



PEEKING INTO OTHER LIFE: TIKTOK MOTIVES OF MALANG'S UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Galih Viabela¹ | Anang Sujoko¹ | Desi Dwi Prianti¹

¹ Communication Science of Social and Political Sciences Brawijaya University

Building FISIP Universitas Brawijaya Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia 65145

Correspondence:
Galih Viabela

Email:
galihviabela012@student.ub.ac.id

<http://jurnal.unmer.ac.id/index.php/n>

Abstract: *Uses and gratification theory is the most appropriate theory to understand the motivations of social media users. The aim of this research is to identify the main motive that drive university students aged between 18 - 24 years for using TikTok. A survey was conducted on 383 TikTok users in Malang, selected through a disproportionate stratified random sampling method. Data was collected using an online questionnaire with five motives for using TikTok: social interaction, self-expression, peaking, escapism, and archiving. The results show peaking is the main motivation for using TikTok. Peeking is a form of voyeurism in the new media era, which is a desire to see other people's private lives. TikTok itself contains content that strongly supports this motive, specifically the 'day in my life' content.*

Keywords: *TikTok, Uses and Gratification Theory, Social Media Motives, University Students*

Abstrak: Teori Uses and Gratification merupakan teori yang paling tepat untuk memahami motivasi pengguna media sosial. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi motif yang mendorong mahasiswa berusia antara 18 - 24 tahun untuk menggunakan TikTok. Sebuah survei dilakukan terhadap 383 pengguna TikTok di Malang, yang dipilih melalui metode disproportionate stratified random sampling. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan kuesioner online dengan lima motif penggunaan TikTok: interaksi sosial, ekspresi diri, mengintip, pelarian, dan pengarsipan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan mengintip adalah motivasi yang paling utama dalam menggunakan TikTok. Mengintip merupakan salah satu bentuk voyeurisme di era media baru, yaitu keinginan untuk melihat kehidupan pribadi orang lain. TikTok sendiri memuat konten-konten yang sangat mendukung motif ini, khususnya konten 'day in my life'.

Kata Kunci: TikTok, Teori Uses and Gratification, Motivasi Sosial Media, Mahasiswa

1 | INTRODUCTION

TikTok, a short-form video application, originated from a company known as ByteDance, which subsequently acquired the musical.ly application and has become the "new obsession" of young people (Dias & Duarte, 2022; Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021). In Indonesia, the social media platform TikTok has achieved a considerable degree of popularity with 113 million users as of April 2023 (Riyanto, 2023). The number of TikTok users in Indonesia continues to increase annually, making Indonesia the second largest country after the United States in terms of user base. In the United States, the user base is dominated by teenagers and early adults aged 18 to 24 years (Kemp, 2023; Shutsko, 2020).

TikTok has experienced a notable increase in popularity over the past year, making it the fastest-growing social media platform in 2021 (Duggan, 2023; Setiyaningsih et al., 2021). As a platform that can facilitate the interests of individuals and groups, TikTok contributes to providing space for various needs related to education (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Aguaded, 2022; Lailiyah et al., 2020), health (McCashin, D. & Murphy, 2022), economy (Abbasi et al., 2023), movements (Krutrök, M. E. & Åkerlund, 2023; Pryde & Prichard, 2022), and so on. The situation in the UK was not markedly different from that in Indonesia. TikTok was still predominantly regarded as a platform for younger users, while the largest demographic of users was already comprised of young adults (Schellewald, 2023; Mustaqim et al., 2021). A study by Cuesta-valiño et al. (2022) elucidates the essential role that motivation plays in user engagement on TikTok, as observed from the perspectives of young users.

Regarding their potential influence as digital natives, university students, who are well-known for their heavy social media usage, provide a special group to investigate (Lan & Tung, 2024). University students have been research subjects in various academic researches related to TikTok and other social media (Elhai et al., 2020; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Lan & Tung, 2024; Zhu et al., 2023). In a study by (Kircaburun et al., 2020) conducted on university students, it was found that motivations for social media use are multi-faceted and significantly influenced by personality traits and demographic factors, that is why understanding these motivations is critical to addressing problematic use and developing strategies to promote healthier social media engagement among university students.

Motivation has been researched extensively in relation to TikTok across various countries, with findings indicating that user tendencies are influenced by national cultural values using Uses and Gratification framework (Deng et al., 2023). In China, the inaugural market for TikTok, numerous studies have explored user motivations on the platform. For example, Lu et al. (2020) examined the motivations of both TikTok users and non-users, finding that TikTok users are primarily driven by entertainment, social interaction, information-seeking, and commercial interests. Similarly, Omar & Dequan (2020) adapted a motivation scale originally developed for Instagram to study TikTok users. This scale identifies five key motives: social interaction, self-expression, peeking, escapism, and archiving.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides a framework for understanding the relationship between motivation and media use. has five basic concepts: active audience, social and psychological origins, strong motives for media use, expectations and

gratification (Stacks et al., 2019). Uses and Gratifications Theory is a communication theory that has existed since the 1940s which continues to grow and is used in various studies related to the motivation and use of various media including social media. UGT is the most appropriate theory in understanding the motivations of social media users such as TikTok (Chao et al., 2023; Montag et al., 2021).

Other than China, research on TikTok user motivations has been conducted in various other countries, where the motivations in question differ from those observed in China. As in cross-cultural research conducted by (Deng et al., 2023) in three countries simultaneously, namely the United States, Spain, and Chile. This research aimed to examine the motivations and satisfaction of TikTok users in diverse countries with disparate cultural values. The findings indicate that users in Chile and Spain, who exhibit a greater degree of collectivism, perceive TikTok as a socialization tool, whereas users in the United States, who demonstrate a stronger inclination towards individualism, tend to utilize TikTok as a means of escapism.

Indonesia, as the second largest country in terms of TikTok users, does not have enough reliable research on TikTok, especially on the motivation of TikTok users. However, there is research by (Rahimullah et al., 2022) who attempted to analyze the factors that influence users' intention to continue accessing higher education content on TikTok. The results showed that perceived usefulness (PU) and satisfaction (SAT) significantly influenced users' intention to continue accessing higher education content on TikTok. It can be concluded that TikTok users rely heavily on TikTok's video recommendation system. This research can be a spark for many other studies that discuss TikTok from different perspectives, such as one that discusses the motivation of its users.

This research aims to identify the main motive of university students in Malang to use TikTok. This research is based on the findings of previous research by Omar & Dequan which tried to examine the motives of TikTok users. The results confirm empirically that there are various types of motivation that influence media use. In the context of TikTok researchers found that social media users consume or watch TikTok for the purposes of escapism, social interaction, and archiving. Meanwhile, they participate in TikTok to express themselves, interact with others, and escape from daily stresses. The motivation to produce TikTok videos, on the other hand, comes from the desire to fulfill their self-expression and archiving. Data was collected using a questionnaire and it considered five categories of motives that Omar & Dequan (2020) used an adapted Instagram use measure (Lee et al., 2015) to assess the motives for using TikTok.

2 | METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to explore the main motive that university students in Malang, aged 18–24, have for using TikTok. The positivist paradigm was adopted, with an explanatory quantitative approach used to objectively understand the phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2021). Malang, which is referred to as the Education City due to its presence of 62 universities (Pemerintah Kota Malang, 2022), was selected as the research site. Due to variations in student numbers across these institutions, the sampling technique used was disproportionate stratified random sampling, an approach suitable for estimating samples in a stratified but unequal population (Sugiyono, 2021). According to data from the Public Communication and Information Division (Bidang Komunikasi dan Informasi

Publik, 2023) the total population of active students in Malang was 333,000. The Raosoft sample calculator, which operates within a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level, was utilized to determine the ideal number of respondents. This calculation yielded a total of 377 respondents as the optimal sample size. The total number of respondents collected through online surveys conducted between September 27 and October 14, 2024 was 383, and all of these respondents were included in the subsequent data analysis.

Tabel 1: Structure of Survey

Parts		Questions/Statements	Theoretical Grounding
Respondent Consent		Consent to be a Respondent	(Hansen & Mach, 2019)
Demographic		Age Gender	-
TikTok Use Motivation (Omar & Dequan, 2020)	Social Interaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I use TikTok to interact with many people 2. I use TikTok to maintain good relationships with others 3. I use TikTok to get the latest info about close friends and family 4. I use TikTok to communicate with friends and family 5. I use TikTok to find out things that are happening around me 	(Caplan, 2003)
	Archiving	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I use TikTok to record daily activities through photos and videos 2. I use TikTok to create my personal space 3. I use TikTok to record my footsteps 4. I use TikTok to publish various contents related to me 5. I use TikTok to take photos and videos of something elegant or cool and store them online 6. I use TikTok to upload photos and videos with a variety of filters to use 	(Sung et al., 2016)
	Self-	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I use TikTok to share my 	(Gibbs et al.,

Expression	latest news 2. I use TikTok to get noticed by others 3. I use TikTok to express my true self 4. I use TikTok to share my personal information with others	2006; Kramer & Chung, 2011; Papacharissi, 2002)
Peeking	1. I use TikTok to view photos and videos that match my interests 2. I use TikTok to see the daily life of people from all over the world 3.	(Doster, 2013; Jung et al., 2012; Metzl, 2004)
Escapism	1. I use TikTok to escape from reality 2. I use TikTok to forget about problems 3. I use TikTok to avoid loneliness 4. I use TikTok to get what I want without putting too much effort into it 5. I use TikTok to relax	(Korgaonkar et al., 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013)

Source: researcher's processed result (2025)

The data were collected using a Google Forms-based questionnaire, which was disseminated via social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The questionnaire measured five motivational constructs based on the Uses and Gratifications theory: social interaction, self-expression, peeking, escapism, and archiving. These constructs were adapted from previous research on Instagram use by Omar & Dequan (2020). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). The scale items exhibited adequate reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values surpassing 0.312. Following this, the data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques with the analytical software, Microsoft Excel, and the statistical software SPSS version 29. Descriptive analysis using the mean value shows the score of each motivation sorted from highest to lowest.

3 | RESULT AND DISCUSSION

TikTok has become a popular platform among university students (Lan & Tung, 2024), as it offers a creative and interactive means to express oneself. Many students use the app to share everyday moments, showcase their talents, or simply entertain themselves after academic activities. The videos uploaded on TikTok are often short yet engaging, making it suitable for quick consumption in between busy schedules. This makes TikTok a relevant platform in the social lives of today's university students. In this research survey provides more insight into what the main motivation for university

students at Malang (ages 18-24) to use TikTok.

Base on data about age frequency, as shown in Figure 1, university students (18-24) use TikTok mostly were 20 years old, with 81 people or 21.1% of the total respondents. This is followed by the 22 year olds with 79 people (20.6%) and the 21 year olds with 75 people (19.6%). Meanwhile, the number of respondents aged 19 was 57 people (14.9%) and the number aged 23 was 47 people (12.3%). The age group with the lowest number of respondents was 24 years, with 17 people or only 4.4%. The age group of 18 also had a relatively small number of respondents, namely 27 people (7.0%).

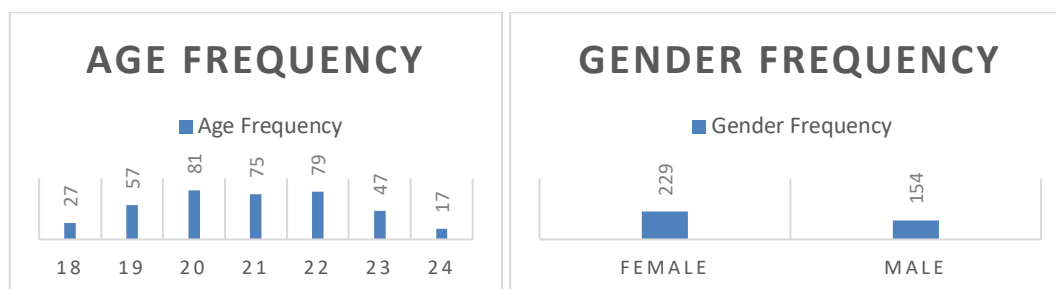


Figure 1 & 2: Age and Genre Frequency
(Researcher's Processed Result, 2025)

Based on data about the gender frequency of the respondents in figure 2, TikTok user consisting of 229 females (58.8%) and 154 males (40.2%). This shows that the majority of university students at Malang who use TikTok are female. In terms of demographics at this research university students who use TikTok are dominated by aged 20-22 female. Research has shown that the use and gratification of social media sites (SMS) vary according to user characteristics such as age, gender, and personality, but these were not further explored in this research. (Kircaburun et al., 2020).

TikTok, a video-sharing platform launched globally in 2017, quickly became one of the world's most popular social networking sites, particularly among young people who use it to create, share, and watch short videos. Since its launch, TikTok has experienced rapid growth, becoming the most downloaded-app globally in 2020 (Nau et al., 2022). Given that TikTok is a platform that offers users a range of social interaction, self-expression, peeking, escapism, and archiving (Omar & Dequan, 2020), the data obtained from this research provide valuable insights into the motivations of the sample group. In this research found that the primary motives among the five categories are those related to peeking motive following by social interaction, archiving, escapism, and self-expression (table 2).

Tabel 2: TikTok Use Motivations

No	TikTok Use Motivations	Mean	SD
1	Peeking	4,29	1,13
2	Social Interaction	4,01	1,04
3	Archiving	3,84	0,91

4	Escapism	3,61	0,81
5	Self-Expression	3,54	1,03

Source: researcher's processed result, 2025

Peeking is the main motivation for university students in Malang to use TikTok. Peeking developed from a motivation called voyeurism which is defined as a curiosity to peek into the private lives of others (Doster, 2013; Munar, 2010). In the field of psychiatric literature, voyeurism has been defined as a pathological condition characterized by an exaggerated tendency to derive pleasure from surreptitiously observing the erotically preferred sex when they are naked, undressed, and engaged in sexual behavior (Baruh, 2010). However, Calvert (2000) in Jung et al., (2012) reveals that in the development of voyeurism in the new media era, as a harmless yet guilty pleasure of peeping into the seemingly real and unguarded lives of others who own televisions and the Internet. In today's culture, therefore, voyeurism is not always associated with something sensual (Baruh, 2010).

Research on voyeurism has been conducted by many communication researchers across traditional and new media. In traditional media such as reality show at television (Bagdasarov et al., 2010; Baruh, 2010). Later voyeurism also developed on various new media such as specific social media like Facebook, *Cyworld* as blogging apps, mukbang online show, personal blogging apps, and several social media (Twitter, Facebook, TripAdvisor, Wikipedia) in one study (Broberg, 2017; Doster, 2013; Jung et al., 2012; Munar, 2010; Park et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2019; Wang, 2015). Unfortunately, none of the numerous voyeurism studies have examined TikTok specifically. While there is popular content on TikTok called 'day in my life' that does meet the criteria of voyeurism, it is something that needs to be studied.

In an article written by (Jennings, 2022) in the US context revealed that due to the structure and accessibility of TikTok, "Day in My Life" videos on the site are very different from regular YouTube vlogs. In contrast to YouTube's lengthy, high-production videos that demand more time, equipment, and editing expertise, TikTok allows users to create short, easily readable material with less effort. TikTok's algorithm guarantees quick visibility, which frequently propels creators to stardom overnight. These movies offer a mix of relatability and voyeurism, showcasing a variety of lives from professionals and students to homeless people and stay-at-home parents. This is not much different in the Indonesian context, content related to 'day in my life' is popular and attracts a lot of attention (Alfian, 2023).

Although there is no proven research, researchers can see similarities between the voyeuristic appeal of TikTok's 'day in my life' content and reality television shows. (Baruh, 2010) in his research discusses that reality shows captivate audiences through their voyeuristic nature, offering glimpses into private or awkward moments that allow viewers to observe the participant's authentic self. Like a snoop patiently gathering clues to complete the picture, viewers are often motivated to observe behavior and find subtle hints of authenticity hidden in the program's often contrived dynamics. This is also the case with TikTok's 'day in my life' content, which features personal moments of influencers and artists performing everyday activities such as waking up, washing the dishes, going to work. Not infrequently through the moments displayed insert things that make the audience curious so that it concludes questions in the comment's column. If

this happens, content creators can reply to comments with comments or with videos to answer the audience's curiosity.

The various interactive features that go beyond simple likes and comments, such as creating personal responses to videos, remixing existing content, and collaborating on duets that allow users to perform together, have raised concerns about the platform's potential for addiction and emphasized the importance of managing its use (Miltsov, 2022). Since TikTok's advanced features have the potential to cause addiction, further research is required to fully understand this phenomenon and how it relates to voyeurism. Park et al. (2022) findings, which show that voyeurism is positively correlated with the level of social media usage as measured by the creation and consumption of material, can serve as a starting point for studies on addiction, particularly TikTok addiction.

4 | CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this research indicate that peeking, a contemporary manifestation of voyeurism, serves as the main motivation for university students in Malang (aged 18–24) to engage with TikTok. While traditionally linked to privacy invasion and voyeurism, in the digital media context, voyeurism has evolved into a socially acceptable form of curiosity, as evidenced by the popularity of content such as "day in my life" videos. These brief, relatable glimpses into others' daily routines foster a sense of connection and entertainment, particularly among female students aged 20–22, who predominate in the region's TikTok user base. The present study corroborates the continued relevance of Uses and Gratifications Theory in the context of explaining TikTok engagement, particularly with regard to the role of peeking, followed by social interaction, archiving, escapism, and self-expression. Given TikTok's design, which encourages passive observation as well as active interaction, further investigation into the platform's addictive potential is necessary, particularly in how voyeuristic tendencies may contribute to excessive use. The present study is constrained by its emphasis on university students in Malang and its reliance on self-reported data, which may compromise the generalizability and accuracy of the findings. Future research should explore voyeurism across different platforms and populations, employ experimental or longitudinal methods to examine causality, and utilize qualitative approaches to gain deeper insight into user's motives.

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