

EXPLORING TIKTOK INFLUENCERS IMPACT ON PAKISTANI YOUTH: A SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The present study delves into the sentiment analysis of Pakistani youth towards TikTok influencers, employing a mixed-methods research design. The data for the present study was collected using a questionnaire consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended items. The data was collected from Pakistani youth ranging from 15 to 30 years of age (timespan was from February 2023 to September 2023). The sample of the study were 300 Pakistani youth, comprising 41.1% males and 58.9% females. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-v20) was employed for descriptive statistics and Chi-Square test on quantitative data. While for sentiment analysis of qualitative data Azure Machine Learning add-on was used in Microsoft Excel for polarity categorization of sentiments. Chi-Square statistics revealed that the relationship between age group and following TikTok influencers was statistically significant ($p=0.010$) while there was no significant correlation between gender and following TikTok influencers ($p= 0.421$). While the qualitative analysis of the data i.e., content analysis revealed a wide spectrum of emotions and sentiments among the respondents, showcasing a varied significance of the TikTok influencers in shaping their thoughts, perceptions, and worldviews. The study offers both qualitative and quantitative insights to inform ongoing research in the realm of digital culture.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Pakistani youth, sentiment analysis, social media, TikTok influencers

Introduction

In today's digital age, social media has not only transformed the landscape of human communication and entertainment, but it also shapes our ideas, thoughts, and perceptions about the world around us. There are several social media platforms offering us new ways of expressing our thoughts, feelings, creativity, and identity. Among these several platforms, one very popular nowadays is TikTok. It enables the users to create, share and watch short videos on different topics.

Young people in Pakistan have exhibited remarkable activity on TikTok. Many Pakistani influencers have harnessed their creativity to create a wide variety of content types to entertain or educate their audience. Their content ranges from entertainment, comedy, fashion, lifestyle, musical challenges, lip syncing, cooking, food and travel vlogs, commentary on social and community issues to motivational and educational videos.

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The huge number of their fan-followers indicate their great influence on the overall society and culture of the youth. A significant facet of TikTok is the way it fosters the sense of relatability among the youth, which is crucial when it comes to activism too. There are many Pakistani TikTok influencers, with millions of followers, making and sharing their content on different topics to resonate with their audience.

In recent years, the trend of studying the influence and impact of social media on youth's sentiments has increased. Since the role of social media is not limited to entertainment, it has gained the value of a channel for expression of thoughts, ideas, talents, and/or concerns on any aspect of social or personal lives in a unique way (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023), researchers are progressively interested in studying the impact of these platforms on the worldview of the users. Another area of the interest of the researchers is to explore users' perceptions about these social media platforms.

Since the tendency of using TikTok (for mainly entertainment purposes) has increased in Pakistan. Youth is following many TikTok influencers for multiple reasons and purposes. It is also important to explore its importance and impact in other domains of life such as lifestyle, ideology building, influencing social norms and culture, impact on educational paradigms. One way of exploring these impacts of TikTok on the overall society of Pakistan is through words of the users of this social media app. The youth of Pakistan can help us analyse the impact of TikTok on their lives.

The present study takes up this contemporary subject of study under the lens of Pakistani youth. As TikTok maintains a profound influence on the attitude and behaviours of young Pakistanis, it becomes important to investigate their sentiments about the use of this platform and its multifaceted influence on their lives.

Significance of the Study

Since it can be observed vividly in our society that the trend of using TikTok is increasing day by day and this social media platform is influencing the lifestyle and perceptions of our youth far and wide, studying the sentiments of Pakistani youth about TikTok influencers becomes imperative. It can offer a comprehensive understanding of the platform's influence on their lives. We can analyse the cultural, societal, educational, and behavioural impacts of these influencers on our youth. The present study offers valuable insights for academia, industry and policymakers to navigate the dynamic landscape of social media and its impact on youth in Pakistan. The findings of the study will add to the research stock as well as provide insights to the academicians and educationists on using this platform for positive results in social, cultural, analytical, and educational paradigms.

Research Objectives

The present study aims:

1. To analyse the sentiments of Pakistani youth towards TikTok influencers.
2. To explore the correlation between age, gender, and TikTok influencers following among Pakistani youth.

Research Questions

Keeping in view the research objectives of the present study. The researcher intends to find answers to following research questions:

1. What are the sentiments of Pakistani Youth towards TikTok influencers?
2. Which age group and gender among Pakistani youth has more tendency to follow TikTok influencers?

Literature Review

Social media rose to widespread use in 2004(Boyd & Ellison, 2007) but its main purpose at that time was just social networking but it's fascinating how its primary purpose evolved over time to become a resourceful tool in educational settings. It allows active learning, collaborative learning activities and peer connections for students and teachers(Greenhow, Galvin, & Staudt Willet, 2019). Social media are the most commonly used and rapidly transforming platforms, they have a transformative capacity too, since they are the largest data generation applications (Balaji, Annavarapu, & Bablani, 2021). It became a part of the classroom for formal learning as well as of informal learning. It afforded the learners with supplementary learning material in the form of recorded audio and video lectures available on YouTube and other educational websites.

Besides leveraging the learners up in the educational landscape, social media also influenced their perceptions and ideas about the world around them. It is helping them learn new skills and a better lifestyle (Shetty, Rosario, & Hyder). It opened up a new array of opportunities for them but also introduced them with some challenges(Nesi, 2020). No doubt social media has reduced the geographical distances, enhanced connectivity, and networking, provided us with opportunities of self-expression and virtual education along with easy to access entertainment, and most of all its power cannot be denied in raising awareness, and social activism. But along with all the benefits it also has some challenges such as privacy concerns, cyber-bullying, addiction, mis-information and mental health issues. It is affecting educational and learning norms of the students (Shabir, Hameed, Safdar, & Gilani, 2014).

TikTok, primarily a short-video creating and sharing platform, made its debut in September 2016 (Adnan, Ramli, & Ismail, 2021; Wu, 2021) but during COVID-19 it became increasingly popular among teenagers and young people. The platform was used by WHO and other health-care professionals to reach a wide-spread audience to disseminate the information on prevention of the disease. Today it is one of the most widely used social media platforms by the youth (Lovett, Munawar, Mohammed, & Prabhu, 2021; Nesi, 2020). The influencers on TikTok have certain lifestyle, characteristics or achievements which buy then fan-following. These digital influencers promote certain ideas, lifestyles, worldviews, and brands through their contents and the youth is undoubtedly influenced by their content (Santiago & Castelo, 2020; Szczurski, 2017; Wielki, 2020).

TikTok is the top-most downloaded social media app in 2018-19. There are multiple reasons of popularity of this platform such as the users can earn money through this platform, they can start trends and they can make their contents popular using hashtags to

break the records of others. The sense of competition is a major reason of keeping people connected to this app. Though many people enjoy using TikTok for amusement but it has negative effects too because of which it was banned by many countries. (Kaur, 2020).

TikTok users belong to different strata of society. User accounts ranging from health-care providers to charity organizers to personal or independent content creators are overly active of this platform. Though not all accounts/users have access to the full range of features. Mostly, independent content creators enjoy all features of TikTok (McCashin & Murphy, 2023). They usually interact with their audience to communicate a serious issue in a lighter tone. The engagement metrics of such independent users of TikTok is higher than other types of accounts.

Many research studies have concluded that different users based on age, education, income and race have different perceptions, beliefs, and intentions about the internet and social media (Pan & Jordan-Marsh, 2010; Porter & Donthu, 2006). Their perceptions and usage of social media also effects the way they use it. Social media has a great impact on psychological health and traits of the users. Many studies have discussed the impact of these platforms extensively. Zhang, Tang, and Leung (2011) have identified six aspects of these impacts which are social surveillance, entertainment, recognition, emotional support, network extension and maintenance. These aspects highlight various ways in which social media can affect individuals' mental well-being, personal and social characteristics.

A sentiment analysis is a well-known tool for opinion mining. It helps in making data-driven and informed decisions to educationists, businesses, financial experts, marketers, politicians and healthcare providers. Sentiment analysis can be defined as the process of gathering and analysing people's opinions, thoughts, impressions regarding different topics, objects, subjects and services (Wankhade, Rao, & Kulkarni, 2022). It allows us to track attitudes and perceptions of people on the web (Godsay, 2015). Not only researchers but enterprises, governments and organizations also benefit from sentiment analysis (Chen, Chiang, & Storey, 2012; Sánchez-Rada & Iglesias, 2019; Wankhade et al., 2022). Since social media platforms in general and TikTok in particular have a great influence on the minds of our youth, exploring their sentiments about the TikTok influencers can provide a comprehensive understanding of their influence on the digital lives as well as real lives of the youth. The sentiments of Pakistani youth towards TikTok influencers can be structured by multiple factors including COVID-19. The pandemic time has served as a main reason for us to move towards digital tools and social media apps more than ever. In such a time, TikTok has served as a platform for Pakistani young people as a channel of self-expression and online learning (Literat, 2021).

Studying the sentiments of Pakistani youth about the influencers making and sharing contents on TikTok can reveal multitude of insights on the digital culture of Pakistani youth, impact of influencers on their social engagements and cultural norms, their mental well-being and educational and literacy statuses.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design to explore the sentiments of Pakistani youth about the TikTok influencers. For a deeper understanding of the phenomenon both quantitative and qualitative approaches of data collection and analysis were employed. A stratified random sample approach was used to ensure representation of all relevant demographics including gender, geographic location, and age of the respondents. It was made sure that the participants were Pakistan youth aged between 15-30 years.

Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire, which consisted of both close ended and open-ended statements. The statements/questionnaire items were designed to measure the valance of the sentiments. The study employed polarity classification (positive, negative or neutral sentiments), which is one of the basic and mostly adopted process of sentiment analysis as it provides the researchers with the most basic categorization of the sentiments to a more nuanced understanding of the emotions of the participants towards a phenomenon of interest (Al-Shabi, 2020).

In this age of technology survey administration has transitioned from traditional in-person distribution of printed questionnaires to a more convenient method i.e., using online survey creation and distribution services such as Google Forms. The survey of the present study was administered online, using Google Forms. Questionnaire were shared to reach the participants of the study using social media platforms, emails, and diverse online platforms. Participation was voluntary and participants provided informed consent before taking part in the study. All the data were anonymized, and participants privacy and confidentiality were made sure.

Data Analysis

The study involved collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. For analysing quantitative data SPSS (v-20) was used. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic information of the participants of the present study such as the age and genders of the participants. The demographic data also served the purpose of exploring the association between the participants' age, gender, and their tendency to follow TikTok influencers. For this SPSS (v-20) was used to carry out Chi-Square analysis of the quantitative data of the present study to find out the statistical significance of correlation between the tendency of participants to follow TikTok influencers based on their demographics such as their age and gender.

For the open-ended items in the questionnaire, sentiment analysis was employed. Sentiment analysis can streamline the data analysis process by providing the researchers with a clearer understanding of the opinions, emotions and behaviours expressed by the participants. The responses of the participants of the present study were downloaded from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel. Since the items were open-ended, the responses provided by the participants needed a close examination before using the data for sentiment analysis. The researcher examined the data made required changes i.e., corrected the spellings, removed emojis and special characters from the responses and removed any duplicate entries. Azure Machine Learning add-on was used to analyse the sentiments of the participants of the present study towards TikTok influencers. Azure

Machine Learning tool was available on Office (Microsoft) add-in store. It worked on Microsoft Excel and labelled each response as either, positive, neutral or negative on the basis of the content in the responses of the participants. A humanized review of each response and the label produced by the machine-learning tool was done to ensure that the categorization of sentiments done by the tool was accurate.

The open-ended questionnaire items were also analysed using content analysis for a broader picture of the situation. The content analysis was also done keeping in view three polarity categories of sentiments. These categories were positive, negative, and neutral sentiments of Pakistani youth towards TikTok influencers. The content analysis also important for validation of the findings of the quantitative analysis conducted through machine learning.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we will discuss the findings of the sentiment analysis of the present research, conducted with the objective to explore the sentiments of Pakistani youth towards TikTok influencers. Firstly, we will see and discuss the descriptive statistics related to the present study i.e., the demographics of the participants and their inclinations towards following the TikTok influencers. A Chi-Square analysis will also be discussed to see whether there is a significant difference in the inclination to follow TikTok influencers between different age groups and genders. Finally, the findings of content analysis will be discussed with regard to key sentiments of the participants of the present study towards TikTok influencers.

Then we will move towards the presentation and discussion on the sentiment analysis of the responses of the participants.

Table – 1
Age of the participants of the present study

Age Groups		
Age Groups	Frequency	Percent
15-19	37	12.4
20-24	210	70.2
24-30	53	17.4
Total	300	100.0

Table – 2
Gender of the participants of the present study

Gender		
	Frequency	Percent
Female	176	58.9
Male	124	41.1
Total	300	100.0

Table – 3
Participants inclination towards following TikTok influencers

Do you follow any TikTok influencers?		
	Frequency	Percent
No	218	72.9
Yes	82	27.1
Total	300	100.0

The sample of the present study consisted of the youth of Pakistan ranging from 15 years old to 30 years old people. The collected data on age (see Table 1) of the participants served two-fold purposes, i.e., to assure that the questionnaire was filled out by youth only and to analyse and explore what are the tendencies of different age strata in using TikTok. It can be seen in the Table 2 that 58.9% of the participants were females while 41.1% were male. Similar to the age, gender demographic helped the researcher to analyze which gender (male or female) had greater tendencies of using TikTok. Though the overall response to the questionnaire item ‘Do you follow any TikTok influencer?’ is presented in Table 3, it can be observed that a majority of the participants responded No (72.9%) while only a small number of participants responded Yes (27.1%). Yet for a detailed understanding of the participants’ tendency to follow TikTok influencers based on their age and gender, the data was entered into SPSS for Chi-Square statistic. Chi-Square analysis is a statistical method used to determine if there is a significant associate between categorical variables or not.

Based on the Chi-Square statistical analysis (Table 4) there is a significant relationship between the age groups and their inclination to follow TikTok influencers ($p=0.010$). However, there is no significant relationship between gender and following TikTok influencers ($p=0.421$).

Table – 4
Cross Tabulation of Chi-Square Results for Age, Gender, and Following TikTok Influencers

Cross-Tabulation of Chi-Square Results for Age, Gender, and TikTok influencer Following						
Do you follow any TikTok influencers?			Gender		Total	
			Female	Male		
No	AgeGroups	(15-19)	Count	16	14	30
			% within AgeGroups	53.3%	46.7%	100.0%
		(20-24)	Count	72	70	142
			% within AgeGroups	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
		(25-30)	Count	35	11	46
			% within AgeGroups	76.1%	23.9%	100.0%
Total			Count	123	95	218
			% within AgeGroups	56.4%	43.6%	100.0%
Yes	AgeGroups	(15-19)	Count	3	4	7
			% within AgeGroups	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%

		(20-24)	Count	46	22	68	
			% within AgeGroups	67.6%	32.4%	100.0%	
		(25-30)	Count	4	2	6	
			% within AgeGroups	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%	
	Total			Count	53	28	81
				% within AgeGroups	65.4%	34.6%	100.0%
Total	AgeGroups	(15-19)	Count	19	18	37	
			% within AgeGroups	51.4%	48.6%	100.0%	
		(20-24)	Count	118	92	210	
			% within AgeGroups	56.2%	43.8%	100.0%	
	Total		(25-30)	Count	39	13	52
				% within AgeGroups	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
				Count	176	123	300
				% within AgeGroups	58.9%	41.1%	100.0%

Table – 5
Chi-Square Test Statistics for the Correlation Between Age, Gender, and Following TikTok Influencers

Do you follow any TikTok influencers?		Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
No	Pearson Chi-Square	9.239 ^b	2	.010
	Likelihood Ratio	9.718	2	.008
	N of Valid Cases	218		
Yes	Pearson Chi-Square	1.729 ^c	2	.421
	Likelihood Ratio	1.635	2	.441
	N of Valid Cases	81		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	7.074 ^a	2	.029
	Likelihood Ratio	7.414	2	.025
	N of Valid Cases	300		

Based on the Chi-Square statistical analysis (Table 5) there is a significant relationship between the age groups and their tendency to follow TikTok influencers ($p=0.010$). However, there is no significant relationship between gender and following TikTok influencers ($p=0.421$).

In table 4, we can observe that female participants belonging to age group 20-24 has the highest percentage (67.6%) of following TikTok influencers. While the age group 15-19 has the highest percentage of followers among males. This divergence in follower demographics shed light on the influencers' fan-base.

Besides this descriptive and statistical analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the participants through questionnaire the researcher had also collected qualitative data which was analysed for positive, negative and neutral sentiments of the Pakistani youth towards TikTok influencers through Machine Learning Tool (Azure Machine Learning add-on in

Microsoft Excel). The results obtained through the artificial intelligence (AI) based tool went through humanized validation for checking the accuracy of the results of tool. Azure Machine Learning tool labelled each statement provided by the respondents to the open-ended questionnaire items of the questionnaires on polarity basis. For instance, to the statement “Do you consider TikTok good for our society?” the responses such as “Yes it provides good entertainment” were labelled as positive, while “I don't think this type of platform is good for young generation” or alike were labelled as “negative” and the responses such as “it depends on the usage” were labelled as “neutral”. However, if the respondents stated that they didn't follow any TikToker, their response was labelled as negative.

In Table 6, the frequency of the responses that demonstrated positive, negative or neutral sentiments towards TikTok for various questionnaire items is presented to summarize the findings of sentiment analysis of the present study.

Table – 6
Frequencies of Sentiment Polarities in Open-Ended Responses
Results of Sentiment Analysis Results for Open-Ended Questionnaire Items

Statement	Frequency of Positive Sentiments	Frequency of Negative Sentiments	Frequency of Neutral Sentiments
Please describe the qualities (both positive and negative of your favourite TikTokers.	169	107	24
Is their content bringing positive change in your personality?	148	138	14
What emotions or feelings do you associate with your favourite TikTokers?	214	56	30
Can you describe a specific instance where the content of your favourite TikToker had a significant impact on your thoughts, behaviour, or emotions?	116	155	29
Do you consider TikTok a good source of learning (from educational perspective)?	109	128	63
Do you consider TikTok good for our society?	137	141	22
Do you want to say anything else?	150	127	23

Overall, table 6 provides a valuable insight into the sentiments and perceptions of Pakistani youth towards TikTok and its influence in general. The presence of a wide range of emotions and sentiments suggest a diversity of views and options within the youth.

When considering favourite TikTokers, the sentiments of the participants are mixed. While it is evident that significant number of respondents have shown tendency of following TikTok influencers and indicated their admiration for the contents of their favourite TikTokers, there is also a notable presence of those who have negative sentiments associated with TikTok and its contents. Many of the participants of the present study indicated their disliking for the platform for multiple reasons such as they considered the content immoral, wastage of time or contradictory to their social and moral values.

It is also evident that the impact of TikTokers' content on respondents' personalities and their worldview has a considerable of positive responses as the respondents talked about the presence of motivational and spiritual content creators/influencers on TikTok. Yet it appears to be a subject of debate since there is almost an equal number of participants who expressed their disliking or scepticism about this social media platform and its contents. Same is the case with the number of participants who agree that this platform and its content creators have positive impact as a source of learning (educational perspective). The respondents talked about the influencers who are creating contents on solving mathematical questions, analytical reasoning and improving English pronunciation. Some of the responses indicated that it is good for our society since critical social and cultural issues and taboos are portrayed in a light-hearted tone on TikTok. But the number of the participants favouring TikTok is equally paralleled by the participants who hold doubts or concerns regarding this and consider TikTok a mere waste of time and toxic for the youth. Though there is also a presence of neutral responses suggesting a wide range of experiences and perceptions.

Content Analysis

In the present mixed-method study the data were also analysed qualitatively. For analysing the open-ended responses of the participants content analysis was adapted. Since it is already mentioned that the researcher was interested in analysing the data according to their polarity class i.e., positive, negative, or neutral sentiments, the qualitative phase of data analysis was also adapted keeping in view the same polarity categories. The responses were thoroughly read and re-read for identification of the sentiments of the respondents. The data were systematically analysed and categorized based on polarity distinguishing between positive, negative, and neutral sentiments.

Positive Sentiments

The positive sentiments in the responses highlighted the aspects of TikTok and TikTok influencers that were appreciated and regarded as valuable by the respondents. Some of the words and phrases which were identified to be positive were "motivating", "personality development", "informative", "improved fashion sense", "interactive", "friendships", "spread happiness", "helps in earning", "quick information", "entertaining", "creativity", and "reliability" etc.,

Negative Sentiments

Negative sentiments primarily focused on the drawbacks and criticisms related to TikTok influencers content. Respondents of the present study expressed their negative sentiments through words such as “low quality entertainment”, “time-wasting”, “useless”, “vulgarity”, “wrong techniques”, “showing off”, “materialism”, “blind following”, “hate”, “bad influence”, “bad content”, “sad”, “destroying moral values”, “body-shaming”, “negative propaganda”, “invading privacy”, and “privacy and security threats” etc.,

Neutral Sentiments

The responses which were considered to be neutral were the ones which lacked strong opinions or specific comments about TikTok influencers such as “nothing”, “no particular thoughts”, “not interested”, “time-pass”, “depends on the usage” etc.,

These are some of the keywords identified from the responses of the participants of the present study. Overall, we can say that both quantitative and qualitative analysis are homogenous in the results. The perceptions and sentiments of Pakistani youth are mixed towards the use of TikTok and influence of TikTokers. It can also be realized from the findings of the present study that TikTok’s reach extends into the realms of personal identity, social interactions and even skills and knowledge acquisition. But at the same time, it may induce feelings of insecurity, privacy threats, social and psychological challenges and other such problems. Furthermore, these findings serve as a reminder that, in the present age of social media, no single viewpoint can encapsulate the entire narrative. It is essential to appreciate the diversity of opinions, experiences and emotions within a given demographic. A one-size-fits-all assessment falls short in capturing the intricacies of how TikTok or its content creators may influence the lives of individuals and society as a whole.

In summary, the analysis of Pakistani youth’s view and sentiments about TikTok influencers highlight the diversity of opinions and emotions within this demographic. TikTok’s impact on individuals’ lives worldviews, emotions, learning and society at a large is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and these findings of this study reveal the importance of considering various perspectives and experiences which discussing the platform’s role in contemporary society.

Conclusion

This research study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the sentiments of Pakistani youth towards TikTok influencers. By employing a mixed-methods approach the researcher combined sentiment analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses with quantitative Chi-Square test analysis to have holistic view of the contemporary status of this platform in our society. The increasing trend of using TikTok and following influencers on this platform indicates that it has strong impact on our society, particularly on our youth. The findings of this study indicate that the youth of Pakistan have mixed sentiments for the platform ranging from positive to negative. Both the strata (people with

positive and negative sentiments towards TikTok) have valid reasons behind their liking or disliking for the application.

As TikTok continues to evolve and shape digital and pop-culture, it is essential for researchers, educationists, and policymakers to delve into diverse and nuanced investigations on the role of this platform in shaping the ideas and ideologies of our youth. It can offer a novel mode of bringing positive change in the social, cultural, and educational paradigms if used correctly. The present study contributes to this investigation and understanding by offering both qualitative and quantitative insights.

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