

TikTok and the Development of Communication Competencies in University Students

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Received: February 25, 2026

Accepted: April 23, 2026

Online Published: April 30, 2026

doi:10.11114/smc.v14i3.8515

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v14i3.8515>

Abstract

This research was conducted in a context of hyperconnectivity, where TikTok has become established as a key platform for the development of communication competencies among students in the Communication degree program. This study analyzed content consumption preferences on TikTok. It explored how students transition from recreational, entertainment-focused use to active, professional engagement driven by academic training. A descriptive research design was applied. The results indicate that 77 percent of students consume entertainment content and that 64.4 percent use TikTok as a means of relaxation. However, a progressive transition toward educational content is observed, associated with subjects such as audiovisual production, digital marketing, and pre-professional internships. In advanced academic cycles, the use of the platform is oriented toward professional positioning and the construction of a personal brand. The study concludes that TikTok fulfills a dual function as a space for leisure and as a formative tool.

Keywords: content consumption, TikTok, education, digital literacy, identity, accessibility

1. Introduction

TikTok is a popular digital platform among Ecuadorian university students (Rendón *et al.*, 2022). Since its origin as Douyin, it has evolved into a complex ecosystem where entertainment, information, and education converge (Rein, 2023). This process responds to what Scolari (2015) defines as a “media ecology.” However, this expansion occurs amid tensions: its popularity coexists with distrust regarding the veracity of content, which makes it necessary to train professionals capable of critically navigating a media ecosystem dominated by algorithms and ephemeral content (Grande, 2016; Caccuri, 2023).

In Ecuador, this scenario is evident: TikTok has 13.2 million active users in 2025 (Kempton, 2025), yet this mass adoption contrasts with growing distrust toward digital content (Nielsen, 2023). According to INEC (2023), 9.6% of the population uses the Internet for entertainment and only 7.7% for education and learning. This highlights the need to understand how students reconfigure their consumption practices toward more critical and specialized uses (Rodríguez, 2016; Fierro-Enrique *et al.*, 2024).

The challenge lies in transforming recreational consumption into educational purposes (Correa *et al.*, 2024). However, as Chávez *et al.* (2020) warn, algorithms generate information bubbles that limit the diversity of perspectives. During the pandemic, TikTok emerged as a hybrid space in which audiences could access both dances and trends as well as tutorials and educational resources that taught how to differentiate between entertainment and verifiable content (Martínez-Fresneda & Correa, 2024). This educational potential must be balanced with rigor and creativity in content production (Micaletto-Belda *et al.*, 2022).

The platform has become consolidated as a scenario of “infotainment” (Toapanta *et al.*, 2024), where emotional content prevails under the logic of the attention economy (Burgos-Andrade & Zambrano-Montesdeoca, 2024). In this model, artificial intelligence prioritizes engagement over depth (Hagar & Diakopoulos, 2023). In response, students are required to shift from being consumers to becoming critical producers, developing what Ferrés and Piscitelli (2019) define as media competencies: critical content analysis, ethical production, and mastery of technological tools.

These competencies are articulated within a multidimensional model that includes command of language, interpretation of transmedia narratives (Scolari, 2013), and the ability to analyze algorithms and interfaces from an ethical perspective (Grande, 2016; Confetto, 2023). TikTok not only redefines the construction of stories but also interaction with them, expanding the challenges of transmedia narratives (Scolari, 2013; Rivera & Bravo, 2019).

This study is grounded in three central theories that are directly applied to explain the multifaceted adoption of TikTok by Ecuadorian university students. Jenkins' (2006) participatory culture elucidates the transition of these students from passive audiences to active prosumers who, in addition to consuming content, also strategically create educational and professional content. Scolari's (2008) concept of hypermediations provides a framework to understand how TikTok's networked, algorithmic logic shapes the students' media ecology, dictating how they interact with digital micro-formats. Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (2012) is strictly applied to understand how socioeconomic barriers and academic training translate into social distinctions within the digital realm. For these Ecuadorian students, building a professional identity on TikTok is not merely a technological adaptation, it is a strategic accumulation of digital and cultural capital amid the risks of liquid modernity.

Despite these challenges, TikTok simplifies complex information into short formats that respond to young people's learning needs (Hartung *et al.*, 2022). The pedagogical value of its microformats lies in their accessibility (Abidin, 2021), which requires universities to integrate them as media literacy strategies (Vizcaino-Laorga *et al.*, 2023). In this way, the platform can reinforce students' academic and professional identity, allowing virality to be used for educational purposes (Carpenter & Wilson, 2022).

2. Method

This research was conducted using a descriptive, cross-sectional design with an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. This methodology responds to the need to understand the frequencies and patterns of TikTok consumption quantitatively, and subsequently explain these numerical trends through the motivations and meanings that university students attribute to their media practices. Specifically, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data occurred at the interpretative level: the statistical results from the surveys regarding usage frequency and content preferences directly guided the analytical focus of the semi-structured interviews. This allowed the qualitative narratives to explicitly explain the underlying reasons for the quantitative patterns, effectively triangulating the data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Data collection was conducted between February and April 2025, a period that coincided with the academic cycle and allowed for the capture of initial impressions. Therefore, a single fieldwork phase was implemented, structured in three stages: administration of surveys, development of semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observation. This sequence made it possible to adequately control the research process and strengthen the internal validity of the study by enabling methodological triangulation and data verification (Etikan *et al.*, 2016).

The unit of analysis consisted of students enrolled in the Communication program at the Universidad Nacional de Loja (Ecuador). This population comprised a total of 208 students distributed across eight academic cycles, from which the sample was selected. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was applied, following the methodological guidelines proposed by Etikan *et al.* (2016) for mixed-method studies. That is, selection was based on student accessibility. This technique, typical of qualitative studies, does not seek to generalize results but rather to understand the phenomenon in depth (Maxwell, 2019).

The final sample consisted of 168 students from the first and eighth academic cycles, selected for their comparative value within the academic trajectory. The size and composition of the sample were defined based on the nature of the phenomenon under study and theoretical saturation, allowing for the capture of a diversity of experiences. No stratification was applied, as the objective was to identify contrasts between the extremes of the training process rather than to proportionally represent the entire population.

For the survey, students from all academic cycles were considered, while for the interviews, one representative per cycle was intentionally selected, resulting in a total of seven participants. This number was deemed sufficient given the qualitative approach, in which depth and diversity of narratives are prioritized over statistical representativeness. Selecting one student per cycle responded to the objective of capturing the evolution of consumption patterns throughout the academic trajectory. These same cases were used as the basis for analysis through observation sheets.

The inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled in Communication studies, have an active TikTok account, and be in either the first or eighth academic cycle. The exclusion criteria included being in the thesis process, having already graduated, or not using the platform regularly (less than once per week).

Study Limitations: It is important to acknowledge that the use of a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method, limited to a single university program, restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader Ecuadorian university

student population. While this approach provided deep, context-specific insights into the evolution of media practices, the results should be interpreted as an exploratory case study rather than a universally applicable trend. Although the sample is local and relatively small, it responds to the object of study, which is to deeply understand the media practices of Communication students at a specific university. While the value of conducting a comparative study with students from other Ecuadorian universities is acknowledged, this first phase focused on a single institution as a case study, leaving open the possibility for future expanded research with a comparative approach and broader national coverage.

The quantitative technique employed was a structured survey applied to 168 students. The instrument was closed-ended, with multiple-choice questions and nominal scales, organized into nine thematic sections. It was designed based on two main variables. The independent variable comprised demographic characteristics, limiting barriers, academic profile, and digital habits; the dependent variable included frequency of use, content consumption, level of interaction, motivations, and evolution of consumption patterns. Responses were measured using nominal scales, considering relationships between subgroups. The sections of the questionnaire addressed everything from basic sociodemographic profile data to the transformation of TikTok use for professional purposes.

Consequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the seven previously selected students, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were structured around three core questions for each variable, including academic profile, evolution of consumption patterns, digital habits, demographic factors, academic constraints, and consumption motivations. Additional questions were allowed depending on the development of the conversation.

The guiding questions addressed the types of content students consumed before entering the degree program and the reasons for their choices, as well as current changes in their preferences and differences compared to initial consumption. Specific moments when this transition emerged were explored, along with the factors that promoted it, such as coursework, professional internships, or academic influences. Economic limitations that could affect access to technological resources were also examined, as well as the active search for professional content on TikTok, the impact of academic workload on time spent using the platform, and students' preferences for staying informed about current issues through TikTok.

In addition, specific motivations leading students to choose TikTok over other social networks were addressed, along with the application of academic knowledge to select professional content and challenges related to the limitations of the platform's short-format structure. Finally, a reflective question was included, inviting participants to share recommendations for professional and critical use of TikTok based on their university experience.

This technique made it possible to gain deeper insight into the content consumed, the academic and economic factors influencing digital habits, and the relationship between TikTok and the participants' professional training. As noted by Díaz-Bravo *et al.* (2013), this type of interview provides greater depth in understanding the students' context, favoring more thorough and relevant interpretations. The interview was structured around two thematic axes and three core questions per variable.

A non-participant direct observation sheet was also applied, which made it possible to verify the authenticity of the data obtained through the interviews. This instrument was used to analyze the active TikTok profiles of the seven interviewees, observing elements such as followed accounts, type of content, interaction, and frequency of use. Both direct observation and complementary sources were employed to strengthen interpretation.

From an ethical standpoint, all participants provided informed consent for their participation. No risks to the participating subjects were identified.

3. Results

3.1 The Evolution of TikTok Consumption: Integrating Frequencies and Student Narratives

Regarding the type of content most frequently consumed on TikTok, the survey data (Table 1) indicate that a large majority of respondents (77.0%) primarily consume entertainment content, confirming that TikTok is initially perceived as a leisure space. However, the integration of qualitative interview data reveals a distinct evolution in these consumption habits as students progress in their academic training. While early engagement is dominated by trends and dances, semi-structured interviews explain the transition toward the 9.9% who prefer educational content. As highlighted by a sixth-cycle student: 'Before entering the degree program, I did not consume TikTok... but later, as I progressed through the degree... I began to understand what the tool is and how it is presented, and I started producing content' (E6). This narrative directly explains the quantitative shift, demonstrating that the use of TikTok for learning and development (23.8%, Table 2) represents a deliberate, academically driven transition rather than merely passive consumption.

Table 1. TikTok consumption: Content type indicator

What type of content do you usually consume most on TikTok?	Frequency	% of total	Cumulative %
4. Music	5	3.1%	3.1%
3. Current affairs	9	5.6%	8.7%
2. Educational	16	9.9%	18.6%
1. Entertainment	124	77.0%	95.7%
0. Other	7	4.3%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	161		
<i>Missing</i>	7		
<i>Mean</i>	1.29		
<i>Median</i>	1		
<i>Standard deviation</i>	0.885		
<i>Minimum</i>	0		
<i>Maximum</i>	5		

Note. Author's own elaboration (2025).

Table 2. Main reason for using TikTok

What is your main reason for using TikTok?	Frequency	% of total	Cumulative %
5. Other reasons	4	2.5%	2.5%
4. Supporting creators	6	3.8%	6.3%
3. Trends	9	5.6%	11.9%
2. Learning and development	38	23.8%	35.6%
1. Relaxation and entertainment	103	64.4%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	160		
<i>Missing</i>	8		
<i>Mean</i>	1.56		
<i>Median</i>	1.00		
<i>Standard deviation</i>	0.943		
<i>Minimum</i>	1		
<i>Maximum</i>	5		

Note. Author's own elaboration (2025).

These quantitative findings regarding the dual function of TikTok are directly supported and explained by the qualitative student narratives. While 64.4% use the platform for relaxation, the transition towards the 23.8% who use it for learning is triggered by academic progression. As one seventh-cycle student explained: '...precisely in the third cycle, when I had my first course in digital communication, it became a professional-level platform that allows me to generate a lot of content...' (E7, Seventh cycle). This demonstrates how statistical shifts are rooted in specific curricular interventions.

Table 3. Academic learning and influence

Which academic learning has most influenced your consumption?	Frequency	% of total	Cumulative %
1. Audiovisual production courses	54	32.9%	32.9%
2. Knowledge in digital marketing	39	23.8%	56.7%
3. Pre-professional internships	13	7.9%	64.6%
4. Pre-professional internships	7	4.3%	68.9%
5. No academic aspect has influenced	51	31.1%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	164		
<i>Missing</i>	4		
<i>Mean</i>	2.77		
<i>Median</i>	2.00		
<i>Standard deviation</i>	1.67		
<i>Minimum</i>	1		
<i>Maximum</i>	5		

Note. Author's own elaboration (2025).

These quantitative findings regarding the academic factors influencing TikTok consumption are directly supported and explained by the qualitative student narratives. While audiovisual production courses (32.9%) and knowledge in digital marketing (23.8%) emerge as the main influences, the persistence of 31.1% of students reporting no academic impact reveals an uneven integration of formal training. As one seventh-cycle student explained: "...precisely in the third cycle, when I had my first course in digital communication, it became a professional-level platform..." (E7, Seventh cycle). This demonstrates how statistical patterns are rooted in specific curricular experiences that reorient TikTok use toward professional and educational purposes.

Table 4. Daily time spent on TikTok

<i>How much time do you spend per day on TikTok?</i>	Frequency	% of total	Cumulative %
1. Less than 1 hour	26	15.8%	15.8%
2. 1 to 2 hours	69	41.8%	57.6%
3. 3 to 4 hours	51	30.9%	88.5%
4. 5 to 6 hours	9	5.5%	93.9%
5. More than 6 hours	10	6.1%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	165		
<i>Missing</i>	3		
<i>Mean</i>	2.44		
<i>Median</i>	2		
<i>Standard deviation</i>	1.02		
<i>Minimum</i>	1		
<i>Maximum</i>	5		

Note. Author's own elaboration (2025).

These quantitative findings regarding time spent on TikTok are directly supported and explained by the qualitative student narratives. While most students report using the platform between 1 to 2 hours (41.8%) and 3 to 4 hours (30.9%), this moderate but consistent engagement reflects its integration into daily routines. As one fifth-cycle student explained: "...more time is spent on the platform than on other applications... what makes me choose this platform is how interactive it is..." (E5, Fifth cycle). This demonstrates how time-use patterns are shaped by the platform's dynamic features and its role as both a habitual and functional digital space.

Table 5. Internet access and cost and their influence

<i>How do access to and cost of Internet influence your use of TikTok?</i>	Frequency	% of total	Cumulative %
3. I limit my consumption to short videos	8	4.9%	4.9%
2. I only use TikTok when I have WiFi access	114	69.9%	74.8%
1. It is not a relevant factor	41	25.2%	100.0%
<i>N</i>	163		
<i>Missing</i>	5		
<i>Mean</i>	1.80		
<i>Median</i>	2		
<i>Standard deviation</i>	0.511		
<i>Minimum</i>	1		
<i>Maximum</i>	3		

Note. Author's own elaboration (2025).

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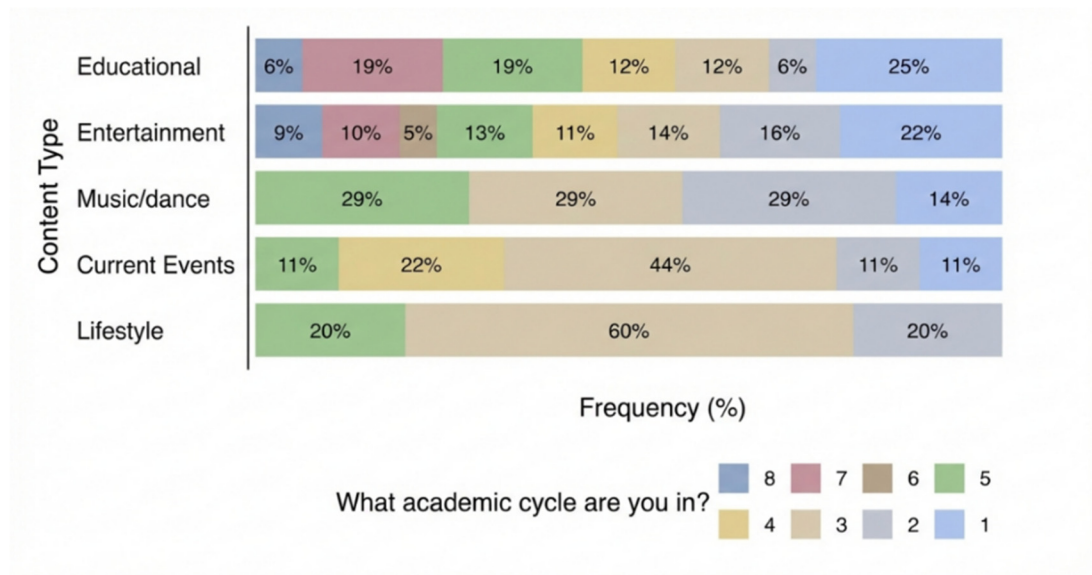


Figure 1. Correlation between academic cycle and type of content

Note. Author's own elaboration (2025).

The figure illustrates the relationship between the academic cycle attended and the type of content consumed on TikTok. Educational content shows greater representation in advanced cycles, while entertainment content predominates in early cycles. Musical or dance-related content is more frequent in intermediate cycles, whereas current affairs content appears more evenly distributed across cycles. Lifestyle content shows higher prevalence in mid-level academic stages. Overall, the figure demonstrates a progressive transition from entertainment-oriented consumption toward more educational and specialized content as students advance in their academic training.

A direct correlation is evident between academic cycle and the type of content consumed on TikTok by Communication students, showing a clear evolution from entertainment toward educational purposes as they progress in their training. While recreational consumption predominates in the initial cycles (entertainment, music or dance, and lifestyle), use for academic and professional purposes stands out in advanced cycles. Educational content is the most consumed in the eighth cycle (25%) and the seventh cycle (19%), confirming the transition from passive use to strategic use. This pattern is also reflected in the third cycle, which acts as a turning point with 44% consumption related to current affairs, coinciding with the introduction of subjects that foster critical thinking. These data empirically support the study and reinforce the need to integrate the professional use of TikTok as a formative tool from the early stages of the degree program.

Table 6. Description of the dimensions obtained from interviewees

Similarities Across Cycles	Observations by Cycle
All begin with entertainment content, except sixth cycle students, who started using TikTok due to influence from the program.	• First and second cycles: Focus on beauty and leisure content. • Third cycle: Transition toward academic content. • Sixth cycle: Late adoption with a professional focus from the outset.
All migrate toward professional content, but with different approaches, customizing themes or specialties according to cycle.	• Fifth cycle: Prioritizes technical skills (editing). • Seventh cycle: Uses TikTok as an idea bank for academic work. • Eighth cycle: Focus on entrepreneurship and professional production.
The third cycle is key to change for most students due to courses and theories oriented toward skill and competency development, including the beginning of pre-professional internships.	• Third cycle: Academic theories generate critical thinking. • Sixth cycle: Highlights digital media coursework as a turning point. • Seventh cycle: Work experience drives change. • Advanced students link change to real projects, for example, eighth cycle.
Advanced cycles use TikTok to address concrete professional needs.	• Seventh cycle: Optimizes free resources and uses TikTok as a professional reference base. • Eighth cycle: Applies knowledge to personal branding.
Economic limitations affect advanced cycles more strongly due to professional production requirements.	• First cycle: Basic access problems. • Sixth to eighth cycles: Limitations in producing high-quality content and professional outputs.
General distrust of TikTok for news, except in the fifth cycle, where consuming everything on TikTok prevails.	• Third cycle: Applies academic filters to verify information. • Fifth cycle: The only cycle that values short format for quick information. • Seventh cycle: Algorithm dominates preferences by recommending content such as reports, which students consume without actively searching.
Recommendation to adopt efficient search approaches and specialized content from the start of the program.	• Seventh cycle: Emphasis on not copying, but discerning. • Eighth cycle: Recommends aligning consumption with professional interests from the beginning.

Note. The table presents the most relevant dimensions of each interviewee. Own elaboration (2025).

The dimensions presented in Table 3 were identified through a thematic analysis of the interviews, where responses were grouped according to common patterns and differences by academic cycle. This process made it possible to establish trends such as the shift from recreational to professional consumption, the impact of academic factors, and economic limitations.

4. Discussion

Consumption preferences on TikTok among Communication students are configured as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by socioeconomic, technological, and cultural factors. According to INEC (2011), Ecuador's socioeconomic level, classified into strata from A to D, conditions access to digital devices and platforms. However, the survey of 168 students shows that even in contexts of technological restriction, in C- and D-level strata, the platform is used as a hybrid space combining interaction for leisure and professional training. This reflects the participatory culture described by Jenkins, cited in Borja et al. (2024), where users act as prosumers.

These dynamic highlights the tension faced by Communication students when attempting to produce academic content on TikTok. They must negotiate between adapting to algorithms driven by humorous trends and producing rigorous educational videos. This negotiation is deeply embedded in their habitus and access to 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, cited in Fernández, 2018). In this study, the observed economic barriers, such as the 69.9% of students who exclusively rely on free Wi-Fi networks due to the prohibitive cost of mobile data, act as strict structural limitations that impede the accumulation of this digital cultural capital. Consequently, advanced students who require professional equipment for high-quality audiovisual production are structurally disadvantaged. Although students exercise their agency by choosing to use TikTok for educational purposes (Vizcaino-Laorga et al., 2023), these economic constraints dictate their media practices, forcing them to adapt their strategies, such as downloading videos for offline viewing. Thus, the digital divide identified in the surveys translates directly into a disparity in cultural capital, profoundly shaping the students' professional development on the platform.

This dynamic is reinforced by platform algorithms which, as noted by Romero (2024), personalize the 'For You' feed

based on prior interactions, creating information bubbles (Caccuri, 2023) while also facilitating access to communicational trends. Scolari's (2018) media ecology explains this coexistence: TikTok competes with and complements other platforms such as YouTube, while students develop media competencies (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2019) to discern between superficial and professional content.

The evolution from recreational content in early cycles to academic content in later cycles highlights the need to anticipate this transition through specific curricular programs from early stages of media consumption (Soengas-Pérez et al., 2019). This reinforces the importance of integrating pedagogical strategies that foster critical consumption. As Rosenzvit (2023) emphasizes, media literacy is key to guiding this process. The role of educommunication is thus emphasized as a means to transform platforms such as TikTok into educational tools.

Transmedia literacy (Scolari, 2017) emerges as a central axis, as students not only consume content critically but also produce viralized material, linking their academic training with digital narratives. Consequently, TikTok consumption is not limited to superficial entertainment but becomes a social field in the sense described by Pierre Bourdieu (cited in Fernández, 2018): a space of symbolic struggle where agents, in this case Communication students, compete to accumulate cultural capital such as knowledge and digital skills, as well as recognition and social distinction, while algorithms and the attention economy (Pereyra, 2019) redefine preferences.

University students use TikTok as a tool for learning and academic dialogue, while acknowledging its limitations for scientific research. Demandando et al. (2017) note that social networks facilitate interaction with instructors and student expression (p. 15), while Toapanta et al. (2024) highlight that 94% of students value the platform for their training, although they prefer other platforms for academic content (p. 129).

This academic-recreational duality aligns with the findings of Díaz (2024), where a small percentage use social networks to support academic work (p. 110), and with Correa et al. (2024), who observe how young people consume information on TikTok, such as news-related memes, and subsequently verify it in reliable sources. Although 64.4% of Communication students in this study prefer TikTok for its dynamic format and interactivity, distrust persists. This reflects the regional trend identified by Bacher (2024), where 72% of Latin American youth use visual social networks such as Instagram or TikTok for news, displacing traditional media, which are perceived as boring or untrustworthy (p. 77).

Thus, TikTok consumption oscillates between leisure and academic use, mediated by intense habits among 41.8% of students who spend between one and two hours per day on TikTok, followed by 30.9% who spend three to four hours. This reveals frequent but not excessive platform use, conditioned by socioeconomic profiles and levels of academic training.

As Jenkins (2006) explains within the framework of participatory culture, users are no longer passive audiences but prosumers who reinterpret and produce content (Velázquez & González, 2019). This aligns with the media competencies described by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2019), where technological management and critical creation skills are essential for transitioning from leisure consumption to professional engagement.

TikTok can function as a formative space, as suggested by Prieto (2023). However, this study shows that its pedagogical effectiveness depends on academic strategies that compensate for imbalances across cycles. While early-cycle students prioritize algorithm-driven entertainment content (Olivares-García & Méndez, 2020), advanced students demonstrate more specialized preferences. This implies the need to integrate media competency training into curricula from initial cycles, using innovative pedagogical methodologies.

This transition reflects the evolution toward hypermediations (Scolari, 2008), where interactivity and multidirectionality are central. Consequently, the platform, far from being merely a leisure medium, consolidates itself as an educommunicative tool when aligned with principles of reciprocity and critical engagement (Ponce & Romero, 2025). This requires institutions to integrate it into their plans in order to train communicators who are capable of navigating new digital ecosystems.

The results obtained ultimately make it possible to affirm that academic factors, economic conditions, and professional training are decisive. Economic and cultural capital interact in the construction of opportunities. The economic factor acts as a limiting barrier, highlighting the cost and accessibility of Internet access, where households with an average income of USD 43 per person per month face difficulties in accessing production equipment and Internet services. In contrast, academic capital, represented by courses such as Educommunication and Audiovisual Production, functions as a transformative habitus, driving the development of media competencies despite existing inequalities (Ruiz, 2018).

This aligns with media ecology theory (Scolari, 2018), in which platforms such as TikTok, although shaped by commercial algorithms, can become adaptive learning environments when institutions integrate pre professional practices that foster professional networking. Given that Internet access and cost significantly affect consumption, as indicated by the 69.9% of students who depend on Wi-Fi connectivity (Santín-Picoita et al., 2024).

Although material limitations persist, critical training aligned with transmedia literacy (Scolari, 2017) partially compensates for these gaps, preparing students for emerging labor fields. However, as Kačínová et al. (2022) warn, this study, being descriptive and cross-sectional, identifies only associations between variables rather than causal relationships. Therefore, future research should adopt longitudinal designs.

4.1 Conclusions

This study demonstrates that TikTok operates as a hybrid socio-educational space in which entertainment, learning, and professional identity converge within students' everyday media practices. Although recreational use remains predominant (64.4%), a significant shift toward educational and professional engagement (23.8%) is observed, particularly in advanced academic cycles, where curricular experiences foster a more critical and strategic use of the platform. In this context, TikTok emerges as a space of consumption and complementary educational resource that supports the development of key media competencies.

However, this transformation is mediated by pedagogical and institutional frameworks rather than by the platform itself, while structural constraints, such as economic limitations and unequal access to technological resources, continue to shape these practices. Therefore, the integration of social media into higher education requires deliberate pedagogical strategies that promote critical, reflective, and professionally oriented uses. Future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches to further examine the evolution of these competencies across diverse educational contexts.

Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the valuable the Santa Elena Peninsula State University, Students of the Communication program at the National University of Loja and every team member who took the time to participate in this study.

Author contributions

Dr. H-M and Comms. S-P. were responsible for study design and revising. MSc. Z- was responsible for data collection. MSc. S-P drafted the manuscript and Dr. A-G revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

This work was supported by Santa Elena Peninsula State University

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

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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