

JQSS: (Journal Of Quranic and Social Studies)

ISSN: (e): 2790-5640 ISSN (p): 2790-5632

Volume: 6, Issue: I, Jan-April 2026. P: 100-111

Open Access: <https://www.jqss.org/index.php/JQSS/article/view/225>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19599177>

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## The Impact of TikTok on Youth Decision-Making and Behavioral Patterns: A Study of Social Influence, Media Consumption, and Lifestyle Choices Among Young Users

1. **Dr. Sadaf Irtaza**   
[sadaf.media@um.uob.edu.pk](mailto:sadaf.media@um.uob.edu.pk)

Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, University of Balochistan Quetta

2. **Shumaisa Khan**   
[Shumaisakhan8@gmail.com](mailto:Shumaisakhan8@gmail.com)

BS Mass Communication IMCGPG F7-4 Islamabad

**How to Cite:** Dr. Sadaf Irtaza and Shumaisa Khan(2026) The Impact of TikTok on Youth Decision-Making and Behavioral Patterns: A Study of Social Influence, Media Consumption, and Lifestyle Choices Among Young Users, (JQSS) *Journal of Quranic and Social Studies*,6(1), 100-111.

### Abstract and Indexing



### Publisher

HRA (AL-HIDAYA RESEARCH ACADEMY) (Rg)  
Balochistan Quetta



# The Impact of TikTok on Youth Decision-Making and Behavioral Patterns: A Study of Social Influence, Media Consumption, and Lifestyle Choices Among Young Users



Journal of Quranic  
and Social Studies  
100-111

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Volume:6, Issue:1, 2026

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.19599177

www.jqss.org

ISSN: E/ 2790-5640

ISSN: P/ 2790-5632

**OJS** **PKP**  
OPEN JOURNAL SYSTEMS PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

**Dr. Sadaf Irtaza**

Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies,  
University of Balochistan Quetta

**Shumaisa Khan**

BS Mass Communication IMCGPG F7-4 ISLAMABAD

## Abstract

TikTok has rapidly become one of the most influential social media platforms among young people, affecting not only how they spend their time but also their decisions, habits, and social interactions. Drawing on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), and insights from Decision-Making Theory (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). This study explores how TikTok influences youth behavior and decision-making. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected from 50 participants through a 30-item close-ended survey and five open-ended questions. Findings indicate that TikTok significantly impacts lifestyle choices, including fashion, hobbies, leisure activities, and spending patterns. Influencers were found to play a pivotal role in shaping preferences, self-perception, and peer interactions. While the platform fosters creativity, learning, and social engagement, it also contributes to distractions, altered routines, sleep disturbances, and social comparison-related stress. Open-ended responses revealed that some behavioral changes occur subconsciously, while others are a direct result of engagement with trending content and challenges. The study highlights TikTok's dual role as both an educational and recreational tool and underscores the importance of media literacy, critical thinking, and responsible usage. Recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers focus on promoting positive content, guiding healthy screen time, and supporting youth in balancing social media engagement with academic and personal responsibilities.

**Keywords:** TikTok, youth behavior, decision-making, influencers, social media impact, lifestyle choices, media literacy

**Corresponding Author Email:**

[sadaf.media@um.uob.edu.pk](mailto:sadaf.media@um.uob.edu.pk) / [Shumaisakhan8@gmail.com](mailto:Shumaisakhan8@gmail.com)

## **1. Introduction**

Social media has become a central part of young people's lives, influencing the way they think, make decisions, and interact with others. TikTok, in particular, has gained huge popularity because of its short, engaging videos, viral trends, and challenges that often shape user behavior. Young people are especially sensitive to these influences since their social and decision-making skills are still developing (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

The Impact of TikTok goes far beyond entertainment. It can affect daily habits, fashion choices, hobbies, friendships, and even study routines. On one hand, the platform encourages creativity, skill development, and social interaction. On the other hand, it can create distractions, foster peer pressure, and lead to constant comparisons with others. This study aims to explore how TikTok affects youth behavior and decision-making, looking closely at usage patterns, the influence of popular creators, and both the benefits and drawbacks of engaging with the platform.

## **2. Research Objectives.**

1. To Examine TikTok usage patterns among youth, including frequency, duration, and type of content consumed.
2. To Investigate how TikTok influences daily decision-making, including lifestyle choices, fashion, hobbies, and social interactions.
3. To Identify the role of influencers and viral trends in shaping youth behavior and preferences.
4. To evaluate both positive and negative outcomes of TikTok engagement, such as skill development, learning opportunities, distraction, and anxiety.

## **3. Literature Review**

In recent years, TikTok has become more than just a trend — it's a powerful social media platform that deeply affects how young people see themselves and make decisions. Research shows that its influence cuts across identity formation, peer relationships, mental health, and consumer behavior.

Some studies highlight how TikTok shapes adolescent social behavior. In a qualitative case analysis of adolescents in Indonesia, Sari (2023) found that TikTok's algorithm and trending content create what she calls "algorithmic conformity" — teens feel pressure to fit into popular trends, but also find space for self-expression. Around 42% of respondents said they felt more confident through creating content, while 32% admitted to social pressure to conform. Sari argues this duality reflects how deeply TikTok is woven into youth socialization.

When it comes to mental health, the literature is particularly nuanced. A study published in the *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* documented that students described TikTok as a "double-edged sword": on the one hand, it fosters supportive communities and psychoeducation; on the other, participants reported compulsive use and feelings of inferiority when simply watching others. Meanwhile, research from the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* found that TikToks under the hashtag #teenmentalhealth generated millions of views, with the most engaging content being

personal experiences, humor, social isolation, and coping techniques. These studies suggest that TikTok can be a space for genuine emotional support, but not without risks.

There's also evidence on more specific behavioral influences. For example, Zhuang Tian and colleagues (2025) conducted a systematic review of 32 peer-reviewed articles on how TikTok influencers affect consumer habits. They found that factors like influencer credibility, emotional appeal, and audience engagement strongly predict impulsive youth buying behavior. This aligns with Social Learning Theory — young people observe influencers and imitate their behaviors, even in their spending.

Body image is another important theme in the literature. According to a narrative review by Alamyar and Khotimah (2023), TikTok videos often glorify body transformation, dieting, and fitness ideals, which can distort young users' self-perception. This link between TikTok consumption and self-image is echoed in mental health research, where users report increased anxiety, lower self-esteem, and negative comparisons with peers or influencers.

Studies have also pointed out worrying psychological outcomes. Rawalpindi-based research on young Pakistani women showed that frequent TikTok use correlates with higher social anxiety, disrupted sleep, and lower overall psychological well-being. Similarly, a study examining TikTok in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa found that intense usage is associated with depressive symptoms. These findings suggest that TikTok's impact is not just social or behavioral — it can also affect youth mental health.

On the other hand, not all of TikTok's impact is negative. Some scholars argue that the platform can be a powerful site for learning, especially around digital literacy. Research by Morales-Navarro et al. (2024) illustrates how adolescents engage with TikTok's recommendation algorithms, using their interactions to understand data ethics and algorithmic justice in personally meaningful ways. In much the same vein, Ebert, Geppert, and their colleagues (2023) found that some teenagers deliberately manage their privacy on TikTok by creating multiple accounts or sharing videos only to private circles, demonstrating an awareness of online audience and risks.

Finally, emerging research connects TikTok engagement to real-world risk behaviors. Zhao and Wong (2024) conducted a computational analysis of how youth liking health-risk related content on TikTok (such as drinking or vaping videos) correlates with their self-reported risky behavior over time. They found a pattern: users who consistently interacted with such content were more likely to favor similar videos later, showing how algorithmic exposure can shape long-term behavior.

#### **4. Research Questions**

1. How does TikTok influence youth decisions in daily life?
2. How do young people adopt behaviors from TikTok trends?
3. What role do influencers play in shaping youth preferences and behavior?
4. What are the positive and negative outcomes of TikTok engagement?
5. How does TikTok affect academic performance, social interactions, and lifestyle habits?

## **5.Theoretical Framework**

Understanding how TikTok influences youth behavior and decision-making requires a strong theoretical foundation. This study draws on three key theories: Social Learning Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Decision-Making Theory. Together, these frameworks explain why adolescents are influenced by TikTok content and how it shapes their daily lives.

### **5.1 Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)**

Social Learning Theory emphasizes that people learn by observing and imitating others, not just through their own experiences. On TikTok, youth are exposed to influencers, peers, and trending content that model specific behaviors, from fashion choices and makeup routines to hobbies and daily habits. When young people see these behaviors being rewarded—through likes, comments, or social recognition—they are more likely to replicate them. For example, a teenager may start participating in a dance challenge or adopting a popular clothing style after noticing peers or influencers receiving attention. This theory helps explain why TikTok can strongly influence youth decisions and behaviors in real life.

### **5.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973)**

The Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on why individuals actively seek out media to satisfy certain needs. TikTok meets a variety of youth needs, such as entertainment, learning, social connection, and stress relief. Adolescents use TikTok not just to watch videos passively but to engage with content that is meaningful to them, whether it's discovering new hobbies, following trends, or connecting with friends through shared interests. This framework highlights that TikTok's influence is interactive: youth are not simply influenced by content—they are choosing content that fulfills personal desires and motivations.

### **5.3 Decision-Making Theory**

Adolescent decision-making is shaped by emotions, peer influence, and the desire for immediate rewards. Valkenburg and Peter (2011) note that “adolescents’ decision-making is highly sensitive to peer and media influence.” TikTok reinforces this by showing youth what their peers and influencers are doing in real time. For instance, seeing friends or popular creators try a new trend can encourage a teenager to participate, even if it distracts from responsibilities or academic work. This theory explains how TikTok trends, social validation, and influencer content can directly affect youth choices, behaviors, and habits.

## **6.Methodology.**

This study used a mixed-method research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of how TikTok affects youth decision-making and behavior. A total of 50 participants, aged between 13 and 25 years, were selected to represent a diverse group of adolescents and young adults.

The quantitative part of the study included 30 close-ended questions aimed at examining key aspects of TikTok usage. These questions focused on the frequency and duration of use, types of content consumed, behavioral influence, psychological effects,

and learning opportunities. This structured approach allowed for systematic collection of numerical data, helping to identify general usage patterns and trends among participants.

To complement the quantitative data, the study also incorporated five open-ended questions. These explored participants' personal experiences, the influence of TikTok on daily decision-making, the role of peer pressure, creativity, and perceived advantages or disadvantages of using the platform. This qualitative component provided participants with an opportunity to express their thoughts in their own words, adding depth and context to the statistical findings.

The data were analyzed using a combination of methods. Quantitative responses were examined through descriptive statistics, including percentages and frequency distributions, to summarize usage patterns and behavioral impacts. Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, meaningful insights, and examples of how TikTok influences youth behavior and decision-making.

By combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study was able to capture not only measurable trends but also the personal experiences of participants, offering a richer and more nuanced understanding of TikTok's impact on youth.

## **7. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **7.1 Demographic Snapshot**

The survey responses (N = 50) were dominated by youth aged 19–21 years (58.8%), largely female (94.1%), mostly university students (94.1%), and primarily from urban areas (81.3%). This sample represents mainly young, educated urban females — a group that is typically active on short-form social media.

### **7.2 Influence of TikTok on Daily Life (RQ1)**

Responses show that TikTok influences everyday choices for many respondents. Nearly half strongly agreed that TikTok affects lifestyle decisions such as clothing and hobbies (47.1%). The platform also appears to impact spending decisions (mix of agreement and neutrality) and motivates some users to learn new skills or try new hobbies. In short, TikTok functions as both a trend setter and an inspiration source for a sizeable portion of the sample.

**Key pattern:** Influence is real but mixed — many users report impact, while a meaningful minority remain neutral or disagree, indicating varying degrees of susceptibility.

### **7.3 Adoption of Trends and Challenges (RQ2)**

Active participation in challenges was limited, but passive adoption of trends (formats, phrases, life hacks) was common. For example, many respondents reported sometimes or often trying life hacks and adopting expressions from TikTok. Discussions about trends among friends were also common, suggesting the app's content fuels peer conversations and social bonding even when direct participation in challenges is low.

**Key pattern:** TikTok exerts diffuse influence — it shapes conversation, gestures, and small everyday actions more than it drives high-risk or highly visible behaviors.

#### 7.4 Role of Influencers (RQ3)

Influencers play a noticeable role in shaping choices. A sizeable portion of respondents agreed that influencers affect buying behavior and lifestyle decisions. Trust in influencers over traditional advertisements appeared in the responses, and some respondents reported comparing themselves to influencers — a dynamic that can influence self-image.

**Key pattern:** Influencers act as modern opinion leaders for this group, affecting preferences, purchases, and identity cues.

#### 7.5 Positive and Negative Outcomes (RQ4)

Responses reflect both benefits and drawbacks:

- **Positive:** Many respondents reported creativity gains and exposure to new ideas. Several noted that TikTok encouraged them to explore hobbies or learn new skills.
- **Negative:** A significant number experienced distraction from studies, occasional stress or anxiety from social comparisons, and disruptions to sleep or routines.

**Key pattern:** Net effect is ambivalent — the platform is a tool for creativity and learning but also a source of distraction and social pressure.

#### 7.6 Open-Ended Insights

Open answers revealed:

- Several respondents felt no strong direct influence on major decisions, even when Likert answers showed some behavioral change — suggesting some influence is subconscious.
- Most respondents did not follow specific trends closely, but many acknowledged small behavior shifts (trying hacks, changing minor habits).
- Responses pointed to a positive impact on choices (new ideas, creativity) paired with negative effects such as distraction.

#### 7.7 Synthesis and Interpretation

Overall, TikTok exerts a moderate influence on the surveyed youth. It shapes tastes, everyday choices, and peer conversations more than it forces dramatic behavioral shifts. Influence is strongest where content is practical (life hacks, how-to clips) or aspirational (fashion, lifestyle). Negative outcomes — distraction, sleep disturbance, anxiety — are present and warrant attention, especially for students balancing academic demands.

#### 7.8 Practical Implications

- **For educators:** Integrate media literacy modules that help students evaluate short-form content and manage digital distractions.
- **For parents:** Encourage conversations about how trends work and discuss why some content aims to attract attention.

- **For policymakers/researchers:** Monitor how influencer marketing and algorithmic amplification shape youth behavior, and consider guidance for healthy screen habits.

## 8. Discussions

The findings of this study reveal that TikTok plays a significant role in shaping the lifestyle, preferences, and behavior of youth, particularly those aged between 19–21 years. Most of the respondents were university students, which shows that even individuals at a higher academic level are not disconnected from the platform's influence. The majority of respondents came from urban areas, indicating that digital exposure, internet accessibility, and social media trends are stronger in cities. Females formed the highest proportion of participants, suggesting that this demographic may be more active on TikTok or more likely to engage with its content.

The responses show that TikTok has a noticeable influence on daily lifestyle decisions. A considerable number of participants agreed that the platform affects their choices related to clothing, hobbies, food, and daily routine. Although not everyone strongly agreed, a large portion still admitted some level of influence, which confirms that TikTok trends are visible in their real-life decisions. One interesting observation is that many participants try to follow or imitate behaviors they see on TikTok, even if they do not actively adopt them. This suggests that TikTok subtly shapes their awareness of ongoing trends — even when they choose not to fully participate.

Participation in TikTok challenges was relatively mixed; only a small portion admitted to regularly taking part, while many participated only sometimes or rarely. This shows that while TikTok challenges are popular, direct participation is not extremely common. Still, many participants reported that they discuss TikTok trends with their friends, which indicates a social impact rather than just individual consumption. The platform seems to influence not only personal behavior but also conversations and social interactions among peers.

Another important finding is the role of influencers. Many respondents acknowledged that influencers impact their buying decisions, lifestyle preferences, or hobbies. Although some participants do not fully rely on influencers, they still admitted that their presence on TikTok shapes their perception of trends. This suggests that influencers work as informal opinion leaders, especially among young users. However, a few participants also mentioned feeling pressure due to comparisons with influencers, pointing to possible negative effects on self-image.

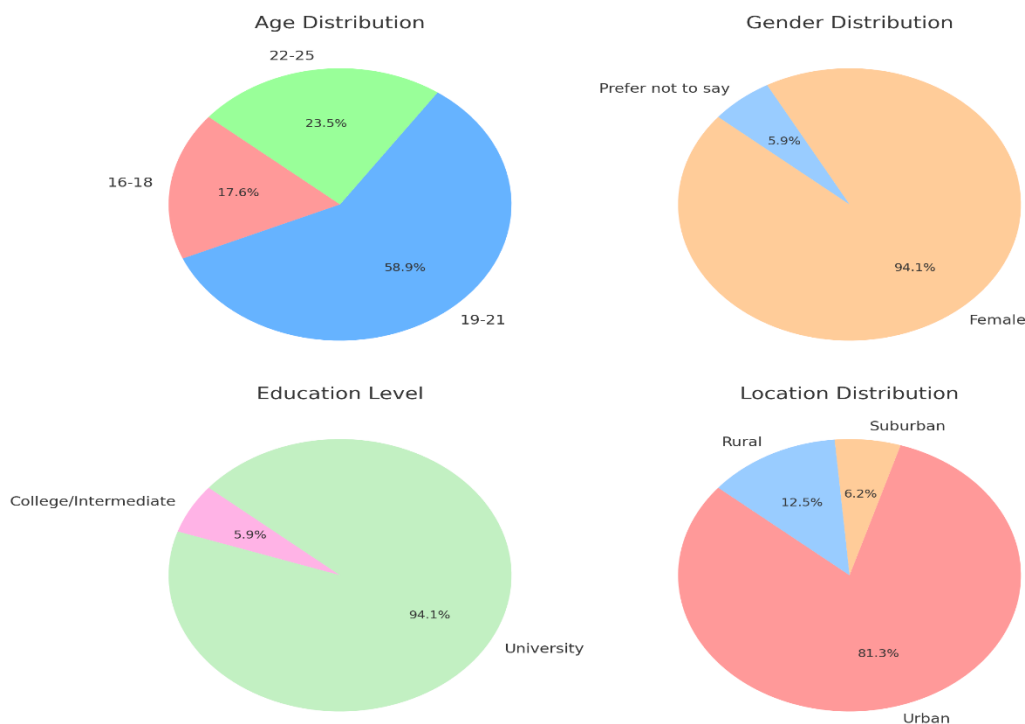
When looking at positive and negative effects, the data shows a balance. On one hand, TikTok contributes to creativity, motivation, new skill development, and exposure to fresh ideas. Many respondents felt encouraged to explore new concepts or try different life hacks seen on the platform. On the other hand, distractions were also reported — especially regarding studies. Some participants felt that spending time on TikTok affects their sleep schedule and reduces study time. There is also a psychological side: a few respondents admitted that social comparison sometimes leads to stress or



anxiety. This reveals that TikTok offers both benefits and challenges — its impact depends on how responsibly it is used.

The open-ended responses were particularly insightful. Some participants stated that TikTok had no major influence on their decisions, while others mentioned that it encouraged creativity and brought new ideas into their life. Interestingly, a few respondents said they had not followed any trends, which suggests that not all users are passive followers — some are simply viewers. Almost everyone agreed that TikTok should not affect academic performance or social relationships, and most reported that their studies or habits were not severely impacted. This indicates that youth may be aware of boundaries and capable of self-regulation to some extent.

Overall, the findings suggest that TikTok holds undeniable influence on the youth but does not completely control their behavior. It shapes awareness of trends, impacts preferences, and encourages creativity while also posing risks related to distraction and self-comparison. Young people seem to enjoy TikTok as a source of entertainment and inspiration, but they also understand the need for balance. The results highlight the importance of media awareness, responsible usage, and digital literacy among youth to ensure that TikTok remains a tool for learning and creativity rather than a source of pressure or distraction.



## 9. Conclusion

The research aimed to explore the influence of TikTok on youth decision-making and behavior. Analysis of the survey data reveals that TikTok has a profound and multifaceted impact on young adults, particularly university students aged 19–21, who were the majority of the respondents. The findings indicate that TikTok is more prevalent

among female youth and those living in urban areas, suggesting that accessibility and social engagement play a key role in its usage.

Regarding daily decision-making, TikTok significantly affects lifestyle choices, including clothing, food preferences, spending patterns, and hobbies. The platform encourages the adoption of new skills and motivates youth to try activities showcased on the app. Trends and challenges widely circulated on TikTok are actively followed and imitated, demonstrating the platform's role in shaping social behavior and peer interactions.

Influencers on TikTok also play a critical role in shaping youth attitudes and decisions. Many respondents admitted that influencers affected their purchasing decisions, fashion sense, and even personal aspirations. The comparison with influencers, particularly in appearance and lifestyle, highlights the psychological influence of social media personalities.

The research further reveals a dual impact of TikTok. On the positive side, it fosters creativity, inspires learning, and introduces new experiences. Conversely, it has negative effects, including distraction from studies, disturbed sleep patterns, anxiety, and social comparison pressures. Open-ended responses confirmed these mixed effects, with some participants feeling little to no impact, while others reported both creative benefits and distractions.

In summary, TikTok exerts a strong influence on youth behavior and decision-making. It shapes lifestyle choices, encourages trend participation, and promotes influencer-driven behaviors, while also presenting challenges related to mental well-being and productivity.

## **10. Recommendations**

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Awareness Programs:** Educational institutions and parents should organize awareness sessions on responsible social media use, highlighting both benefits and potential risks of platforms like TikTok.
2. **Time Management:** Youth should be encouraged to set limits on daily TikTok usage to reduce distractions and ensure a healthy balance between leisure and responsibilities.
3. **Mental Health Support:** Counseling services should address issues like social comparison, anxiety, and stress associated with social media consumption.
4. **Promoting Positive Content:** TikTok and similar platforms can be encouraged to promote educational, skill-enhancing, and constructive content to maximize the benefits for youth.
5. **Critical Thinking Skills:** Youth should be trained to critically evaluate trends and influencer content, ensuring that they make informed choices rather than blindly following viral behaviors.

6. **Parental Guidance:** Parents should monitor and guide younger users, helping them differentiate between entertainment and content that may negatively affect their self-image or decision-making.
7. **Research and Policy Development:** Policymakers and researchers should continue studying the social media landscape to create guidelines that protect youth while fostering creativity and engagement.

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