

## Trend starts here: perks on self-esteem among Filipino undergraduate tiktok users

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**Abstract** - The emergence of the TikTok application represents noteworthy phenomenon in the realm of social media. It became an avenue for self-expression, business, awareness-raising, and entertainment (Insider Intelligence, 2022). This indicates that more individuals will continuously be engaged by this app, especially undergraduate TikTok users, who are usually exposed. This stimulates the researchers in identifying the perks of the TikTok app for the self-esteem of Filipino undergraduate students along with the distinct features of the platform. This study employed a qualitative research design through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) developed by Smith et al (2009). Using the purposive convenience sampling, 24 participants were interviewed, in person and via email. The responses of the participants underwent thematic approach. Rigorous condensation of the transcript led in shaping four distinct themes (1) engagement of undergraduate TikTok users on the application, (2) meeting the undergraduates TikTok users' purpose for a sense of fulfillment. (3) improvement rendered by the TikTok application o undergraduates' qualities and abilities and (4) interactive and production features as a source of self-esteem advancement. Various practical recommendations were further elaborated at the end of the study.

**Keywords:** trend starts here, perks on self-esteem, filipino undergraduate students, tiktok exposure, tiktok features

## I. INTRODUCTION

A growing world phenomenon has occurred after an impressive feat for a platform launched in 2016 (Big 3 Media, 2020). This has recently brought over 1.53 billion active users globally which received 2.6 billion downloads on the App Store and Google Play (Doyle, 2023). An application widely known as TikTok was developed by Chinese start-up company Byte Dance and formerly known as Musical.ly. It is a social media platform where users can create, share, and discover videos that range in duration from 15 seconds to 10 minutes (D'Souza, 2023). Individuals use the app as a form of self-expression, primarily to create and share videos of themselves performing, dancing, acting, and lip-syncing (McGarrigle, 2023). TikTok makes it simple to create video content with a variety of frequently enhanced features, including the use of filters, stickers, voiceovers, sound effects, and background music, which enables users to be creative with their videos. Other than video production, interaction features such as collaboration on content using duets and stitch, live video streaming, and video replies were created for the users to view, comment and share posted videos (Yang, 2022). This course leads to the recognition of "influencers" and "content creators" by the community.

Influencers and content creators on TikTok are distinct from one another. Influencers are individuals who use their fan base to promote their lifestyle or brands, whereas content creators are individuals who write content for their blogs (Patel, 2021). These individuals are referred to as TikTokers; a one-word term for TikTok users. TikTokers are described as individuals by Cambridge Dictionary (2021) as those who use the services of the application to create content and influence the community. Tiktokers mostly prioritized gaining likes and followers while their videos creatively featured on the platform. These confer that exposure along with various effects affects the overall sense of oneself, in particular with the TikTokers (McGarrigle, 2023). The way individuals' value and perceive themselves is called self-esteem (Mind, 2022).

Self-esteem is defined by Rosenberg as the orientation of oneself on his or her own thoughts and feelings (University of Maryland, 2021). This component affects the general well-being of an individual which includes decision-making and emotional management (Cherry, 2022). Hence, this self-concept is vulnerable especially in the context of social media platforms, in particular with the TikTok application. Further studies revealed that there is a strong inverse relationship between social media and self-esteem (Jan et al, 2017). However, Penn State (Social media & self-esteem, 2020) stated that positive impact occurs through the interaction which renders a sense of belongingness and support.

A local study explicitly examined the effects of TikTok on the self-esteem and social support of users. It was cited that many observers and experts believed that the more social media platforms there are, the more people suffer from low self-esteem. However, TikTok users could garner an increase in self-esteem by exposing themselves as influencers and content creators on the said platform. TikTok has improved features that make it possible to interact with other users. As a result, multiple online communities were created. Due to the interactive features (e.g., likes, comments, duets, and stitches from other users, this leads to the idea of social support (Wang et, 2019). When someone uploads a video, the feedback they receive from others significantly impacts how they value and see themselves, thus garnering an increase in self-esteem. Furthermore, the study, which considered only 53 out of 71 participants because they were the only Tiktok users, revealed that using the app for more than 6 hours a week has an average level of self-esteem. This revelation varies on the contents they watched as TikTok users mostly watched Dance Covers, though Memes were closely patronized (Amoda et al, 2022).

TikTok became an avenue for self-expression, business, awareness-raising, and entertainment. In an inaugural forecast, TikTok will not remain where it is right now; rather, it is calculated to profoundly expand by 2025 (Insider Intelligence, 2022). This indicates that more individuals will continuously be engaged by this app, especially undergraduate TikTok users, who are usually exposed. The growing number of undergraduate TikTok users will undoubtedly have an impact on their own self-esteem, either positive or negative (Adawiyah, 2020). Moreover, Montag et al (2021) stated that when conducting a study about TikTok, attention needs to be paid to more specialized aspects of the broad dimensions of use and gratification theory, like social usage. One possible area of research is a greater emphasis on the study of self-esteem in relation to TikTok use. This stimulates the researchers to identify the perks of the TikTok app for the self-esteem of Filipino college students. Furthermore, the researchers wanted to find out which features of the application helped boost the self-esteem of undergraduates.

Hence, this study specifically aimed to respond to the following queries: (a) What are the perks of using the application for the self-esteem of undergraduate TikTok users? (b) What are the features of TikTok that help boost the self-esteem of undergraduate TikTok users?

## **II. METHOD**

This section provides the research method applied in this study. It discusses the design, settings, participants, data gathering procedure and analysis and ethical considerations of this research.

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative research design using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the specific approach. This methodological approach, which is widely used in psychology (Smith et al, 2009) that seeks to understand the significance linked to lived experience (Gala, 2021), is used to determine perks on self-esteem for Filipino undergraduate TikTok users by looking at the own experiences of the participants and interpreting the qualities of those experiences. Furthermore, a total of 26 TikTok users are the participants of the study and are located within one of the universities in the Philippines, specifically in Leyte Province. Through purposive convenience sampling, a set of criteria has been followed to choose the participants of the study: (1) they must be undergraduate TikTok users of the university; and (2) they must have uploaded videos on TikTok, publicly. Moreover, the locale of the study has been set based on the ease of access for interviewing the participants. The interview can take place in a face-to-face interview or an email interview; thus, it is convenient to interview the participants where the researchers are currently situated.

### **2.2 Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis**

In accumulating the requisite information for the study in two weeks, the researchers distributed the invitation letter and informed consent. Upon getting the approval, the researchers asked permission in using an audio recorder to document the proceedings of the interview. In light of the questions posed to the participants during the interview, the Semi-structured Approach was applied which consisted of open-ended inquiries, thereby allowing the participants to freely express their views. The first two sets of questions asked the following: (1) How long have you been uploading videos on the TikTok app? and (2) What improvements to your personality have you observed throughout that time, particularly to your confidence in your worth and abilities? Additional questions were subsequently posed about the specific content that the users usually upload. Whereas, the two remaining questions are the following: (1) What features of the TikTok app do you frequently use? and

(2) Based on the aforementioned features, how does each of them uplift the way you value or perceive yourself? Additionally, the methodology employed for data collection was centered on storytelling, as it allowed for a more open and unrestricted approach to sharing personal anecdotes and insights (Vecaldo et al, 2019). The participants were instructed to speak a language of their preference and proficiency, which included English, Filipino, or their mother tongue. Overall, 15 out of the 24 designated participants who consented to participate were successfully interviewed in person; and the remaining participants were interviewed form through email to authenticate the data gathered.

The collected data from the interviews underwent rigorous transcription and scrutiny, followed by further analysis using the thematic approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2019). This method culminated in the categorization and condensation of the transcripts according to the identified themes and subthemes. Following the manual for qualitative data analysis of Saldaña (2012), a content analysis was conducted to discern and delineate these thematic categories, which underwent two cycles of coding. The first coding cycle utilized were descriptive coding and in vivo coding. Descriptive coding is a method wherein the data were categorized through descriptive nouns alone, while In Vivo coding is the condensation of data that includes a word or phrase from terms used by the participants. Consequently, this provides a direct organizational apprehension of the study. The succeeding cycle was a combination of eclectic coding and axial coding. Eclectic coding is the refining of codes from the combination of two types of coding conducted in the first cycle. On the other hand, axial coding reassembles the codes to produce more polished data by crossing out redundant codes. Hence, this enables the researcher to formulate categories and follow the crafting of distinct themes that emerged from dividing larger portions of text into smaller and meaningful segments.

Moreover, the researchers outlined that the participation of undergraduate students was of their own volition and their answers would be shielded from identification and disclosure. An invitation letter and informed consent to the participants was given with intention of informing them of the research while simultaneously ensuring their respected privacies. To maintain the anonymity of the participants', assigned codes were rendered to each of them such as P1 (Participant 1), P2 (Participant 2), etc. The researchers placed significant emphasis on the ethical considerations regarding the well-being and comfort of the participants during the course of the study. Furthermore, this study presented in accordance of promoting the objective of the research such as knowledge, truth and avoidance of error.

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The present study aims to identify the benefits of using the TikTok application that influence the participant's perception and orientation of oneself. This section examines the data gathered in response to the research question, which assesses the benefits of using the TikTok application, as well as the interactive and production features that influence the self-esteem of Filipino undergraduate TikTok users.

#### **3.1 Perks of using the TikTok application for self-esteem.**

In this study, the researchers found three themes that were favorable to the participant's responses to the influence of the TikTok app: (1) Engagement of Undergraduate TikTok users on the application, (2) Meeting the undergraduates' TikTok user's purpose for a sense of fulfillment, and (3) Improvement rendered by the TikTok application on undergraduates' qualities and abilities.

##### **(1) Engagement of Undergraduate TikTok users on the application**

In the time that Filipino undergraduate TikTok users have been uploading videos on the TikTok app, the gathered data revealed that Filipino undergraduate TikTok users started their engagement on the application since the pandemic had started. Two examples determined the commencement and duration of TikTok usage by Filipino undergraduate TikTok users.

*I've been using it for about 3 years pero stop stop hiya... [P6]*

**(Translation)** *I've been using it inconsistently for the past 3 years...*

*I think it was during the pandemic, and then until now I am still uploading videos on TikTok, but it only happens once a week since I'm also busy in school. [P8]*

These two examples discussed the commencement of Filipino undergraduates in using the TikTok application and the duration of their engagement on the application. They mentioned when they started using and uploading videos on TikTok and how they consistently or inconsistently engage on the application. During the whole duration of the pandemic, gratifying entertainment and affective needs were usually sought which became a pertinent driver behind TikTok engagement (Bossen and Kottasz, 2020).

### **(2) Meeting the undergraduates' TikTok user's purpose for a sense of fulfillment**

In the engagement and usage of the TikTok application, data shows that Filipino undergraduates use the application for pastime activity, stress relief, and avenues for self-expression. Two examples are categorized to identify the purpose of using the application.

*I think, kuan la adto like, pa pa group koan la, group videos like for fun lang, for entertainment, tas after that until now, nagtitiniktok la ghap ako for entertainment na rin. [P4]*

**(Translation)** *I think that time I upload videos-group videos- for fun and for entertainment. Until now, I'm still using the application for the same purpose still.*

*Naipakita ko kun an akon mga like an akon pano ko maeexpress an akon talent through that platform. [P3]*

**(Translation)** *From that, I was able to express and showcase my talent on that platform.*

These two distinct responses from the participants identified the purpose of the Filipino undergraduates in their engagement with the application. They indicated that they upload videos and content on the app for entertainment purposes and self-expression. It is supported by Delliana (n.d.) that college students use the TikTok application as a relaxing environment and a stress relieving tool, particularly, in improving one's mood. However, Kross et al. (2022) elaborated that the TikTok app is somehow an unhealthy environment as the study discusses that several psychological processes, such as fear of missing out and upward social comparison are linked to negative effects on the experience and lives of TikTok users.

### **(3) Improvement rendered by the TikTok application on undergraduates' qualities and abilities**

Filipino undergraduate TikTok users have been uploading videos on the application, and improvements to personalities are observed over time as students are engaging in the application. The data collected shows that the application enhances the undergraduates' perception of themselves, as it particularly revealed that it boosts their confidence, progress on social influence is observed, praises as a form of encouragement, and it amplifies the abilities of Filipino undergraduate TikTok users. From there, two examples identified the impact on social self, improvement of one's self, and the development of skills.

*What was good about it was that I slowly realized that it helped boost my confidence. I have also received appreciation from other people, which helps me increase my self-confidence. Also, uploading videos made me realize that I am capable of doing what others can do; I have the ability to do such things, which enhances my self-worth. [P22]*



*Throughout the experience I had recording myself to upload them on TikTok, I have seen such improvements in my confidence and self-esteem. This is likely because the app allows us to create and share content that reflects our interests and personalities and receive positive feedback and support from the community. I have used TikTok as a platform to showcase my talents, such as dancing, singing, and acting, which boosts my confidence in my abilities. [P24]*

These two examples comprehensively discussed the improvements to personality particularly in the qualities and abilities of Filipino undergraduate TikTok users. Their responses indicate their experience and the confidence, skills, abilities, and encouragement observed and developed throughout the time that they had been uploading videos on the TikTok app. This is supported by Li (2023) who documented that those who had subjective meanings, particularly, in the development of qualities and abilities, in social media become aware of their self-worth which improves the way they perceive their selves. On the other hand, Green (2022) asserted that those videos yield immediate satisfaction, making users addicted to the app, increasing the risk of self-disclosure problems, and reducing their self-esteem. However, (Savira et al, 2022) concluded that a person's unwillingness to try new things and their fear of failure are the primary causes of low self-esteem, rather than their use of social media.

### **3.2 Features of the TikTok app that helps in boosting self-esteem.**

In order to contribute to the discourse surrounding it at hand, undergraduate TikTok users are encouraged to share their respective vantage points regarding the features that uplift the way they value and perceive their selves. This led to the recognition of four themes modified from the condensed data transcription: (1) Interactive and production features as a source of self-esteem advancement, (2) Improvement rendered by the TikTok application on undergraduates' qualities and abilities, (3) Meeting the undergraduates TikTok user's purpose for a sense of fulfillment, and (4) Engagement of undergraduate TikTok users on the application.

#### **(1) Interactive and production features as a source of self-esteem advancement.**

TikTok consists of a variety of enhanced features that led to the production of video content and interaction in the TikTok community. The corpora collected from the undergraduate TikTok users' responses disclose the features they frequently use on the application which contribute to self-esteem advancement. Two examples discuss such improvement through the relevant features of the application.

*Well, most of the features I used are the ones that most TikTok users used are the filter trends such as the puzzle challenges, ai edits, face edits, quizzes, and more. Other features are the duet with other videos about quizzes and reaction video. [P23]*

*My commonly used features on the TikTok app include creating and sharing short videos, adding music, using filters and effects, following other users, commenting on and liking videos, and participating in challenges and trends. [P24]*

The responses from the two examples specify the frequently used features of undergraduate TikTok users. The explicit response leads the researchers to categorize these features into two relevant and suitable categories: (1) Interactive Features, and (2) Video Production Features. This is supported by a literature published by Yang (2022) that a combination of a variety of frequently updated features, such as the use of facial and augmented reality filters, voiceover, video recording, uploading, quality, and effects, and background music, TikTok makes it simple to create video content and encourages users to be creative with their productions. In addition to video production, interaction features were developed for users to view, like, comment, share, and save posted videos, such as duets and stitch for content collaboration, live video streaming, video replies, and reposting.

## **(2) Improvement rendered by the TikTok application on undergraduates' qualities and abilities.**

The frequent use of the features of the TikTok app, data collected asserts that increased usage of the TikTok app is seen due to its frequently improved interactive and production features, which were highlighted in prior responses. Two examples express how the engagement of the undergraduates led them to invest time in using the application and rendered improvement from frequent use.

*Baga't through hit, through hit akan pagvivideo, бага't бага't nagiging, nam-through tak pagvivideo ghap ito dida na platform бага't gintatagan ghap it akan hin sarili na time, бага't бага't ginhihimo ko hiya na hobby ngaran kun sugad kuan ako бага't busy ha school, usa hiya nga nagpapakoan hit akan бага't бага't natatagan ko time basta tungod hit Tiktok. [P3]*

**(Translation)** *Through creating videos, I'm giving myself a me-time to the point that I make it as my hobby even though I'm busy in school.*

*Furthermore, uploading those videos is my own way to show and share with others who I am. In this way, I was able to understand myself, and through this, I can make other people understand me and show them my value. [P22]*

In these two examples, it was specifically discussed how rendering frequent use of the features enhanced engagement and use of the application, which contributed to undergraduates' qualities and abilities. They mentioned that by using the app's video production features, such as the ability to make videos, they were able to use it frequently to the point where they made time for it even amid busy schedules because it allowed them to express themselves to others. The way that undergraduates view themselves has therefore improved. Pop et al (2022) revealed that, in line with their self-esteem, students' body esteem levels rose in direct proportion to the time they spent on TikTok. Furthermore, according to (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017), students who use social media are likely to value frequent interactions more; as a result, the investment would reveal how seriously people take social media use.

## **(3) Meeting the undergraduates' TikTok user's purpose for a sense of fulfillment.**

The use of the TikTok application, as well as the frequently improved features of the app, contributed to the fulfillment of the undergraduate TikTok users' endeavors. The corpora gathered discussed how interactive and production features serve as avenues for self-expression and ability amplification. Following that, two examples discussed how these characteristics help them express and develop their abilities.

*When it comes to features, sa video, kasi diba may photos tas video doon sa application yung latest update. When It comes to video sa mga filters, mga funny filters yung yung mga latest na filters that will make you feel beautiful in your koan, that will also be an avenue for you to express yourself and to feel beautiful. [P5]*

**(Translation)** *In terms of feature, particularly, video. I used filters, funny filters, and latest filters that will make you feel beautiful, that will also be an avenue for you to express yourself and to feel beautiful.*

*I feel more open and honest with the things that I want to express, and also enhance my editing and creativity skills in making unique contents. [P16]*

In these two examples, the undergraduates believe that using the interactive and production features leads to the undergraduate TikTok users' purpose of using the app. They discussed how the specific filters altered their perspectives, allowing them to express themselves more freely. McGarrigle (2023) believe that people use the app to express themselves, primarily by creating and sharing videos of themselves. It also improves their ability to create unique content. As a result, they can interact more with others in the community, and the interactive features (e.g., likes, comments, duets, and stitches from users) contribute to the concept of social support (Wang et al, 2019).

#### (4) Engagement of undergraduate TikTok users on the application.

Along with the increased engagement and use of the application from the interactive and production features, data gathered discussed the effectivity and effectiveness of the application in uplifting the undergraduate's perception of oneself, as well as how they conclude the application as a detriment to the TikTok community. Three examples provide two-dimensional viewing in the use of the application.

*Overall, the features that I'm using benefit me in such a way that they increase my self-esteem and self-worth. I am grateful for the features of TikTok for the reason that it helps all the users build up their confidence in uploading their videos. [P24]*

*Waray man, waray man hiya. Diri man hiya nakaka apekto. Kun haakon side, waray. [P6]*

**(Translation)** No, I don't think so. It doesn't really affect me personally, so no.

*Kumbaga kun danay, awa dre gad danay kay permi, kun nag scroll scroll ako ha TikTok then kun nakoan kasi permi ko kasi ginkikita it comments section tas kon kon it ira pagcomments is good, which is mas okay para mas nagiging motivation ghap ito han naguupload han TikTok. Pero kun baga't negative side liwat hiya baga't deri hiya maupay kay it TikTok kasi damo it nagamit especially it bata baga't nagiging maapply daw ito it bata kay siyempre ginupload ito ha social media tapos masing ito na "hala goods ngean buhaton" koan sugad hito ba. [P8]*

**(Translation)** I read the comments on my videos to inspire myself, but if they're negative, since a variety of users use TikTok, particularly young users, it might influence them and lead them to believe that leaving negative comments is just something that people do.

Daniels (n.d.) discovered a positive and negative relationship between social media usage and self-esteem, which is influenced by factors such as feedback and investment in social media use. Continuous use of the features, as well as participation in the application, will affect undergraduates' self-esteem, either positively or negatively (Adawiyah, 2020). The three examples all generally covered how users' involvement with the application affects how they view themselves. In particular, the first example finds that using TikTok and the upgraded features of the app is personally effective because it boosts their sense of worth and self-esteem, which gives them more confidence to use the app. The second example, however, finds that frequent use of the features is ineffective because there has been no discernible change in their personality during their participation in the app. Finally, the third example demonstrated how positive feedback motivates people, whereas negative feedback has an impact on the audience and may lead them to believe that negative feedback is something that everyone does. This agrees with the statement of Valkenburg & Piotrowski (2017) that both positive and negative feedback have an impact on a person's self-esteem, both significantly and marginally.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This paper delved into the recognition of special advantages that the TikTok app could render to the self-esteem of the undergraduates who uses the platform, in particular with the content creators and influencers in the Philippine context. Findings were drawn from the insights of the Filipino undergraduate TikTok users which concludes that throughout the engagement on the platform meets one's purpose for a sense of fulfillment and improves one's qualities and abilities. Those were the factors that uplift each of individuals in valuing or perceiving themselves. In addition, the findings identify the distinct features of the TikTok application that the participants often utilized namely interactive and production features. Such features serve as a foundation on the advancement of one's self-esteem.

Moreover, this study substantiated the notion of TikTok being a phenomenal application that highly influence an individual's self-esteem. Future researchers may explore this study with the inclusion of collegiate performance of the undergraduate students. It is



also intriguing to tackle about the application's adverse impact on the user's self-esteem. Subsequent studies that might abide on the same scope could deal with the categorization of the types of users particularly through demographic profiles, level of engagement and popularity. Any relevant concerns in connection with TikTok and self-esteem that were not encompassed by this study may be conducted for further investigation.

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