



THE USE OF TIKTOK SOCIAL MEDIA BY STUDENTS OF SMA NEGERI 1 TEBING TINGGI IN CHOOSING BEAUTY PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT

TikTok is increasingly being used by teenagers as a platform for information search and consumption reference, including in selecting beauty products. This study aims to describe the patterns of TikTok usage by female students at SMA Negeri 1 Tebing Tinggi in selecting beauty products and identify factors that influence their decisions. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Informants were purposively selected from female students in grades X–XII who actively use TikTok and use it as a reference for beauty products. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of coding, categorization, and interpretation. The results show that TikTok serves as a primary reference source through product reviews, tutorials, and creator/influencer recommendations that shape female students' consumption preferences. Product selection decisions are influenced by creator credibility, viral trends, ease of access to information, and encouragement from the social environment. TikTok also contributes to the formation of female students' perceptions of beauty standards and self-identity in the digital space. Although it expands self-care knowledge and awareness, TikTok use has the potential to trigger impulsive consumption and pressure to adhere to ideal beauty standards. Therefore, strengthening media literacy is necessary so that adolescents can critically interpret content and make wiser consumption decisions.

Keywords: *TikTok; social media; teenage girls; beauty products; media literacy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of communication technology and the digital media ecosystem has transformed the ways teenagers access information, develop preferences, and make consumption decisions. In the new media era, digital platforms no longer function simply as entertainment spaces, but also as arenas for education, persuasion, and the formation of social behavior through algorithmic systems that personalize the user experience. One

of the most prominent platforms in today's youth digital culture is TikTok, which utilizes an interactive short video format and an interest-based recommendation system. These characteristics make TikTok highly influential in how teenagers interpret content and use it as a reference for everyday decisions, including the consumption of beauty products (Shukmalla et al., 2023).

In the context of adolescent consumption, beauty products are one of the most actively produced and consumed categories through TikTok content. Content such as product reviews, skincare and makeup tutorials, before-and-after videos, and influencer recommendations present information that appears "direct" and "realistic," making it easily believable to teenage audiences. This phenomenon demonstrates TikTok's development as a marketing communications space that does not always take the form of explicit advertising, but rather through the personal experiences of creators that influence users' perceptions and consumption preferences. Several studies have shown that content marketing and influencer marketing strategies on TikTok can influence purchasing decisions, particularly for cosmetic products closely associated with the identities and lifestyles of young users (Shukmalla et al., 2023; Raharjo et al., 2023).

However, TikTok use by adolescents is inextricably linked to the dilemma of a double impact. On the one hand, TikTok opens up broad access to information, enriches adolescents' knowledge of self-care, and encourages digital creativity and participation. On the other hand, the platform also has the potential to encourage imitation, the formation of uncritical consumption preferences, and exposure to content that is not always age-appropriate. Research by Khoir et al. (2024) confirms that TikTok has the potential to provide both educational benefits and risks when used without adequate guidance and literacy. Among high school female students, these risks can manifest in the form of a tendency to follow viral beauty trends, impulsive purchasing, and the internalization of ideal beauty standards constructed by visual representations on social media.

An increasingly crucial issue is when beauty content is no longer understood solely as practical information but becomes part of the construction of adolescents' social identities. Beauty on social media is often framed as a "symbolic value" related to social acceptance, self-confidence, and validation from others. Nurhanifah (2021) states that the search for sensation and recognition through audience responses (likes, comments, views) can encourage teenagers to increasingly actively follow trends and conform to dominant standards in the digital space. Thus, consuming beauty products on TikTok is not merely a functional decision, but also related to adolescents' social and psychological needs to appear according to the expectations of the digital environment.

Several previous studies have examined TikTok and adolescent consumer behavior or the impact of social media in general, but there are still gaps that require further research, particularly in the local context of high schools and the subjective experiences of female students as active users who use TikTok as a primary reference before purchasing beauty products. Many studies tend to focus on TikTok's influence quantitatively or portray the platform solely as an entertainment medium, thus failing to adequately describe how female students interpret content, build trust in creators, and negotiate the interplay between viral trends, personal needs, and social pressures in beauty consumption decisions. Therefore, this study is important to explain in depth the TikTok usage patterns

of female students of SMA Negeri 1 Tebing Tinggi in choosing beauty products and identifying the factors that influence their decisions.

This research is expected to contribute academically to strengthening the study of new media and adolescent consumer behavior, particularly in viewing TikTok as a social interaction space that shapes beauty preferences and consumption patterns through a combination of algorithms, influencers, and viral trends. Practically, the research findings can serve as a basis for strengthening media literacy in schools and families, enabling adolescents to filter information, understand the risks of biased beauty content, and make more critical and informed consumption decisions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to deeply understand the social media usage patterns of TikTok by female students at SMA Negeri 1 Tebing Tinggi in selecting beauty products. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on exploring the experiences, perceptions, and subjective meanings constructed by female students as active TikTok users, specifically in accessing and interpreting beauty content as a reference before making product choices. The focus of the study was not directed at testing causal relationships, but rather exploring how female students obtain information, assess content credibility, and consider trends and social influences in their consumption decisions.

The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra, from July 2025 to February 2026. The subjects were female students in grades 10 to 12 who actively used TikTok, had accessed beauty content such as reviews, tutorials, influencer recommendations, and before-and-after content, and had purchased or at least considered purchasing beauty products after being exposed to TikTok content. The object of this study was the use of TikTok as an information and reference medium in the beauty product selection process, including the factors influencing consumption decisions and their influence on female students' perceptions of beauty standards. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with six to ten participants, adjusted to meet the required data depth. If necessary, a snowball sampling technique was used to obtain additional informants until data saturation was reached, which is the point at which data obtained is repetitive and no longer yields significant new information.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore students' experiences regarding TikTok usage habits, the types of beauty content they frequently access, reasons for trusting certain creators, and considerations when selecting beauty products. Observations were conducted to examine general TikTok usage patterns and how informants interact with beauty content, including their tendency to save, share, or follow recommendations generated by the TikTok algorithm. Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of screenshots of relevant content, usage activity logs, and other documents to strengthen the interpretation of the research findings. With this combination of techniques, the data obtained is expected to more comprehensively reflect the empirical conditions and actual experiences of informants.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of coding, categorization, and interpretation. The analysis process began with transcription of

interview results, followed by data reduction to select information relevant to the research focus. Next, the researchers coded the data to identify key themes, including TikTok usage patterns, sources of trust in beauty content, social factors and viral trends in consumption decisions, and the influence of TikTok on female students' self-perceptions. The themes identified were then organized into analytical categories and interpreted to build a systematic understanding of TikTok's role in shaping beauty product consumption preferences among female high school students. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely comparing interview results with observational findings and documentation, and member checking to ensure the researcher's meaning and interpretation matched the informants' experiences. With these steps, the research results are expected to have a sufficient level of credibility and be academically accountable.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

TikTok as a Beauty Information Ecosystem for High School Teenagers

TikTok can be understood as the most prominent representation of new media, which operates through algorithmic logic, content personalization, and a short video format designed to accelerate user attention and engagement. Conceptually, new media is distinguished from conventional media by its interactive, participatory nature, enabling users to become not only message recipients but also producers and disseminators of information (Pardianti & S, 2022). Within the TikTok ecosystem, users are continually directed to "similar" content based on their viewing history, interaction intensity, and specific interest patterns, making the algorithm a crucial player in shaping each individual's personal information map. This explains why beauty content can recur and become increasingly dominant among teenage users, especially when they frequently watch videos related to skincare and makeup. Thus, TikTok is not simply an entertainment app, but rather a digital communication system that actively curates information reality and influences how teenagers assess what is important to pay attention to.

From a persuasive communication perspective, TikTok's short video format has a unique strength because it combines visual elements, personal narratives, sound, and live demonstrations, making the message feel real and compelling. Beauty content in the form of reviews, tutorials, and before-and-afters provides the illusion of quick proof that is more readily accepted than lengthy texts or formal advertisements. In the context of digital marketing, this pattern aligns with findings that content marketing and influencer marketing on the TikTok platform can influence purchasing decisions by presenting experiences that appear authentic and easily replicated (Shukmalla et al., 2023). This means that persuasion on TikTok doesn't always come in the form of explicit advertising, but more often appears as the creator's personal experience framed as education, recommendations, or testimonials. This type of persuasive mechanism is highly effective for teenagers, as they tend to respond to relatable, light, quick, and visual content, especially when the content is narrated using everyday language that resonates with the audience.

TikTok's relevance for high school teenagers is further strengthened as the platform integrates with their daily routines and forms habitual consumption patterns.

Psychologically, the habit of opening TikTok daily is not only driven by a need for entertainment but also becomes an automatic information-seeking pattern—for example, when teenagers are curious about the latest trends, viral products, or hotly discussed self-care techniques. Within the Uses and Gratifications framework, media use can be understood as an effort to fulfill user needs, including information, entertainment, personal identity, and social integration (Hasny et al., 2021; Nuzuli, 2022). For high school girls, these needs are intertwined: they seek product information, receive entertainment from creative content, build self-image through beauty knowledge, and feel connected to trends shared by their peers. Consequently, TikTok becomes a reference source that is perceived as more immediate and more in line with adolescent preferences than other information sources perceived as rigid or less engaging.

Within the context of the beauty information ecosystem, TikTok also creates a social space that connects adolescents with trends, influencer figures, and beauty standards that are constantly reproduced through visual representation. This phenomenon coincides with the increasing search for social validation in digital media, as adolescents are encouraged to conform to ideal appearances deemed "normal" or "attractive" by platform culture. Nurhanifah (2021) emphasized that social media can generate a sense of sensation and psychological satisfaction from audience responses (likes, views, comments), which ultimately encourages teenagers to increasingly follow the flow of popularity. At this point, beauty is no longer understood solely as a self-care necessity but has also transformed into a social symbol associated with acceptance, recognition, and existence. This is important because it provides context for why high school teenagers are not simply consuming beauty information but also negotiating their identities through product choices, the trends they follow, and how they present themselves in the digital space.

Therefore, the introductory narrative of this research discussion emphasizes that TikTok needs to be positioned not merely as an entertainment medium, but as a "consumption reference space" that shapes adolescents' preferences and decisions in choosing beauty products. This research finding aligns with the explanation that TikTok can have a dual impact: on the one hand, it becomes a space for creativity and a source of information that expands knowledge, but on the other hand, it has the potential to trigger imitation, exposure to age-inappropriate content, and influence that is not always critical if used without adequate literacy (Khoir et al., 2024). In the context of female students at SMA Negeri 1 Tebing Tinggi, TikTok operates as a "living" information ecosystem, because it not only provides content but also shapes information consumption patterns through algorithms, encourages emotional closeness through creative short videos, and influences how female students view beauty as part of their lifestyle and social identity. With this framework, the research not only explains "what TikTok is used for," but also positions TikTok as a digital communication system that shapes adolescents' consumption choices and ways of thinking more broadly.

TikTok as a Primary Reference Source for Beauty Product Decision-Making

In this study, TikTok appears to function as the primary reference source used by female students before deciding to purchase or try beauty products. The practice of "checking reviews first" is not simply a casual habit, but rather indicates a shift in adolescent consumption behavior, leading to an increasing reliance on social media-based

information validation. From a Uses and Gratifications perspective, media use can be understood as a user strategy to satisfy information needs and reduce uncertainty before acting (Hasny et al., 2021; Nuzuli, 2022). For high school female students, this need arises because beauty products are directly related to self-confidence and self-image, so they tend to seek references that are perceived as quick, easy, and relevant. Because TikTok provides concise and "straight to the point" information, female students prefer this platform as an initial reference rather than asking formal sources or reading lengthy reviews, which are considered less practical.

Video content on TikTok is also perceived as more convincing because it combines the power of visualization, testimonials, and real-time usage demonstrations. Compared to text-based media, short videos provide a more concrete depiction of product usage, texture, color, and even before-and-after results, creating a seemingly "real" experience for viewers. This phenomenon aligns with the characteristics of new media, which emphasize interactivity and sensory-visual experiences in message delivery (Pardianti & S, 2022). In the context of beauty products, visual elements are crucial because users are not only seeking information about product ingredients or functions but also want to see directly observable evidence of change. Review content that shows faces, skin tones, and changes in skin condition makes female students perceive the information as more authentic, especially when presented in simple language and a relatable style. Thus, TikTok's persuasive power lies in its ability to present both information and evidence, even though this evidence is often subjective and non-generalizable.

Critically, this situation suggests that TikTok is fostering a "rapid validation logic" in adolescent consumption behavior, namely the tendency to make decisions after receiving brief validation from viral and seemingly convincing content. Quick validation occurs when female students feel confident simply by watching a few video reviews or tutorials without further verification. This mechanism is powerful because TikTok operates through a personalization algorithm that exposes users to similar content repeatedly, creating the illusion that a product is indeed "good" due to its frequent discussion. In the context of influencer marketing, Shukmalla et al. (2023) assert that marketing content and influencer recommendations can influence purchasing decisions because the message is conveyed through personal experiences that are perceived as authentic. This means that female students' purchasing decisions are often formed through the accumulation of visual impressions and repetition of content, rather than through a thorough analysis of needs. This situation explains why TikTok can act as an effective yet risky platform for persuasion, as consumption decisions are shaped by quick validation that may not necessarily align with each individual's skin needs.

The impact of this rapid validation is evident in the shift in the fundamental purchasing decisions of female students: from a need-oriented orientation to trends and social influence. Initially, decisions about choosing beauty products may stem from practical needs such as treating acne, brightening, or maintaining moisture. However, under the influence of TikTok, these considerations often shift to "what products are going viral" or "what products are influencers using." The influence of trends is further strengthened when female students also receive social support from their peer groups, as following beauty trends becomes a symbol of self-actualization and a way to gain acceptance within a group. A study by Raharjo et al. (2023) showed that influencer marketing strategies on

social media influence purchasing decisions because influencers act as opinion leaders, shaping market preferences through close relationships with their audiences. This is relevant to the context of high school female students, as they are at a developmental stage sensitive to social acceptance. Therefore, beauty consumption decisions are often influenced by considerations of "impression management" and the self-image they want to project in social spaces, both online and offline.

Ultimately, TikTok, as a primary reference source, not only influences purchasing decisions but also shapes female students' mindsets about how consumption decisions should be made. When video reviews become the primary reference, the consumption process tends to become simplified: simply view the review, feel confident, and then purchase. On the one hand, this process helps female students acquire information more quickly and increase their knowledge of beauty products. However, on the other hand, this mechanism has the potential to encourage impulsive consumption behavior and reinforce ideal beauty standards established by TikTok visual content, especially if female students lack strong media literacy. This finding aligns with Khoir et al. (2024), who emphasized that TikTok has a dual impact: it can be an educational tool, but also risks fostering imitation and unhealthy content consumption when used uncritically. Therefore, it is important to position TikTok not merely as an information channel, but as an ecosystem that shapes a "consumer mindset" through rapid validation, viral trends, and mutually reinforcing social influence.

Positive and Negative Impacts of Using TikTok in Selecting Beauty Products

Using TikTok as a reference source for beauty products has had a significant positive impact on increasing product literacy and self-care awareness among female high school students. TikTok presents practical and easy-to-understand beauty content, such as explanations of skincare basics, application sequences, product ingredients, and tips for selecting products according to skin type. At this stage, TikTok functions as a "digital learning space" that expands adolescents' knowledge informally beyond formal learning sources. From a new media perspective, platforms like TikTok possess a strong educational character because they combine interactivity, visualization, and a concise delivery format that aligns with the information consumption habits of the younger generation (Pardianti & S, 2022). Thus, beauty content, initially viewed as merely entertainment, in practice helps strengthen students' understanding of self-care and product knowledge, which they may have previously lacked.

Another positive impact is the emergence of pre-purchase information search behavior. Female students don't immediately buy products based solely on advertisements or friends' recommendations, but instead search for reviews on TikTok to gain insight into the benefits, quality, and experiences of other users. This phenomenon demonstrates a digital consumption literacy process, where adolescents use media to reduce uncertainty before making a consumption decision. The Uses and Gratifications framework explains that individuals use media to fulfill specific needs, one of which is the need for information. Therefore, review search is part of users' efforts to gain certainty and a sense of security before making a purchase decision (Hasny et al., 2021; Nuzuli, 2022). In this context, TikTok accelerates the information search process because review and tutorial content is available in video format, which is considered easier to digest than lengthy text. On the positive side, this behavior indicates that female students tend to be

more selective and are more aware that consumption decisions should be preceded by information search.

TikTok can be positioned as an informal learning medium that influences how adolescents understand beauty issues in a practical way. Through content repetition, female students gain comparative knowledge between brands, understand the differences in product functions (e.g., moisturizer, serum, sunscreen), and even understand popular terms in the skincare world. Studies on TikTok content management show that the platform is indeed developing as an effective new information medium because it combines educational and entertainment elements in a light format that is close to users' routines (Pardianti & S, 2022). In a study by ASP, this finding was seen when TikTok facilitated female students' "independent learning" about self-care through the experiences of creators, as if TikTok were a quick catalog of beauty knowledge. However, despite producing product literacy, the learning process remained contextual and subjective because the learning sources were dominated by creators' experiences, rather than medical or dermatological scientific references.

Beyond these benefits, this study also demonstrated negative impacts in the form of impulsive consumption tendencies triggered by virality and trends. "Buzzing" product content on TikTok often encourages teenagers to buy not because of skin needs, but because the product is popular and considered part of a lifestyle. In this situation, consumption decisions are not entirely rational, but rather influenced by the pressure of trends and the psychological urge to keep up. This phenomenon is related to the increasing Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among teenagers, which encourages them to follow what's being discussed on digital platforms (Purwanto, 2024). Furthermore, influencer marketing reinforces impulsive consumption because creator recommendations are often perceived as "authentic experiences," even though they still have the potential to carry promotional interests (Shukmalla et al., 2023; Raharjo et al., 2023). As a result, TikTok can encourage rapid consumption patterns: female students see reviews, feel confident, and then purchase, without adequate reflection on the suitability or risks of using the product.

Other, more serious negative impacts include pressure to conform to ideal beauty standards and short-term psychological risks, such as insecurity and body dissatisfaction. Exposure to "perfect" visuals on TikTok can trigger self-comparison, especially when female students see influencers or creators with appearances deemed more attractive and conforming to dominant beauty standards. In studies of beauty standards on social media, representations of bodies and faces considered ideal often shape social constructs that make young women feel the need to conform to social acceptance (Basir et al., 2022). The push for social validation in digital media also reinforces this pressure, as adolescents derive satisfaction from public responses (likes, comments), leading them to follow beauty trends to maintain their social presence (Nurhanifah, 2021). However, it is important to emphasize that this study does not position TikTok as the sole cause of the problem, but rather demonstrates that negative impacts arise when content consumption is not accompanied by critical scrutiny and media literacy. Therefore, strengthening media literacy is necessary so that female students can sort out hidden promotional content, understand the boundaries between education and persuasion, and use TikTok as a healthier and wiser source of information.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that TikTok has transformed from a mere entertainment platform into an information ecosystem that shapes how female students at SMA Negeri 1 Tebing Tinggi understand, evaluate, and make decisions about beauty products. Key findings indicate that TikTok serves as a dominant reference in the product selection process, particularly through review content, tutorials, and influencer recommendations, which are considered quicker, more concise, and easier to understand. This confirms that female students' consumption decisions are no longer solely based on conventional information sources, but are increasingly guided by digital media logic that prioritizes visual experiences, personal testimonials, and content repetition through algorithms.

This study also confirms that the factors influencing female students' decisions are multidimensional, related not only to the quality of the information but also to trust in the creator, the appeal of viral trends, ease of access to information, and the influence of their social environment and peers. In practice, female students tend to "check reviews first" as a form of information search before purchasing. However, this process also demonstrates a tendency towards rapid validation, where decisions are based on visual reinforcement and the popularity of content without always being accompanied by a more critical examination of the product's suitability to their skin needs.

In terms of implications, this study demonstrates the dual impact of TikTok on adolescent beauty consumption. On the one hand, TikTok positively contributes to increasing product literacy and self-care awareness, as female students obtain practical information on skincare types, how to use them, and product comparisons to inform their purchasing decisions. However, on the other hand, TikTok also has the potential to encourage impulsive consumption due to its viral appeal, while also creating pressure from ideal beauty standards that can impact adolescent psychology, such as feelings of insecurity and a tendency to compare themselves to the dominant visual representations of "perfection" on social media.

Therefore, this study does not position TikTok as the sole cause of consumer behavior or beauty pressures, but rather emphasizes that both positive and negative impacts arise from how users use it and their capacity to critically process information. Therefore, strengthening media literacy and digital consumption literacy is crucial so that female students can distinguish between educational content, personal opinions, and disguised promotions, and make rational and safe decisions based on their needs.

Practically, the results of this study recommend the need for a collaborative role between schools and families in fostering a culture of healthy social media use, through digital literacy education, critical discussions about beauty standards, and mentoring adolescents in selecting appropriate and safe products. For further research, it is recommended to expand the number of informants, compare across schools or regions, and examine more specifically the relationship between the intensity of exposure to beauty content and changes in consumption behavior and psychological health of adolescents, so that the resulting understanding becomes more comprehensive.

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