

Tik Tok: A Review

Alisha M. Goss

Beal College

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Professor Ginger Glodowske

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(Getty Images, 2020)

Social media is taking over the world, and the app Tik Tok is the newest front runner in the social media trend. We all have our guilty pleasures surrounding social media. For me, it is scrolling Facebook, Instagram, or Tik Tok, in the small moments I can find. I do this hoping for an escape, and Tik Tok takes the cake. It is my nightly ritual to fall asleep, and I do it every single night. This sounds like a harmless pass-time. I mean who doesn't want to fall asleep watching content that was specially selected for them? Content that is filled with humor, insight, and oddities. Tik Tok brings me a lot of joy. However, I fear this joy may come at a cost to me and anyone else who engages in watching the Tik Tok app. Although Tik Tok seems generally harmless, I fear that it may have a negative impact on the mental wellbeing of those who watch it regularly due to how it tends to consume people, encourages people to escape from reality rather than face their problems, and creates a platform for cyberbullying.

So, what exactly is Tik Tok? Some people may not know. I never did. Tik Tok is a social media app created in 2016 by a company based in Beijing, China. The company that created Tik Tok is called Bytedance (Omar & Dequan, 2020). It is very user friendly and consists of 15-second videos that you scroll through full of content created by other users of the app. The app generates other material you may enjoy based on the videos that you hit like on. For example, if you like a video about dogs, other videos with dogs in them will come upon what is referred to as your "for you" page. The creators of this app are very clever because this is not the only trick they use to keep people interested in the app. They have based their entire social media platform on the uses and gratification theory. Uses and gratifications is a psycho-social theory that implies that people are active in their social media use, and they use it to reach some type of gratification based on psychological or sociocultural needs or interests (Omar & Dequan, 2020). Tik Tok entirely encompasses this theory. The users run this app (or that is what they are made to

believe). The content is made entirely by users, for users. If you like videos on addiction, you will see videos on addiction in your feed. It is genius really, but is it healthy? A few months ago, I would've called it harmless, but now I disagree.

It is easy to get consumed with Tik Tok. Who doesn't have time for a few 15-second videos? I began to notice I was losing much more time than intended when scrolling Tik Tok. It would start harmlessly enough, a quick scroll on my lunch break or before bed. I would then look at my clock to realize far more time had passed than I had realized. My phone would go off with messages and emails and I would wait to check them so I could watch just one more video. One more video turned into three maybe 10 more videos, and I would find myself pulled back into the vortex. Tik Tok is designed to run this way. It is a psychological social media prison of sorts. The interesting part is, there are countless videos on Tik Tok talking about lost relationships and jobs as a result of watching too much Tik Tok. It is humorous because it is relatable. The app, in general, is full of funny videos, but it is a platform for much more than humor. It also can be a platform for hate as can any social media platform.

It can be dangerous to allow yourself to be consumed with social media like Tik Tok. One can forget what real life even is. Tik Tok is a two-sided coin. One side of it seems obvious. It is entertaining and fun. Something to ease the mind and take the focus of the stressors of daily life. The other side is the side that most remain oblivious too. How healthy is it to escape from daily life constantly? It is no different from using drugs or other substances to numb the mind and ease the pain. It isn't that difficult to become consumed with an app like this. The other users on this platform who become Tik Tok famous are fun and relatable. They almost feel like they are your real friends. Some of them may indeed be your real friends. The bar for fame is low for Tik Tok users. Anyone can be famous on Tik Tok if enough people like the message they're sharing.

There are a lot of upsides to that as well. It is a great platform for artists and musicians to get their work out there. A lot of songs have become famous as a result of Tik Tok and the dances that people have created to go with them. This makes it impossible to have an entirely negative opinion on Tik Tok. It is like most social media; there is a dark side but also so many positives which makes it hard to criticize.

Tik Tok has become a breeding ground for cyberbullying and social acceptance alike. We all know that the internet has created a whole new platform for the cruelty of humanity, and this app is no different. There is a comment feature on the app, which allows others to comment on the videos you post. Since you do not have to know someone to see the content they post (unless it is private), it opens the door for a ton of negativity. Hateful words and comments are thrown around a lot on this app, and it is part of the appeal. When one feels insecure about themselves, they tend to lash out at others. Tik Tok has a lot of people who actively use the app. Hundreds of millions worldwide. This includes several people with disabilities or alternative ways of living. Those people become easy targets for cyberbullying. The one feature that Tik Tok has that can help with cyberbullying is the ability to disable commenting on any video you post. I have seen a lot of extremely cruel and negative comments on Tik Tok, but on the flip side of that, I have seen a lot of uplifting and supportive comments as well. There is a majorly redeeming aspect of Tik Tok that it is hard to overlook. It seems to offer a support network for those who are generally unaccepted by society. The thing that is hard to gauge is whether it balances itself out.

Are there redeeming qualities about Tik Tok? Yes, there are. I just cannot seem to shake the way it seems to control my life and time. It feels almost like a drug of sorts. I find myself comparing my life and relationships with those on Tik Tok. The drama and lives of the creators of the videos on Tik Tok (who are also the consumers) become almost like a second life to me. I

find myself consumed with it. It is important to live within the realm of one's own life and not base reality on a baseline created by those seeking fame, and Tik Tok makes that hard to do. I have lost countless hours scrolling through Tik Tok videos. Ignored messages from true friends and real-life support systems to numb out to the reality that Tik Tok creates for me. This app has become something I have developed a love/hate relationship with. Though this app has given me an escape from the stressors of my daily life, I cannot help but think that it harms my overall mental well-being. Though I know the thoughts and feelings I have surrounding this app, I do not think I will stop any time soon. That, my friend, is the nature of the beast.

References

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