usage of TikTok among University Students

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Abstract

This study examines motivational and psychological factors that drive TikTok usage among university students in the Klang Valley. Guided by the Uses and Gratifications and Social Cognitive Theories, a cross-sectional online survey was administered to 150 youths aged 18–29. Measures covered entertainment, information searching, peer influence, social pressure, and usage of TikTok. Data were analysed with assumption checks, correlations, and multiple regression. The sample was balanced by gender and largely comprised undergraduates aged 21–23. Correlations with TikTok usage were strongest for peer influence ($r = 0.813$) and entertainment ($r = 0.672$), with smaller positive correlations for information searching ($r = 0.319$) and social pressure ($r = 0.150$). The regression model indicated a strong overall fit ($R = 0.894$; $R^2 = 0.800$). Entertainment ($\beta = 0.523$, $p < .001$), information searching ($\beta = 0.210$, $p < .001$), and peer influence ($\beta = 1.228$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted TikTok usage, while social pressure did not ($\beta = 0.010$, $p = .797$). The Durbin–Watson statistic (1.416) suggested no autocorrelation. Findings show that TikTok usage among students is primarily shaped by peer networks and hedonic gratifications, with information seeking playing a supplementary role. Social pressure was not a driver, implying that participation is largely voluntary and peer-driven. These results underscore TikTok’s social and entertainment motives for young adults and point to opportunities to leverage peer dynamics and engaging content for sustained use.

Keywords: TikTok Usage, uses and gratifications, social cognitive, psychological wellbeing, media consumption

1. Introduction

Social media has become an essential aspect of modern life, with billions of users worldwide actively engaging on various social networking sites (Hang, 2024). TikTok has witnessed a rapid surge in popularity, especially among young users. As of October 2024, TikTok reported over 1.58 billion monthly active users globally (Statista, 2024). In Malaysia, the number of TikTok users has grown significantly, with projections estimating an increase to 21.7 million by 2029 (Statista, 2024). This rapid adoption is driven by various factors, including entertainment, information-seeking behaviour, peer influence, and social pressure (Amin et al., 2022).

COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated social media usage, as individuals turned to digital platforms for communication, entertainment, and self-expression (Tsao et al., 2021). TikTok, with its unique short-video format and interactive features, became a popular choice among students. Many young users utilize TikTok to showcase creativity, engage with peers, and access information, making it an integral part of their daily lives (Zhang, 2022). Despite its widespread use, the previous studies mainly examined the motivation factors which derived from Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory (Bhatiasevi, 2024; Jin et al., 2024) on psychological well-being and continuous usage, but the external psychological factors such as peer influence and social pressure (Erdem et al., 2025; Stevic, 2024) which can be explained through the Social Cognitive

Theory remain underexplored in academic research (Gajo et al., 2023), which make the researchers examine these factors. For instance, a previous study by Gao et al. (2022) found that enjoyment and information seeking were the predictors of social media addiction among the youths. Chan et al. (2022) and Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen et al. (2023) found that entertainment is the predictor of binge-watching behaviour. However, Bhatiasavi (2024) found that not all the U&G determinants are significant, as the study found self-discovery has a negative relationship with social media usage. This also aligned with the study of Jin et al. (2024) that the escape motive is not significantly related to satisfaction and Instagram's continuous use intention. Thus, the inconsistencies of the past findings urged the researchers to reexamine the study.

Despite the widespread use of technology among students, there remains a need for increased awareness and understanding of emerging platforms like TikTok. Given its relatively recent introduction and rapid evolution, academic research on TikTok is still developing (Rejeb et al., 2024). Recent years' studies have begun to explore various aspects of TikTok's impact, including its influence on communication patterns, educational applications, and potential implications for mental health (Pretorius et. al., 2022; Wang & Shang, 2024). However, a gap remains in understanding the psychological and motivational factors affecting TikTok usage among university students. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the key motivations and psychological drivers that contribute to the increasing popularity of TikTok usage among university students (Adnan & Morat, 2022).

Hence, the research questions for this study are posed as follows:

1. What are the key motivational factors (entertainment, information searching) that drive university students to use TikTok?
2. What are the psychological factors (peer influence, social pressure) that influence university students to use TikTok?

This study contributed to the media psychology literature by integrating the U&G motives (entertainment, information searching) with the Social Cognitive Theory (peer influence, social pressure) in a single framework, which is unique to be tested in the developing country setting.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Underpinning Theories

The Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory explains why people actively choose media to satisfy specific needs. Originating with Katz et al. (1973), it takes a functionalist view: media are used because they meet audience motives such as information, entertainment, social connection, or utility (Falgoust et al., 2022). U&G also focuses on how users judge the value of content and the way they access it, linking choice to perceived satisfaction (Liang et al., 2021).

Recent work shows how U&G helps explain behaviour across digital settings. For example, user needs (e.g., anxiety relief, social approval) can drive the sharing of misinformation during crises (Apuke et al., 2021). In workplaces, different gratifications from enterprise social media (information exchange, visibility, support) relate to job satisfaction and efficiency (Liang et al., 2021). In consumer contexts, adding gratification motives to technology models improves predictions of repeat use (Agarwal et al., 2021), and perceived benefits from mobile app reviews shape tourists' visit intentions (Palos-Sanchez et al., 2021). In short, U&G provides a clear lens for this study, where people use the social media platforms when the platform reliably delivers the gratifications they seek (Chan et al., 2025).

Besides, the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) by Bandura (1986) was applied as another theoretical underpinning to understand individuals' usage of TikTok. As illustrated by the SCT, an individual's cognition, behavior, and environment are in a complex and reciprocal interplay (Gan et al., 2024). Specifically, a person's behavior is affected by observing and learning from others, such as peers and parents (Sokolova et al., 2024). This theory has been adopted in distinct fields of the literature. A previous study highlighted the need to discover factors driving human behavior (Gan et al., 2024). In terms of psychological factors, peer influence and social pressure were investigated in the anterior documentation. For instance, a positive association was reported between social influence and sustainable behavior (Rahmania, 2024). Furthermore, Al-Kfairi et al. (2024) indicated that peer pressure and social norms have positive effects on users' behavior in the digital space. Drawing from the literature, in which the researchers validated the suitability of the SCT, this study applies it as an appropriate framework to explain psychological factors in driving the usage behavior of TikTok.

2.2 Hypothesis Development

Entertainment is one of the strongest motivators behind the use of social media. Abbasi et al. (2023) explain that hedonic experiences such as humour, enjoyment, and fun play a key role in shaping TikTok usage, with users turning to the platform to relax and seek pleasure. This is consistent with Stamenković and Mitrović (2023), who applying the U&G Theory, argue that entertainment is central to why individuals choose TikTok over other platforms. This also aligned with

the study of Chan et al. (2022), where they found that entertainment is the predictor for binge-watching as it fulfils the need for escapism and enjoyment.

Other studies confirm that TikTok's design encourages entertainment-driven use. For instance, Wang and Guo (2023) point out that short-form video consumption can become addictive because algorithmic recommendations constantly supply entertaining and personalised content. Similarly, Nwafor and Nnaemeka (2023) reported that university undergraduates rely on TikTok for fun, relaxation, and social connection, making entertainment one of the primary gratifications sought by students.

Handranata et al. (2024) show that interactive and trend-based features on TikTok make entertainment central not only to user enjoyment but also to shape consumer behaviour. Liu (2024) supports this by noting that TikTok's entertaining functions encourage continuous use and higher levels of user satisfaction. Finally, Cervi and Marin-Lladó (2021) highlight political parties' use of entertainment strategies such as humour, music, and trends to attract young audiences, demonstrating that entertainment is a cross-cutting element in TikTok content creation. Taken together, entertainment plays a central role in explaining the popularity and rapid growth of the platform. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Entertainment has a positive effect on TikTok usage among university students.

Information searching is often driven by curiosity and the need to access reliable sources. Avcı and Yıldız Durak (2022) emphasise that digital citizenship and information literacy skills have become increasingly important, especially during COVID-19, as individuals adapted their strategies for searching and evaluating information online. In line with this, Sokolov and Serzhan (2022) argue that the promotion of electronic information resources is crucial in helping users to locate and make use of materials available within institutional settings, such as libraries.

The way information is accessed has also shifted significantly with the rise of mobile and social media platforms. Borgaonkar et al. (2023) highlight that students' reliance on mobile devices is now central to their learning and daily activities, with smartphones becoming a primary tool for information seeking. Gandasari et al. (2024) extend this perspective by showing that social media can also act as an effective communication channel in niche contexts such as livestock farming, where farmers use platforms to obtain and share information.

More recently, Wetzel and Kani (2025) note that emerging technologies such as generative AI are being integrated into library education to enhance information literacy, helping users to critically evaluate digital sources. At the same time, Perdana et al. (2025) find that the popularity of TikTok as an information search tool has contributed to a decline in the use of traditional search engines like Google among Generation Z. This demonstrates how younger users are redefining information-seeking practices, increasingly favouring social media platforms for quick, accessible, and interactive content. In summary, these studies show that information sources are no longer confined to formal repositories but are spread across mobile technologies, social media, and AI-driven platforms. Therefore, the hypothesis is postulated:

H2: Information searching has a positive effect on TikTok usage among university students.

In a digital setting, peer influence can help in shaping norms, behaviors, and group dynamics (Veenstra, 2025). People are more likely to adopt apps when reviews seem credible, and rankings look strong, as these cues raise perceived value (Jiang et al., 2022; Subramaniam et al., 2023). Besides, Leijse et al. (2023) found that peers have protective roles in adult problematic social media usage. In communities and religious life, peer influence supports trust and shared identity. For instance, the study by Bibian and Ma'rof (2024) found that social media usage and peer influence can help in shaping the self-concept among youths. Besides, social networks encourage people to join cooperatives (Twumasi et al., 2021), and trust that is shaped by peers to promote zakat compliance (Bin-Nashwan et al., 2021). Overall, peer influence works through three main paths: social learning (skills and norms), normative pressure (legitimacy and reputation), and trust-based embeddedness (collective action). This aligned with the SCT, where a person's behavior is affected by observing and learning from others, such as peers and parents (Sokolova et al., 2024). Based on the aforementioned discussion, this study hypothesized:

H3: Peer influence has a positive effect on TikTok usage among university students.

Social pressure is the influence of what others expect from us. It shapes how people think and act. Stanaland et al. (2020) show that pressure to "be masculine" links feeling threatened in one's gender, and aggressive thoughts become stronger. Batool et al. (2021) find that Instagram posts of lavish weddings push parents in Lahore to spend more, showing how online display leads to offline conformity.

Social pressure also drives group and consumer actions. Bergan et al. (2021) report that peer cues can raise student voter turnout, suggesting that knowing "others will see" motivates civic behaviour. Ye et al. (2024) show that social expectations and pressures are intertwined with personal aspirations and cultural norms, influencing life decisions and attitudes.

There are risks in digital settings, where Herrero et al. (2021) find that digital social pressure through likes, comments, and public visibility will help explain how social factors lead to smartphone addiction. This also aligned with Xu et al. (2023), where peer pressure significantly predicted social media addiction among adults. Overall, social pressure can encourage actions, but may also create stress and compulsive online use. Thus, the study formulated the assumption that:

H4: Social pressure has a positive effect on TikTok usage among university students.

These hypotheses provide the basis for the empirical testing of the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1.

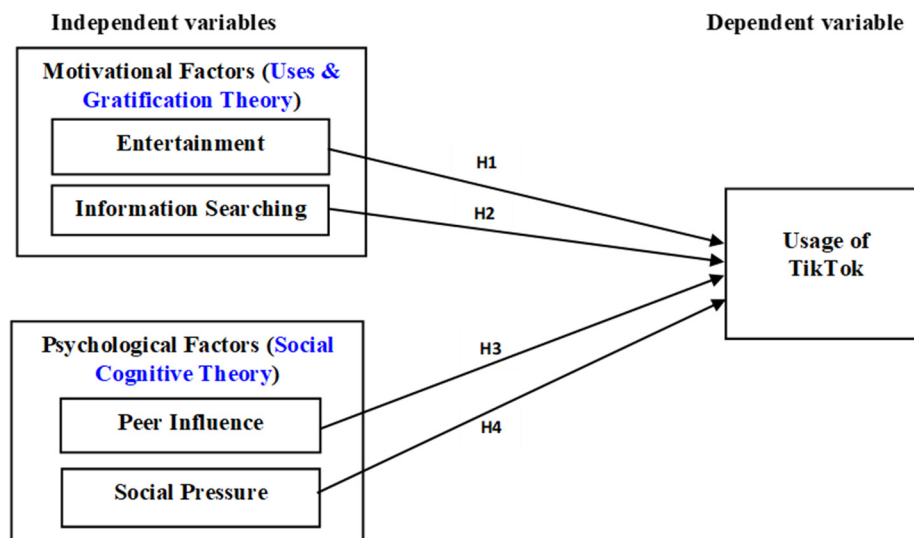


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative research approach was adopted in this study as it allows the use of mathematical and statistical techniques to address the research objectives (Apuke, 2017). This approach is appropriate because it can accommodate many respondents and provides a systematic means of testing and validating theoretical models. Quantitative methods are widely recommended for studies that aim to evaluate hypothesized relationships between variables (Hair et al., 2022).

3.2 Sampling Procedures

The technique that was used in this study is a purposive sampling technique. A purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sample that is chosen based on population characteristics and the study's goal (Memon et al., 2025). The purpose is to investigate TikTok users who have installed and use the TikTok application to be eligible as the respondents.

Although probability sampling is ideal in terms of its sampling generalizability, on many occasions it is not appropriate or necessary. Calder et al. (1981) have long argued that representativeness is inappropriate when the goal of research is rigorous theory testing. As such, a non-probability sample is deemed more fitting when the purpose is to test the proposed theoretical assumptions (Hulland et al., 2017). Social science studies that use theories to explain a phenomenon in a different context are more likely about theory generalization, rather than sampling generalization.

The target participants are youths aged 18–29 residing in the Klang Valley. A priori power analysis (G*Power) was used to determine the minimum sample size (Hair et. al., 2022; Kang, 2021). Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), $\alpha = 0.05$, statistical power = 0.95, and four predictors, the minimum required sample is 129. The study collected data from 150 TikTok users, which exceeds this threshold and provides adequate statistical power.

3.3 Measurement

The instrument for this research is divided into three sections, namely Sections A, B, and C. Section A included demographic information such as age, gender, education, and nationality for respondents. Section B was related to independent variables, which are peer influence, entertainment, where the items were adapted from Gupta and Bashir (2018), whereas the variables (information searching and social pressure) were adapted from Had and Garijih (2016). Section C is the Usage of TikTok (dependent variable), where the items were adapted from Ahmed (2019). In Sections B and C, a five-point Likert-type scale was used to analyze respondents' motives for using TikTok. A Likert-type scale consists of five anchors, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree, which respondents must choose their responses among the five options.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using an online self-administered questionnaire. Before participation, all prospective respondents received an information sheet on the survey cover page detailing the study purpose, voluntary nature, expected time, and data handling. Informed consent was obtained electronically. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no incentives were offered. The instrument was distributed to the target cohort via institutional and student channels; responses were completed online and returned directly to the researchers.

Ethical safeguards were applied throughout. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity; no personally identifying information was collected. Data were encrypted, stored on password-protected drives, and accessed only by the research team. Procedures followed recognized standards for social-science research ethics, including informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and secure data management.

All responses were screened and exported to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) for analysis. Descriptive statistics, assumption checks, and inferential tests were conducted in line with established recommendations for survey-based research (Hair et al., 2022). The data collection took place from March 2025 to April 2025.

3.5 Pilot Study

Before the actual data collection, it is crucial to conduct a pilot study with 30 respondents to check the reliability of the survey questionnaire. Reliability analysis in Table 1 showed that all scales met the recommended threshold (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$), consistent with the notion of Hair et al. (2022). As the instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, the researchers proceeded to the main data collection.

Table 1. Reliability analysis for each variable

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha Value (n=30)
Usage of TikTok	5	0.761
Entertainment	5	0.869
Information searching	5	0.795
Peer Influence	5	0.897
Social pressure	5	0.853

3.6 Normality

The researchers examined skewness and kurtosis to check whether the data were approximately normally distributed. As a rule of thumb, values between -2 and $+2$ indicate acceptable normality for many multivariate procedures (Hair et al., 2022). As shown in Table 2, the dependent variable Usage of TikTok showed skewness = -0.200 and kurtosis = -0.527 , both within this range. This suggests the distribution is close to normal.

Normality matters because Pearson's correlation and multiple regression rely on the assumption that variables (more precisely, the residuals in regression) are normally distributed to produce accurate standard errors and p-values. When this assumption is met, statistical tests are more reliable and inferences about significance are valid (Hair et al., 2022). Given the results, the researchers proceed with Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis.

Table 2. Normality based on skewness and kurtosis values

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Usage of TikTok	-0.200	-0.527

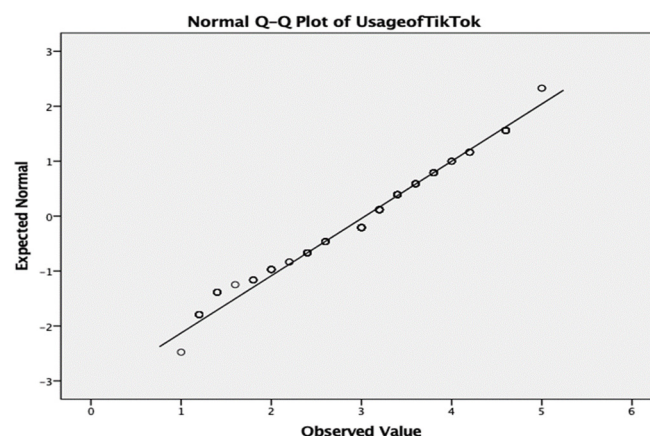


Figure 2. Q-Q plot for Usage of TikTok

4. Results

Based on Table 3, the gender distribution among respondents is relatively balanced, with 50.7% male and 49.3% female participants. More than half of the respondents are within the 21-23 age group (50.0%), followed by those aged 24-26 (25.3%), 26-29 years old (12.7%), and 18-20 years old (12.0%). Regarding nationality, most respondents are Malaysian (90.0%), while international students make up 10.0% of the sample. In terms of education level, 38.0% of respondents hold a Bachelor's degree, 37.3% have completed a Foundation/Diploma, 12.7% have obtained a Ph.D, and 12.0% possess a Master's degree. The distribution of educational qualifications suggests that the sample comprises individuals from various academic backgrounds, with the largest group having undergraduate qualifications.

Table 3. Profile of the respondents (N=150)

Variable(s)	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	76	50.7
	Female	74	49.3
Age groups	18-20	18	12.0
	21-23	75	50.0
	24-26	38	25.3
	26-29	19	12.7
Nationality	Malaysian	135	90.0
	International	15	10.0
Education	Foundation/ Diploma	56	37.3
	Bachelor's degree	57	38.0
	Master's degree	18	12.0
	Ph.D	19	12.7

The Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to determine the direction and strength of the correlation for each variable. Based on Pearson's Product-Moment correlation analysis, it was determined that Peer Influence and Usage of TikTok have a positive and very high correlation ($r = 0.813, p < 0.05$). In addition, Entertainment and Usage of TikTok also has a positive and moderate correlation ($r = 0.672, p < 0.05$). However, Information Searching has a positive and weak correlation with Usage of TikTok ($r = 0.319, p < 0.05$), same goes to Social Pressure and Usage of TikTok it has positive and weak correlation ($r = 0.150, p < 0.05$), where the interpretation of the strength of the relationship was based on Moore's et al. (2021) indicators.

Table 4. Correlation test on the relationship between motivational and psychological factors and Usage of TikTok (n=150)

Factors	Usage of TikTok	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Entertainment	0.672**	0.000
Information Searching	0.319**	0.000
Peer Influence	0.813**	0.000
Social Pressure	0.150	0.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

The value of the Durbin–Watson statistic in this research is 1.416, which falls between the acceptable range of 1 to 3 (Hair et. al., 2022), indicating that there are no issues of autocorrelation in the regression model. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) is 0.894, suggesting a strong relationship between the independent variables (entertainment, information searching, and peer influence) and the dependent variable (usage of TikTok). The R^2 value is 0.800, meaning that 80.0% of the variance in TikTok usage is explained by these predictors, while the remaining 20.0% is accounted for by other factors which are not included in this study.

The coefficient analysis further reveals that entertainment ($\beta = 0.523, p < 0.001$), information searching ($\beta = 0.210, p < 0.001$), and peer influence ($\beta = 1.228, p < 0.001$) significantly predict TikTok usage. However, social pressure ($\beta = 0.010, p = 0.797$) does not have a significant effect. This indicates that entertainment, information searching, and peer influence are strong predictors of TikTok usage among students, whereas social pressure does not contribute meaningfully to the model. Based on these findings, H1, H2, and H3 are supported, while H4 is rejected.

Table 5. Multiple regression analysis of usage of TikTok with predictor variables.

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	p
(Constant)	0.480	0.184		0.010
H1: Entertainment	0.480	0.073	0.523	0.000
H2: Information Searching	0.193	0.039	0.210	0.000
H3: Peer Influence	1.124	0.069	1.228	0.000
H4: Social pressure	0.011	0.042	0.010	0.797

Note: F = 144.666; $df_1 = 4$, $df_2 = 145$; R = 0.894; $R^2 = 0.800$; Adjust $R^2 = 0.794$

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the motivational and psychological factors that influence TikTok usage among university students in Klang Valley. Guided by the U&G and SCT theories, the research tested the effects of entertainment, information searching, peer influence, and social pressure on TikTok usage. The findings provide useful insights into how these factors drive the platform's adoption and use among young people.

The demographic profile of respondents, who were mostly between 21 and 23 years old and pursuing undergraduate qualifications, reflects the typical TikTok users based in Malaysia. Young adults represent the most active group of social media users, and their familiarity with digital platforms makes them a key segment for examining TikTok's growth.

The regression results showed a strong overall model fit, with an R value of 0.894, indicating a high correlation between the independent variables (entertainment, information searching, peer influence, and social pressure) and TikTok usage. The R^2 value of 0.800 demonstrates that 80.0% of the variance in TikTok usage is explained by these predictors, while the remaining 20.0% can be attributed by other factors which are not examined in this study. This strong explanatory power reinforces the relevance of the chosen predictors in understanding social media behaviour among young users.

Peer influence was the strongest predictor ($\beta = 1.228, p < 0.001$), showing that TikTok's social and interactive features strongly resonate with students. This supports earlier work emphasizing that peer networks shape online behaviours and digital adoption, particularly in contexts where interaction and trend participation are central (Bibian & Ma'rof, 2024; Leijse et al., 2023; Veenstra, 2025). The strong role of peers also reflects TikTok's network effects, where students are motivated to join and remain active as their friends participate, amplifying the platform's popularity.

Entertainment also emerged as a major driver ($\beta = 0.523, p < 0.001$). TikTok's design of short, personalized, and engaging videos fulfils students' needs for fun, relaxation, and escapism, consistent with findings that hedonic gratification is a central motivator of TikTok use (Abbasi et al., 2023; Stamenković & Mitrović, 2023). This shows that students turn to TikTok primarily for enjoyment, making entertainment a critical factor in sustaining engagement, which aligns with the U&G theory. Information searching, though weaker ($\beta = 0.210, p < 0.001$), was still significant. This indicates that TikTok is increasingly viewed as a convenient and alternative information source, in line with research noting that Generation Z increasingly relies on social media for quick, accessible, and interactive information rather than traditional search engines (Avcı & Yıldız Durak, 2022; Perdana et al., 2025).

In contrast, social pressure ($\beta = 0.010, p > 0.05$) did not significantly influence TikTok usage. Although past research also indicates that while social pressure can drive behaviours in some digital contexts (Herrero et al., 2022; Stanaland & Gaither, 2021; Xu et al., 2023), in leisure-oriented apps like TikTok, usage is more often shaped by self-gratification than by perceived obligation. Thus, TikTok's widespread adoption among youth may have normalized its use to the point where external pressure is no longer a significant driver.

The differences in the size of the beta values also provide useful insight into the relative weight of each factor. Peer influence clearly outweighs both entertainment and information searching, which indicates that while students value TikTok for fun and information, the strongest pull comes from its social cognitive dimension. This suggests that TikTok's network effects, where friends influence peers to join, participate, and engage with content, are central to its success. The weaker, though still significant, role of information searching indicates that TikTok may complement rather than replace traditional information platforms, serving as a quick and accessible reference or source of knowledge.

Taken together, these findings strengthen the arguments of U&G and SCT theories in a unique single framework for explaining TikTok usage among young people. It confirmed that TikTok is primarily used to satisfy needs related to social connection and entertainment, while also showing an emerging role in information seeking. Importantly, the lack of significance for social pressure challenges assumptions that social media adoption among youth is always driven by external pressure. Instead, TikTok engagement appears more voluntary and peer-driven, highlighting the platform's role in fostering voluntary digital communities rather than compulsory participation.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the motivational and psychological factors influencing TikTok usage among university students in Klang Valley, guided by the U&G theory and SCT. The findings showed that entertainment, information searching, and peer influence significantly predicted TikTok usage, with peer influence emerging as the strongest driver. In contrast, social pressure was not significant, suggesting that students' use of TikTok is shaped more by intrinsic motivations and peer networks rather than by external expectations. The results highlight the social and hedonic nature of TikTok use among youth while also acknowledging its growing role as an alternative information source. With an R^2 value of 0.800, the model explained a substantial proportion of the variance in TikTok usage, underscoring the importance of these factors in shaping social media behaviours among young adults.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study extends the application of the U&G and SCT in the context of short-video platforms (TikTok), confirming its robustness in explaining digital media usage. The strong predictive role of peer influence shows that social networks are central to online participation (Leijse et al., 2023; Veenstra, 2025), which supported the SCT. The findings also reinforce the significance of hedonic gratifications in sustaining engagement (Abbasi et al., 2023; Stamenković & Mitrović, 2023), thereby contributing to the growing literature of U&G theory. The non-significance of social pressure challenges assumptions that normative expectations always matter in digital contexts, suggesting that in hedonic platforms, voluntary and peer-driven motives outweigh compliance-based behaviours (Herrero et al., 2022; Wang & Guo, 2023). This adds nuance to U&G theory by showing that gratifications sought from hedonic platforms differ from those associated with utilitarian or professional media use.

6.2 Practical Implications

Practically, the results provide important insights for educators, marketers, and policymakers. For marketers and content creators, the dominance of peer influence suggests that strategies leveraging network effects—such as peer challenges, collaborative videos, or influencer partnerships—are likely to be effective. The strong role of entertainment further underlines the need for engaging, creative, and interactive content to maintain user attention.

For educational practitioners, the growing role of TikTok in information searching highlights opportunities to use short videos as alternative tools for communication and knowledge dissemination, particularly among Generation Z, who favour quick and accessible information (Avcı & Yıldız Durak, 2022; Perdana et al., 2025). Finally, the absence of a significant effect for social pressure suggests that campaigns should emphasise enjoyment, creativity, and community rather than compliance or obligation.

6.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the use of a purposive sampling method and a single geographic area (Klang Valley) limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Therefore, future studies could expand the scope by including more diverse samples across different regions and age groups to improve representativeness.

Second, the study focused only on four predictors; other important variables, such as habit, algorithm awareness, or cultural values, may also influence TikTok usage (Wang & Guo, 2023; Ye et al., 2024). Besides, future researchers could also explore additional constructs, such as identity expression, emotional regulation, phubbing behaviour (Ahmad Zawawi et al., 2025; Chan et al., 2025) and personality traits (Balakrishnan et al., 2025), which may provide a deeper understanding of the social media usage patterns.

Third, this study only focused on a single platform, which is TikTok. Thus, future studies can do comparative studies across platforms (e.g., TikTok vs. Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts) and examine whether gratifications differ by platform design.

Finally, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, meaning the directionality of relationships cannot be fully confirmed. Longitudinal designs may help to examine how motivations for TikTok use evolve, especially as the platform continues to develop new features. In addition, qualitative approaches could complement quantitative findings by capturing richer insights into users' lived experiences with TikTok and enhancing the media psychology scholarship.

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Authors contributions

CES - Conceptualization, Methodology, Project Administration, Writing Original Draft, TJC - Supervision, Resources, Writing -Review & Editing. YT - Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing - Review & Editing. MHC & ZFM - Validation, Visualization, Writing -Review & Editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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