

The Impact of 15 seconds on Algerian Users

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Abstract:

The large spread of Tik Tok reached all the countries, cultures, and even all regions. The caveat to this article deserves mentioning the social side of TIK Tok. This position research paper tries to unveil the impact of social media platforms Tik Tok on Algerian users.

This research conducted through a quantitative method, an E-survey distributed to Algerian users of Tik Tok, the direct link to survey was published on facebook group of Algerian Tik Tokers. This study reveals the huge impact of this App on algerian users in their ideas, habits, preferences, lifestyles...etc. an implication for sociologists and parents is that Tik Tok should be used in tune with users social duties, but never a vacuum to fill in the time of coronavirus pandemic

Keywords: social media; Tik Tok; impact; Algerian users.

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- INTRODUCTION

TikTok is a popular video-sharing smartphone application owned by ByteDance Ltd., a privately held company headquartered in Beijing, China. The app is under intense scrutiny by the U.S. government as a potential privacy and security risk to its users. A major concern is that ByteDance is subject to Chinese laws that require companies operating in China to turn over user data when asked to by the national government. The large spread of TikTok has reached all the countries, cultures, and even all religions, which has adapted to the logic of the platform. The popularity of this social network invites influencers to address a young audience on a platform characterized by visual and short content and dynamics defined by algorithmic recommendations, trending hashtags and challenges. Researchers all over the world differ over how TikTok's content can impact its users' ideas, habits, preferences, and even lifestyles.

1. What is Tik Tok?

TikTok is defined by Yuxin (2020) as a video-sharing social network service owned by ByteDance that, according to its website, seeks to “inspire creativity” of users and “bring joy” to the users (TikTok - Real Short Videos, 2020). It is a typical User-generated content platform (UGC), where content is produced by users, rather than the company. Accessible via mobile phone, the application allows users to create short lip-sync, dancings, gaming, DIY, food videos, etc., in 3 to 15 seconds or 3 to 60 seconds.. Other than video production, users engage in TikTok by viewing, sharing, and commenting on videos created by other users. Among various interaction of users, memes, the remix and reinterpretation of catchphrases, storylines, and songs, and other formulaic elements, were often used to reflect user's thoughts and culture. Through the process of constantly producing video content, some users gradually gain more followers or recognition from the community. These community-recognized users are called “influencers”.

2. Literature review:

Recent scholarship on the subject shows a great influence of social media on young people. In this section we going to cover the most important studies conducted on the subject in Arabic society. Previous studies conducted show that such image focused apps lead to several mental health issues like body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, narcissistic personalities etc. The usage of this application has resulted in child pornography, cyberbullying and parental disengagement. Dr Badriya Abdul Jaffar, Dr Sadia Riaz, and Dr Arif Mushtaq conducted a study titled *Living in a Moment: Impact of TicTok on Influencing Younger Generation into Micro-Fame* in 2019. Their paper used a pragmatic approach to examine indepth reasons behind TikTok becoming a sudden massive success amongst teenagers along with its positive and negative effects. Content analysis was performed on parent's views and comments left as feedback at the app store for downloading this application. Qualitative data gathered was transcribed and codified to derive emerging themes. Focused group interviews with a few up and coming TikTok micro celebrities were conducted to explore their underlying thought processes, problems and other interesting facts about the application. The study proposes a conceptual framework as roadmap of TikTok micro-fame which could be used by other studies and researchers. The study substantiates a fact towards understanding the areas of further research in designing and developing the application from a functional as well as users' perspective.

Plethora of research and studies have been done to understand why TikTok has gained its sudden massive attention and its effects on the younger generation. There study is important as it can improve the functional perspective and user's

perspective of this app. This platform also exceedingly provides to the user's preferences which often results in the misuse of its features and vulgarization of the content. There are contents that disrupt the ordinary mortals of the society, absence of effective and precise value guidance. The content seems to be standardized and some part of the content contains Violation. The user-centric theory which effortlessly validates the "uses and gratification" theory. If it's only based on "satisfaction" and if there is no "guidance" the entire function will deteriorate. In India especially TikTok has been a major concern leading it to the ban of the app due to its inappropriate content and Pornography. More actions should be taken to defend users against misapplication, their privacy and digital security. It should also enable users to report content that are inappropriate and violate community guidelines. This would also help parents to recognise the negative impact such image-focused applications have on the children and enlighten teenagers to be more vigilant while using the app. From the data collected it was seen that there were similarities in the issues raised by parents' opinion and the participants' interviewed. Both parents and the interviewees state that vulgarity and inappropriate comments are present on the app where the interviewee's asserting that girls are more likely to face cheap and objectifying comments. In the aspect of privacy settings, most claims that the app is quite safe with new laws being implemented post the ban of the app in India. As for minors, it's not safe with its highly suggestive and vulgar content. Two of the interviewees said that kids need to be monitored on the app as "age is just a number". This study stated that this app should follow to the role of "gatekeeper" and should eliminate the energy of harmful content. It can also improve the "aesthetic taste" and encounter the high level "spiritual needs" of users by giving quality content. This paper also discusses reviews

given by individuals “microcelebrities” about TikTok. Moreover, Dr Hanan Ezzat in a study titled *Social media influencers and the online identity of Egyptian youth* investigated the relationship between social media influencers and the online identity of Egyptian youth (2020). The context of this study is Egypt, a country of traditional, patriarchal and keenly religious nature. Its youth, while being viewed as promising with all eyes set on them to bring about change in the society, face many challenges on a day-to-day level. They struggle with their identity just like other youth around the world. This study is critical to understand the role of social media influencers given that youth spend a great deal of time following them and consuming their content.

The original contribution to knowledge is exploring the way in which social media influencers’ and their fans’ processes of identity construction are connected through their online performances and interactions in a non-Western developing culture. This study also provides a look into the societal role of social media in Egypt, moving away from the mobilization role that has dominated social media studies about Egypt. The study delves into how social media influencers and their fans from youth present themselves online and construct their identity. It looks into what constitutes a social media influencer and a fan and their relationship. Special focus is on how fans appropriate the content presented by social media influencers and how becoming a fan plays out in their online identity.

The literature which this study draws upon includes studies about identity in the digital age, identity development, online identity construction and self-presentation and relevant studies. Particular attention is paid to Goffman’s dramaturgical approach and Leary’s self-presentational tactics. Additional important

relevant theoretical concepts are included to help explain the relationship between social media influencers and the online identity of youth, namely: displays of authenticity, identification, Source Credibility Theory and parasocial relationships. The study employs a qualitative methodology through in-depth interviews with nine influencers and eighteen of their fans. The interviews generate a wealth of information, insights and perspectives from both parties.

The analysis of the interviews revealed that social media influencers reached out to their audiences, with an aim to build a large fan base. To achieve that objective, it was essential for them to create a distinct persona.

3. Challenges offered by Tik Tok

TikTok offers challenges which are classified by Khatab (2015) into two main categories. These are hashtagged trending videos that start a series of video responses from users. Among their most popular challenges is #DontJudgeMeChallenge, which was initiated in 2015 as a campaign based on a makeup tutorial YouTube video by Chicago-based makeup artist Em Ford titled “You Look Disgusting”. The campaign spread on social media networking sites such as Twitter and Instagram and gained wide attention as an attempt to combat body shaming, reaching 170,000 video submissions on Twitter. The campaign consisted of videos made by users that highlighted facial imperfections such as acne or scars, clearly and rather farcically added by makeup, only to be removed on camera to show a cleaner complexion. The campaign was sometimes criticized as self-defeating and propagating the very element of body shaming it purportedly targeted. Another major challenge launched by TikTok is #KarmaisaBitch. This challenge builds on the comedic sense propagated by the now-extinct website Vine.

3.1 - The Attractive/Unattractive Binary

The #DontJudgeMeChallenge is a straightforward reference to value judgement based entirely on the body image. The challenge

begins with the user projecting herself/himself as unattractive, then attempting to cover the camera in order to transform to a different attractive body image. The title of this challenge is more like a plea asking the public sphere to hold off judgement. It is interesting that the videos do not live up fully to the title. The very structure of the videos accepts and even seeks judgement. It only requests viewers to postpone their judgement until the users change their appearance to become more acceptable within normalized concepts of beauty. In asking for no judgement, however, the videos elicit judgement. The #KarmaisaBitch is another reinforcement of value judgement based on the body image. This is evident as the makeover motif is central to the challenge. The original scene from the TV show is an expression of gloating over an unfortunate event that happens to one's rival. The scene went viral on YouTube then became a popular meme before it became a TikTok challenge. In the challenge, a user initially looks at the screen, either plain looking or with unfavorable makeup like the #DontJudgeMeChallenge. The user then throws a bedsheet over, covering herself/himself. The video then cuts to a new scene where the same user has a makeover and fits the same criteria of beauty used in the #DontJudgeMeChallenge. What is added to the #KarmaisaBitch challenge is that the users lip sync the sentence, "Oh, well. Karma is a bitch," from Riverdale, followed by the transformation scene to the tune of Kreyshawn's song "Gucci Gucci," in a blunt socioeconomic reference. It is worth mentioning that all the videos take place in what seem to be the users' bedrooms. This adds an element of intimacy, enhancing playfulness. It is interesting that the videos' background reveals an intersectionality of the private, as seen in the bedrooms, and the public, as the videos are posted publicly. For the purpose of the analysis, the video samples from both challenges are divided into the following categories: (1) Exaggerated features in the unattractive scene; (2) Body shaming; (3) Ableism; (4) Ageism; (5) Integrating gender; (6) Rejection; (7) Variation.

3.1.1 Exaggerated features

in the unattractive scene In the first scene from one standard #DontJudgeMeChallenge video, a close up of the face of a male user in what appears to be a bedroom shows that the user clearly uses a filter to exaggerate his features by making his nose and lips seem bigger, adds cream to his face, distorting his complexion, lets his hair hang down, and looks subdued. In the scene following the transformation, the filter is gone, revealing the user's regular features. What is more, there is no cream or any other material distorting his complexion. His hair is styled with a bandana.

3.1.2 Body shaming

In this example, a female user does not use a filter to distort her features. Instead, in order to strike an unattractive pose, she does not wear makeup, wears oversized clothes, pulls her hair back, and wears eyeglasses. She stands in what seems to be a bedroom with flailed arms and stares blankly. In the transformation scene, the user wears makeup, a short t-shirt revealing midriff, and poses with her hair flowing and arms widespread, again in a traditionally sexy pose. The two scenes focus on the user's belly, as she clearly stuffs her shirt in the first scene to seem as if she has a large waistline, then bares it in the second to show a small waistline, with an elaborate focus on an overweight version in the initial scene.

3.1.3 Ageism

Another variation on the binary of ugly and beautiful is age. In one video, the first scene shows a young man and a child, who both panic as, via filter, they notice that their hair is grey and their faces have wrinkles, indicating old age. Their terrified reaction mimics clearly fear of aging. In the transformation scene, both users are young. Their image is complimented with other features. In the first image, the young man in his older version is wearing a sleeveless shirt, with grey hair and wrinkled face. In the second, he is a young man, wearing a dark shirt on top, implying a more professional look as

opposed, perhaps, to a stereotype of retired men in a sleeveless flannel.

3.1.4 Ableism

The sample video for this category follows the same steps but adds a slight variation that is quite interesting. In the unattractive version, the hair, complexion, and posture of the user are compromised in a closeup as always. In addition, however, the user is seen holding a respiratory inhaler. The reference to ill health in the video adds health as an attribute to sexual appeal. In the transformation version, the stereotypical elements of hair, complexion, and poise are altered to reveal not only a self-confident user with the usual bold gaze facing the viewer, but also emphasize health as the user is no longer hunched forward and is not holding an inhaler.

3.1.5 Integrating gender

An interesting and less common play on gender in the #DontJudgeMeChallenge is introduced in a video that has an interesting twist. In the unattractive version, we see the expected face in closeup covered with pimples, a painted unibrow, exaggerated facial expressions, and a mop of hair. The user's unattractive character wears eyeglasses, which is in line with the negative portrayal of physical weaknesses as weaker eyesight here is portrayed as a sign of ugliness. A new feature is added here, as a moustache and beard are also painted on the user's face. The gender twist occurs as the transformed user in the second scene is revealed as a woman. Not only do the stereotypical features of complexion, facial expressions, hair, or even eyeglasses change, but also the user's gender changes.

3.1.6 Rejection

One video shows two users performing a short skit. This is the only video that takes place in what seems to be a living room rather than the bedrooms we have in all the other videos. A man and a woman play a couple. The man is sitting on a couch, pretending to be too busy with his mobile phone to pay attention to the woman, sitting

at his feet and begging with a hand gesture for his attention. In the second scene, the woman gets a makeover, and is now the one sitting in an aloof pose on the sofa while the man is the one on his knees on the floor raising his arms in the pleading gesture. It is worth noting how, despite seemingly empowering the female partner, the video still reinforces heterosexual norms of gender roles, as the woman only manages to earn the man's attention when she achieves sexualized appearance.

3.1.7 Variation

Variation in one video is worth examining where the focus is not on a person but on a drawing. The background here is not a room but a piece of paper. The initial scene shows only a hand drawing an unimpressive stick figure face. In the second scene, a fully drawn portrait in Japanese manga style fills the screen. Interestingly, it is the character in the drawing that has the stereotypical sexy pose, complete with dangling earrings and stylish hair. Replacing a human body with two variations of drawing styles, an unattractive stick figure and the other an attractive well-executed drawing, reduces body image to a created project, thus emphasizing its performativity and projectability. It is possible to see this video as a reflection on the process behind the challenge. It epitomizes the performativity of the visual body image and highlights the desexualized oversimplified aspect of the first scene as opposed to the second scene.

3.2 The Gender Binary

#TheBoyChallenge is a seemingly simple gender transformation. A typical video in this challenge begins with a teenage female user who puts her head down or looks away then comes back with her hair covered, usually by a hooded sweater, and looks like a teenage male. Variations on this theme all tackle the intersectionality of the body image and gender as a performance. Moreover, users still attempt a sexy pose, while impersonating a male, thus performing sexiness in a different gender, which highlights the role of the body in presenting not only gender but sexual appeal as well. The video

samples are analyzed under the following categories: (1) Clothed transformation; (2) Non-clothed transformation; (3) Witness.

3.2.1 Clothed transformation

In one typical video in #TheBoyChallenge, the user stands in a bedroom and shows the viewers a hairband, then turns around, hides her head, and when she turns back, she looks like a teenage male in a hooded sweater. She then performs a stereotypical teenage male seductive pose, making a fist with the three middle fingers while sticking out the thumb and little finger of her hand, perhaps alluding to the shaka hand gesture, normally viewed as “chill” or “cool” gesture that indicates a non-committal laid back attitude. The key to the clothed transformation video is to reinforce the superficiality of the visibility of gender binaries.

3.2.2 Non-clothed transformation

One of the interesting variations of the challenge does not use clothing and hair but uses facial makeup to change the user’s gender. In this video, there is a closeup on the user’s face lying on a pillow on a bed. The user hides half their face, revealing a female’s face, only to turn around and cover the female face, revealing the other side of the face as a male’s face. The side meant to indicate a male has a moustache and a stubble beard painted on the face, whereas the side meant to represent a female has long eyelashes and lipstick. The user is bare-shouldered, and no clothes are shown. A birthmark on the / shoulder is shown in both the female and male scenes, indicating that the male and female faces belong to the same person. The video puts emphasis on the body image that relies on natural facial features and the absence of clothes intensifies such focus.

3.2.3 Witness

In the duo videos in #TheBoyChallenge, the user has an audience witnessing the transformation and showing disbelief. In one video, the screen is split. Both parts of the split screen seem to be taken in a bedroom. A male user eagerly watches a female user with

long hair in the first scene. In the transformation scene, the female user turns around, simply covers her hair with her sweater's hood, then turns to face the camera looking like a male. The male user covers his mouth, wide-eyed with a dropping jaw as if in shock as he watches her transformation.

4- Issues facing Tik Tok users

Badriya (2019) highlighted three main issues that face Tik Tok users, which are namely: Inappropriate content theme, privacy and settings theme, and mental health theme

4.1 Inappropriate content theme: It included key concerns of parents like “a lot of nudity in this app” and “inappropriate songs and lyrics”. One parent said, “I came across very sexually inappropriate content”. It also includes “Disgusting”, “offensive songs” are easily searchable and “pornography exists”. The app also contains pop ups in the newsfeed where “every time I opened the app it would show a random person’s video, with no control over age appropriate parameters.” This app is not recommended for anyone under 18 years of age as it “turned into a child pornography platform”. The indecency of the app has accelerated to an extent where “adults are friending kids and spamming them with commercials with inappropriate content.” An extremely concerned parent states the unacceptable content “will de-sensitize them and they will think its ok.

4.2 Privacy and settings theme:

Parents were of the considerate view that this app is more worried about gaining high number of users rather than protecting the youth “App has Poor Privacy Precautions”. Majority of people have reported “paedophiles” on this app. The duet feature of this app allows older men and creeps to create inappropriate responses to videos of children and women. The men record inapt and sexual reactions to videos of kids 18 years and younger, which is a key issue parents have noticed as well “There are many child predators.” TikTok is a dangerous app to young kids as it permits people to easily “gather information” about users from their videos.

4.3 Mental health themes:

TikTok has also been a base for users to “bully” other users which leads to “depression” and “suicide” which need to be reported.

5. Research question

To what extent do Tik Tok platform impact Algerian users’ uses, habits, preferences, life styles?

6. Methodology

6.1 Participants and Instruments

The focus of the present study is to better understand the opinions of Algerian users of Tik Tok about the impact of Tik Tok Platform on their daily life habits, uses, ideas, and lifestyles. The participants were 166 Algerian of Tik Tok users.

6.2 Questionnaire Presentations and Administration

Keeping in view the nature of our research, a close end questionnaire consisting of 9 statements was developed in Arabic language to collect data and conduct the investigation, to measure the extent of impact of Tik Tok. These characteristics were chosen from findings in social research because of its direct relevance to Algerian society and Algerian users of Tik Tok.

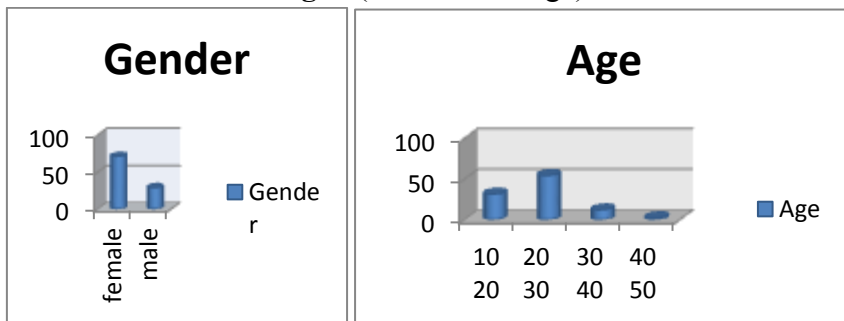
The questionnaire also included a part about personal information and was distributed electronically via a direct link for the survey which was published in a Facebook group of Algerian Tik Tokers. When the link to questionnaire was published on the Facebook group, the nature and purpose of the survey was explained to them, moreover they were assured strongly that their responses will be kept confidential in order to relieve them from any kind of fear and pressure. Participants were asked to read the questionnaire carefully, and were asked to put a cross next to each statement that goes with their opinion.

6.3 Findings and Discussions

This section presents the findings of the study

1. The first part of questionnaire consisted of two questions about personal information about the participants of the study.

Fig.1. (Gender and Age)

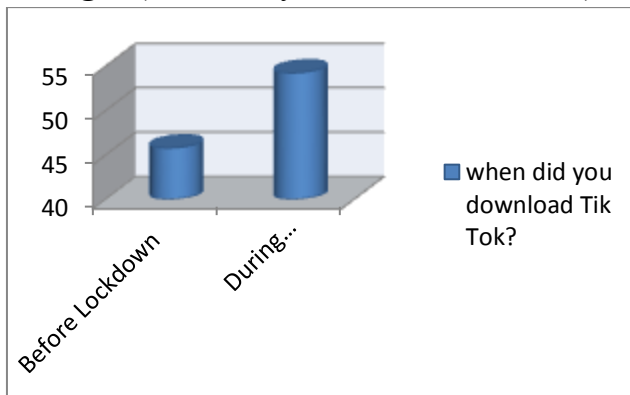


Source: Prepared by the researcher

The participants were 71.08% female, and 28.92% male. The majority of them adolescents (20-30 years old) were 54.22%, minors (10-20 years old) constituted 31.33%, and participants also comprised 12.04% of adults (30-40 years old).The lower category was (40-50 years old) with 2.41%.

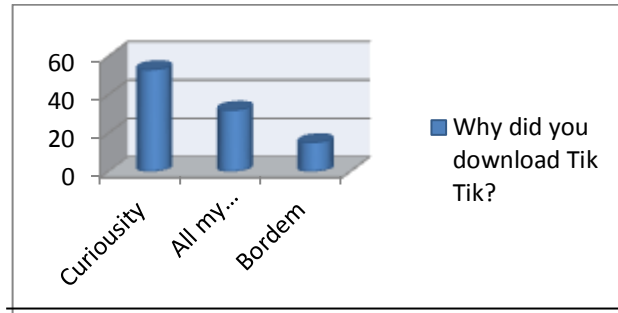
2. The first research question was: when did you download Tik Tok? The percentage of participants who downloaded Tik Tok before lockdown estimated 45.78%. The percentage of participants who downloaded it during lockdown was 54.22%. It may be related to that feeling of stress and boredom during lockdown which lead individuals to try new social media platform which they did not use before.

Fig.2. (When did you download Tik Tok?)



Source: Prepared by the researcher

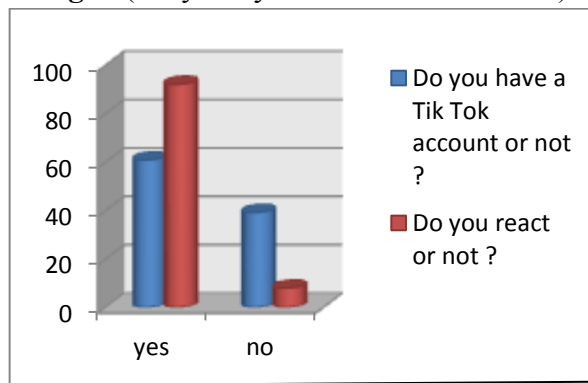
Fig.3. (Why did you download Tik Tok?)



Source: Prepared by the researcher

The majority of participants 53.01% downloaded Tik Tok because they were curious to know what it was. Followed by 31.93% of the participants who downloaded it because all their friends had it. While the percentage of participants who downloaded it because they were bored of other social media platformrs was 15.06%. These results could be explained by the curious nature of humans, and their desire to discover new things, add to that frinds coulds any thning between them even tools of entertainment and joy.

Fig.4. (Why did you download Tik Tok?)

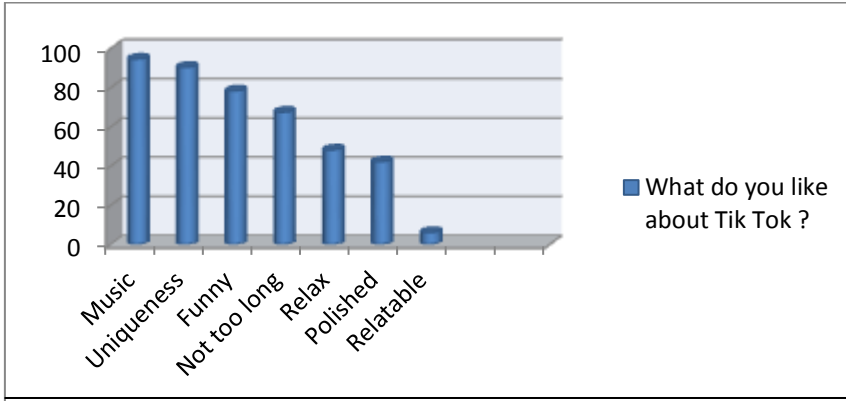


Source: Prepared by the researcher

Those who had a Tik Tok account consisted 60.84% of the participants, only 92.08% reacted (comments, share, and explore...Etc) with Tik Tok content while 7.92% of those who had an account did not react. On the other hand, 39.16% of the participants did

not have a Tik Tok account. This might be due to minors' tricks in order to create an account while they had not the legal age to had one (the legal age to have an account is 16 years old, and the legal age to send and receive messages is 18 years old).

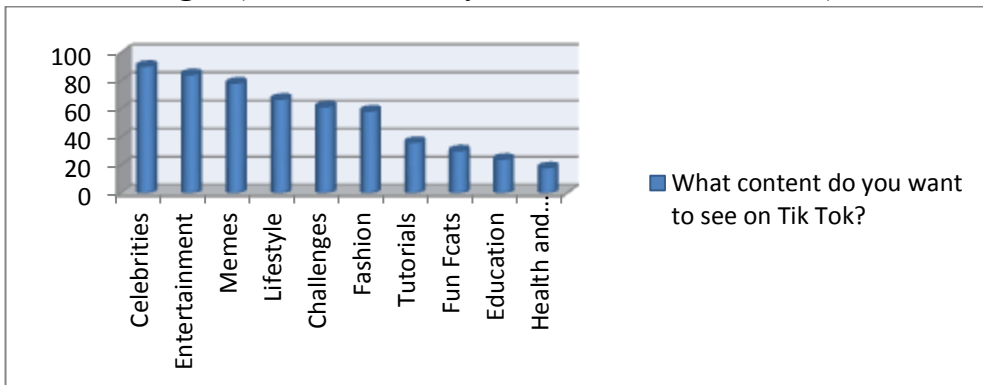
Fig.5. (What do you like about Tik Tok ??)



Source: Prepared by the researcher

The participants liked Tik Tok for several reasons, which were ordred according to their order from the highest to lowest percentage : they liked the music (94.58%), the content is more unique than other social media platforms (90.36%), videos are funny (78.31%), the content is not too long (67.46%), it is a good way to relax and forget about all the issues for a little bit (48.19%), it seems more polished than other social media platforms (42.17%), and it is more relatable (6.08%).

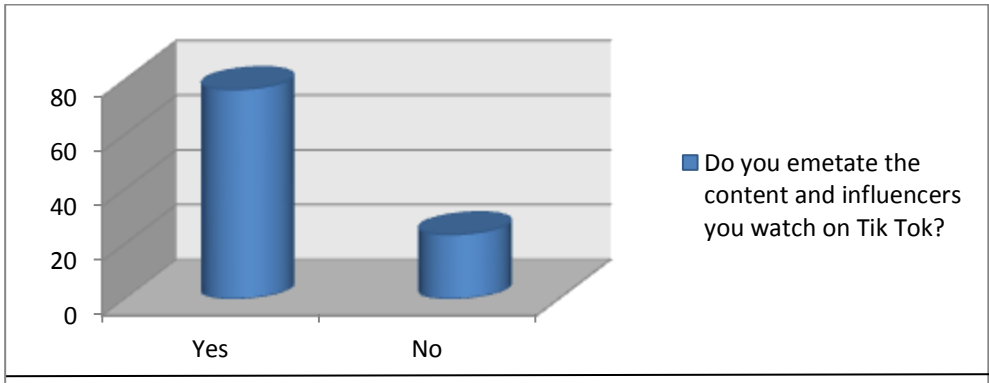
Fig.6. (What content do you want to see on Tik Tok?)



Source: Prepared by the researcher

The participants liked to diverse the content they watch on Tik Tok, their preferences are ranked from the highest to the lowest percentage as following: Celebrities (90.36%), Entertainment (84.38%), Memes (78.31%), lifestyle (66.87%), Challenges (61.45%), Fashion (58.43%), tutorials (36.14%), fun facts (30.12%), education (24.1%), health and fitness (18.07%).

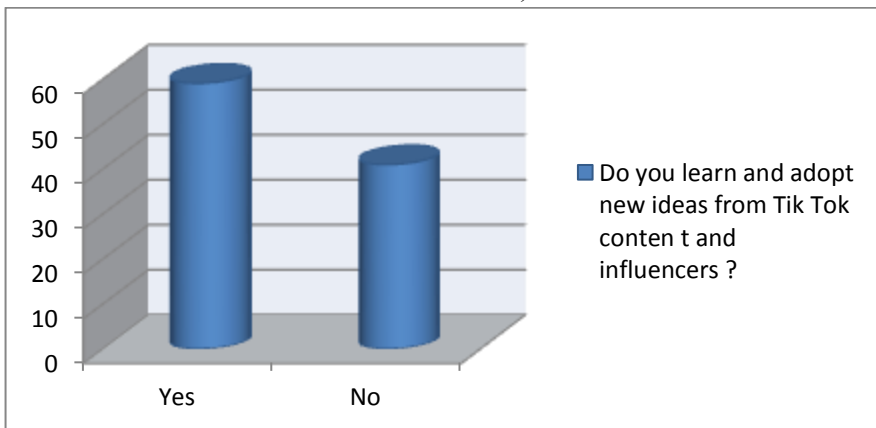
Fig.7. (Do you emetate the content and influencers you watch on Tik Tok?)



Source: Prepared by the researcher

The percentage of « Yes » responses was estimated 76.51%, while participants who did not emetate the content and influencers were 23.49%. Usually, they are influenced with content or the celebrity, this explains why they emetate them.

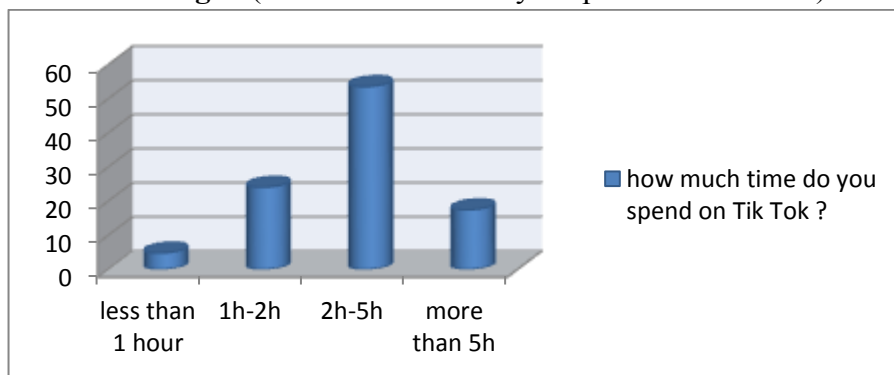
Fig.8. (Do you learn and adopt new ideas from Tik Tok content and influencers ?)



Source: Prepared by the researcher

The majority of participants responded with « Yes » their percentage were 59.04%, while 40.96% of them did not learn and adopt new ideas and habits from Tik Tok content and influencers. This explains that the great majority are influenced and impacted by Tik Tok.

Fig.9. (How much time do you spend on Tik Tok ?)



Source: Prepared by the researcher

The participants who spent between 2 to 5 hours on Tik Tok presented the highest percentage 53.61%, followed by whome spent between one to two hours were 24.1%, next them the participants who spent more then five Hours per day on Tik Tok were 17.47%, and finally, the minority of participants spent less than hour hour on Tik Tok, they were 4.82%. The long time spent on Tik Tok can be due Lockdown period, people had nothing to do, and they were bored at home which lead them to occupy their free time with social media platforms.

7- Results

The present study found that a great category of users spent long time on Tik Tok platfroms due to coronavirus pandemic especially tenagers which may influence thneir educational attainment. But the good news that this App put « Family safety Mode » which allowed parents to control time spent on screen. Most users blindly consumed cntnent and emitated influencers. This can be explained by the great influence of this platform on its users.

- CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Tik Tok witnessed a huge spread during Coronavirus pandemic from young people as other social media platforms. In order to contribute to the need for further research on the impact Tik Tok, the present study investigated the extent to which Tik Tok influence Algerian users through a quantitative study. The finding adds to a growing body of research that coronavirus pandemic helped in the spread of Tik Tok, and that this App influenced greatly its users in their ideas, habits, preferences, and life styles. After all, this research conducted in a short period of time, We would like to point out that the present study could offer only a tentative investigation to understand the impact of Tik Tok and Algerian users. Many limitations could be poited out in this study including the scarcity of research about the subject in Algerian society and Arabic countries in general on this subject. Anothoer limitation of this study is that only 166 participatnts took part in the study. People are reluctant to respond to questionnaires about social media as they feel it's too personnal to talk about it. Thus, the cultural obstacle limited the study to 166 participants.

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