

Digital Culture and Youth Development: Assessing the Influence of TikTok on Adolescents in Makassar

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Abstract

The growing presence of digital media has transformed how adolescents interact, construct values, and engage with their social environment. TikTok, as one of the most popular platforms among Indonesian youth, plays a central role in shaping contemporary digital culture. This study examines how TikTok influences adolescents' social interactions, moral values, and awareness of social issues in Maccini Parang, Makassar. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to adolescent respondents who actively use TikTok. The instrument measured perceptions related to patterns of social interaction, moral considerations, and behavioral responses to content encountered on the platform. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to identify dominant tendencies and variations in responses. The findings indicate that most adolescents engage intensively with TikTok and are frequently exposed to content they perceive as distracting or inappropriate, such as non-educational material, sensational trends, and morally questionable behavior. Despite this exposure, the results also show that many adolescents demonstrate a degree of critical awareness and self-regulation by selectively filtering content they consider negative or irrelevant. While some respondents acknowledged that TikTok influences their real-life decisions and moral perspectives, others maintained that their values remain largely shaped by family, school, and community norms. These findings suggest that TikTok's influence on youth development is neither uniform nor deterministic but mediated by adolescents' agency and local socio-cultural contexts. This study contributes to discussions on digital culture and youth development by offering localized empirical insights into how adolescents negotiate digital influences within everyday social life.

Keywords: *digital culture, TikTok use, youth development, moral values, social interaction*

Introduction

The widespread use of digital media has fundamentally altered how adolescents build identity, interact socially, and make sense of the world around them. TikTok, as one of the most dominant platforms among Indonesian youth, has become a space where visual culture, trends, and peer interaction converge. In communities such as Maccini Parang, Makassar, TikTok is not only consumed for entertainment but also shapes daily conversations and social dynamics. However, this rapid digital exposure raises concerns about its potential influence on adolescents' moral development, communication

patterns, and sensitivity toward social issues. These concerns form the empirical basis for the present study.

Recent studies offer a range of perspectives on the influence of TikTok among young users. Padilah et al. (2023) note that TikTok encourages expressive behavior but may also promote impulsive imitation of trends. Fitriani et al. (2024) and Fatmawati et al. (2023) identify risks related to moral judgment, including exposure to inappropriate content that may conflict with students' developing value frameworks. Meanwhile, Aurelia (2023) highlights that TikTok contributes to new forms of social interaction among adolescents, blending online and offline communication. Other scholars emphasize character education and digital responsibility, arguing that adolescents do not always follow online content blindly; instead, they negotiate meaning based on their own values and the guidance they receive from home and school (Amalia et al., 2023). Despite these contributions, existing research often focuses on macro-level observations and less on how young users in specific communities internalize their experiences with TikTok.

Although previous studies provide valuable findings on the effects of TikTok, they rarely explore how adolescents interpret digital content through the lens of cultural meaning-making. Most research highlights risks or behavioral changes but does not fully address how young people exercise agency in negotiating digital influences within their socio-cultural environment. Moreover, little is known about how adolescents from urban kampung communities such as those in Maccini Parang construct their moral values and awareness of social issues amid pervasive exposure to TikTok. This study addresses these gaps by integrating humanities perspectives, focusing not only on the behavioral impact but also on adolescents' interpretive processes and their ability to filter, resist, or reinterpret digital content.

Based on the identified gap, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do adolescents in Maccini Parang perceive TikTok's influence on their social interactions? (2) To what extent does TikTok shape their moral values? and (3) How does TikTok contribute to their awareness of social issues? The primary objective is to examine these dimensions through a humanities-based approach that recognizes youth as active cultural agents rather than passive consumers. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on a localized urban community and its integration of humanities theory to interpret adolescents' meaning-making processes within digital culture an aspect that has been largely overlooked in previous TikTok-related studies.

Method

The study employed a quantitative descriptive design to examine adolescents' experiences using TikTok in the context of social interaction, moral value formation, and awareness of social issues. This design was selected because it aligns with the research objective of capturing patterns, tendencies, and perceptions from a group of respondents in a systematic and measurable manner. A descriptive approach also allows the researcher to portray the situation as it naturally occurs without manipulating variables, making it suitable for mapping the cultural and behavioral tendencies of adolescents in the digital era.

The population of the study consisted of adolescents living in the Maccini Parang area of Makassar, a densely populated urban kampung characterized by active social engagement and widespread access to digital media. From this population, a sample of respondents aged 12–18 years was selected using convenience sampling. This sampling technique was considered appropriate because the research aimed to obtain real-time

responses directly from adolescents who actively used TikTok. A total of respondents participated by completing the questionnaire distributed through on-site visits and direct assistance to ensure clarity and accuracy in answering.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of close-ended items measured on a Likert scale. The instrument was developed based on three thematic categories: (1) patterns of social interaction influenced by TikTok, (2) moral and behavioral responses shaped by media consumption, and (3) adolescents' awareness of social issues encountered on the platform. The questionnaire items were adapted from indicators commonly used in digital literacy, moral development, and social interaction research, while also adjusted to reflect the local context of Maccini Parang. Before distribution, the instrument underwent expert validation to ensure clarity, relevance, and content accuracy. The final version was pilot-tested on a small group of adolescents to confirm consistency and meaningful interpretation of each item.

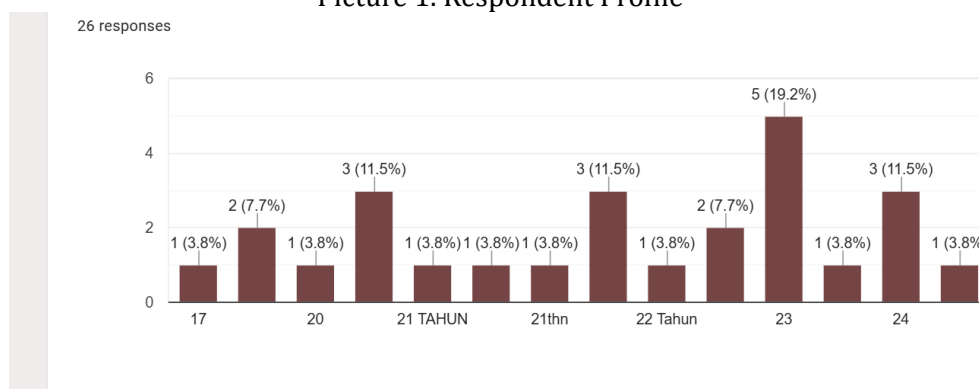
The collected data were processed and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Each item was tabulated, converted into percentages, and interpreted based on response frequencies as displayed in the questionnaire result figures. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of agreement, dominant perceptions, and the distribution of responses across categories. These descriptive insights were then used to support further interpretation in the discussion section, particularly in relation to existing studies and the humanities-based perspective employed in this research. The combination of structured data collection, clear measurement indicators, and systematic descriptive analysis ensures that the study can be replicated in similar settings or expanded by future researchers exploring digital culture and youth development.

Results

Respondent Profile

A total of 26 respondents participated in this study. The age composition was dominated by the 23-year-old group (19.2%), followed by the 21-year-old and 24-year-old groups (each 11.5%), with the remaining age categories appearing in smaller proportions. Overall, this distribution shows that most respondents fall within the late-teen to young-adult range, which aligns well with the focus of the research.

Picture 1. Respondent Profile



A closer look at the age dispersion reveals that participants largely represent individuals who are transitioning from adolescence to early adulthood an important developmental stage where identity formation, social engagement, and digital media consumption tend to intensify. Although the respondents listed their ages using varying formats, the general pattern remains clear: this demographic group is among the most active users of TikTok, often relying on the platform not only for entertainment but also

for self-expression and social interaction. The predominance of respondents in this age bracket therefore strengthens the relevance of the study, as their experiences and digital behaviors offer meaningful insights into how TikTok shapes communication practices and youth development among adolescents in Maccini Parang.

Adolescents' Perceptions of Distracting and Harmful TikTok Content

Picture 2 Adolescents' Perceptions

Ada beberapa aspek dari TikTok yang saya anggap kurang menarik atau mengganggu, seperti.....

26 responses

Tidak mengganggu
Berita hoax
Gossip* Dan netisen
Video kekerasan
Video joget yang terlalu vulgar
Fitur-fitur pada aplikasi
Mandi lumpur
Banyaknya konten Yang tidak mengedukasi
Konten berbau pornografi

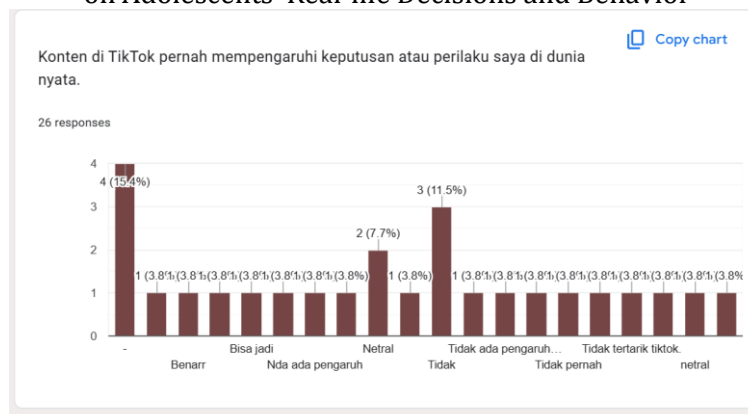
In addition to identifying the age range of participants, this study also explored how adolescents perceive the types of TikTok content they find distracting, unappealing, or potentially harmful. The responses varied, but several clear patterns emerged. Some respondents stated that TikTok content did not particularly disturb them. However, many others highlighted specific issues they frequently encountered on the platform. Among the concerns raised were hoax news, gossip-driven content, and the behavior of netizens who often fuel online conflict. These elements were viewed as contributing to a digital environment that can easily mislead or provoke emotional reactions among young users.

Participants also expressed discomfort with violent videos, overly vulgar dance content, and content with pornographic tendencies, all of which were perceived as inappropriate or misaligned with positive youth development. A few respondents pointed out features within the application that they found distracting, and some mentioned trends such as “mud bathing” or other sensational content that they felt lacked value or purpose.

Another recurring concern was the abundance of non-educational content, suggesting that while TikTok offers entertainment, it does not always provide meaningful or constructive material for adolescents seeking personal growth or knowledge. Overall, these responses illustrate that although TikTok is widely used and enjoyed, adolescents in Maccini Parang remain critical of the platform's content landscape. Their concerns reflect broader issues within digital culture—particularly the tension between entertainment-driven algorithms and the developmental needs of young people.

Influence of TikTok Content on Adolescents' Real-Life Decisions and Behavior

Picture 3. The influence of TikTok Content on Adolescents' Real-life Decisions and Behavior



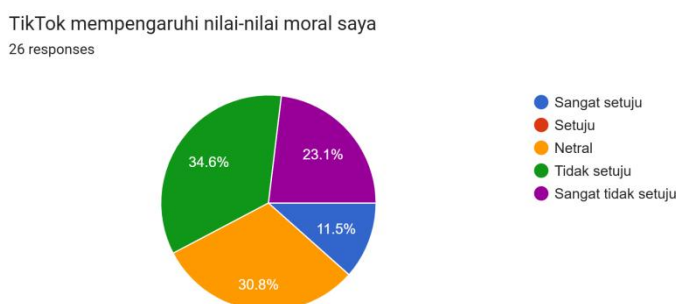
The survey also examined whether TikTok content had any influence on the respondents' real-life decisions or daily behavior. The results revealed a range of perspectives, showing that adolescents do not experience the platform's impact in a uniform way.

A small group of participants (15.4%) indicated that TikTok had influenced them at some point, whether through trends, recommendations, or ideas they encountered on the platform. Several others responded with uncertainty, using terms such as "maybe" or "could be," suggesting that the effect of TikTok may occur subtly shaping preferences or behaviors without users fully realizing it. Meanwhile, a considerable portion of respondents expressed neutral positions, reflecting that they neither felt influenced nor completely unaffected. This group seems to acknowledge TikTok's presence in their daily lives while maintaining a sense of personal control over their decisions.

On the other hand, some participants (11.5%) clearly stated that TikTok does not influence their behavior. A few even mentioned that they are not interested in TikTok or do not use it frequently enough to experience any impact. Overall, these findings highlight the diverse ways adolescents in Maccini Parang interpret their engagement with TikTok. While some users recognize its role in shaping real-life choices, others remain neutral or dismissive of its influence. This variation reflects the broader complexity of digital culture, where exposure to media content does not always translate directly into behavioral change but may still contribute to subtle shifts in attitudes, interests, or social habits.

Perceived Influence of TikTok on Moral Values

Picture 4. Perceived Influence of TikTok on Moral Values



A similar diversity of opinions appeared when respondents were asked whether TikTok influences their moral values. A small group (11.5%) agreed that the platform had shaped their moral outlook in some way, likely through exposure to new ideas, behaviors, or social norms circulating within the app. Meanwhile, 30.8% expressed neutral opinions, neither affirming nor rejecting TikTok's moral influence. This suggests that many adolescents may consume digital content without reflecting deeply on its ethical implications, or they may feel unsure about distinguishing entertainment from moral development.

On the other hand, the largest portion of respondents (34.6%) stated that TikTok does not influence their moral values, and an additional 23.1% strongly rejected the idea. These adolescents appear confident that their personal beliefs remain independent of online trends or media messages. These responses highlight the complexity of moral development in the digital era. While TikTok provides constant exposure to diverse forms of expression, many adolescents maintain a sense of moral autonomy, demonstrating selective engagement with the content they encounter.

Discussion

Influence of TikTok on Youth Digital Culture and Development

This section provides an in-depth discussion of how digital culture particularly through TikTok shapes the development of adolescents in Maccini Parang, Makassar. The analysis integrates both quantitative and qualitative findings and explains how TikTok influences cognitive, behavioral, and psychosocial aspects, including the formation of moral values. The discussion also connects the results to previous theories and studies on youth development and digital media.

1. TikTok Engagement and Youth Development Dynamics

Overall, the respondents showed a high level of engagement with TikTok, with many spending more than two hours per day on the platform. This pattern aligns with national and international studies indicating that TikTok has become one of the most dominant social media platforms shaping adolescent behavior in recent years. Jumiya (2022) found that intensive TikTok use has significantly influenced students' cognitive habits and patterns of attention in Indonesia. Similarly, Maulida et al. (2025) reported that children and adolescents increasingly rely on TikTok as a primary source of entertainment and self-expression.

These findings support the assumption that adolescents in semi-urban contexts like Maccini Parang are highly exposed to global digital culture. High engagement reflects not only the desire for entertainment but also the internalization of digital norms, language patterns, and social behaviors circulating on the platform.

A respondent stated:

"When I open TikTok, I can stay for a long time; sometimes I lose track of time because videos just keep coming."

— Respondent 07 (Male, 17)

This reinforces the quantitative finding related to time displacement, which may affect learning concentration, study routines, and face-to-face social interactions.

2. Exposure to Harmful and Distractive Content

The study also shows that the most distracting and potentially harmful content includes profanity, prank videos, and displays of hedonistic lifestyles. More than 60% of respondents admitted frequently encountering content inappropriate for their age.

One participant expressed:

"Sometimes I see content that isn't educational, but it keeps appearing because of the FYP algorithm."

— Respondent 14 (Female, 16)

This observation aligns with Galanis et al. (2024), who found that algorithm-driven reinforcement on TikTok tends to amplify engagement-based rather than educational content, contributing to problematic use, reduced self-control, and lower school engagement. Similarly, Maulida et al. (2025) emphasized that TikTok exposure may influence children's behavior, emotional regulation, and early social cognition through repetitive, fast-paced content consumption.

From a youth development viewpoint, repeated exposure to such content can shape identity formation, moral reasoning, and perceptions of normative behavior, especially when not accompanied by adequate digital literacy or parental guidance.

3. Alignment with Prior Research and Theoretical Expectations

These findings support digital socialization theory, which asserts that social media increasingly functions as a major agent of socialization influencing thoughts, emotions, and behavioral responses. Several aspects of the study are consistent with earlier empirical findings on:

- a) body image and self-esteem (Gusri & Dwatra, 2024);
- b) imitation and trend-following behavior (Maulida et al., 2025);
- c) self-control challenges and impulsivity (Galanis et al., 2024);
- d) digital moral development shaped by algorithmic exposure (Jumiyati, 2022).

However, this study also reveals nuances not always highlighted in international research. While global literature often suggests adolescents lack critical judgment when consuming short-form content, several respondents demonstrated intentional filtering behavior. For instance:

"I skip negative content because I don't like it and don't want to be influenced by it." - Respondent 21 (Male, 18)

This indicates that not all adolescents are equally vulnerable to digital influence. Some possess strong internal value systems shaped by family, school environment, and the socio-cultural context of Maccini Parang.

4. Moral Implications and Real-World Application

One key contribution of this study is exploring how TikTok influences adolescents' moral understanding and everyday decision-making. While TikTok can foster creativity and informal learning, the findings highlight several risks:

- a) normalization of impolite behaviors;
- b) increased consumption of entertainment over productive activities;
- c) reduced focus, attention span, and discipline.

Despite these risks, many respondents demonstrated emerging moral awareness, emphasizing self-regulation, selective viewing, and content filtering. This awareness is essential for ethical digital participation and real-life behavioral choices.

The practical implications of this study include:

- a) the development of school-based digital literacy modules focused on critical consumption and moral awareness;
- b) strengthening parental guidance and community involvement in digital supervision;
- c) the formulation of value-based digital citizenship curricula;

d) informing local youth policies regarding social media use.

Thus, this research not only evaluates the influence of TikTok but also provides actionable insights to strengthen youth character and digital ethics particularly within the cultural reality of Maccini Parang.

Conclusion

Conclusion of the Article

This study examined the influence of TikTok as a form of digital culture on adolescent development in Maccini Parang, Makassar, with particular attention to engagement patterns, exposure to distracting and harmful content, and implications for moral and social development. The findings indicate that TikTok plays a significant role in adolescents' daily lives, shaping not only their entertainment preferences but also their cognitive habits, social interactions, and value negotiation processes.

The results show that most adolescents engage intensively with TikTok, often for extended periods, which aligns with broader trends in youth digital behavior. This high level of engagement contributes to time displacement and heightened exposure to algorithm-driven content, including materials perceived as inappropriate or morally questionable. However, the findings also reveal that adolescents are not uniformly passive consumers. Many respondents demonstrated critical awareness and self-regulation by selectively filtering content they deemed negative or unproductive.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital socialization by highlighting the interplay between global digital culture and local socio-cultural contexts. The findings suggest that moral development in the digital era is not solely determined by platform algorithms but is also mediated by family values, educational environments, and community norms. By focusing on adolescents in Maccini Parang, this research provides context-specific insights that enrich existing discussions on youth development in Southeast Asian urban settings, an area that remains underrepresented in digital culture studies.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to a single neighborhood, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader adolescent populations. Second, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may introduce response bias, as participants' perceptions and behaviors could differ from their actual practices. Finally, the study did not incorporate longitudinal data, limiting its ability to capture long-term developmental effects of TikTok use.

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