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## TikTok use intensity and self-identity among high school students

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### Abstract

**Background:** Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage in the formation of self-identity. During this phase, individuals strive to recognize their potential, values, and life goals through self-exploration and social interaction. The development of technology and social media, particularly TikTok, has become part of adolescents' daily lives. TikTok provides a space for expression, entertainment, and social interaction, but high usage intensity has the potential to influence the process of self-identity formation.

**Purpose:** To determine the relationship between the intensity of TikTok use and adolescent self-identity.

**Method:** A quantitative method with a correlational design and a cross-sectional approach. The study population included 360 students in grades 10 and 11 aged 15–18 years. A sample of 79 respondents was selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the criteria of active TikTok users for at least the past month.

**Results:** Data were collected using a questionnaire and analyzed using the Spearman Rank correlation test ( $\rho$ ). The results showed that the majority of respondents had high TikTok usage intensity and a strong self-identity.

**Conclusion:** The  $p$ -value = 0.199 ( $p > 0.05$ ) and  $r_s = 0.146$  indicated no relationship between the intensity of TikTok use and adolescent self-identity.

**Keywords:** Self-Identity; Teenagers; TikTok Usage Intensity.

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is an important and complex developmental phase in human life. During this stage, individuals experience significant changes physically, psychologically, and socially as part of the transition toward adulthood (Hasanah, 2023). According to Erikson, adolescence is a period of identity exploration, in which individuals attempt to answer the question "who am I" through the exploration of values, interests, and social roles. If adolescents fail to establish a clear identity, they may experience role confusion, which can affect their psychological well-being and social behavior (Izzani, Octaria, & Linda, 2024). Developmental tasks during adolescence encompass various important aspects related to physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes (Suryana, Hasdikurniati, Harmayanti, & Harto, 2022).

The development of information technology has had a major influence on how adolescents explore and form their identities. Social media has become one of the primary means of social interaction among adolescents. TikTok, as one of the most popular social media platforms, provides a space for users to express themselves through short video content, follow trends, and build extensive social networks. Based on data from We Are Social 2025, more than 70% of active TikTok users in Indonesia are adolescents and young adults, indicating the platform's strong appeal among younger generations (Malahayati & Puspasari, 2024). TikTok's algorithm, which enables content to spread rapidly regardless of follower count, encourages users to continuously engage with the application (Manek & Virilia, 2025). TikTok is one of the most popular platforms among

Indonesian adolescents, with more than 108 million users in 2025. High usage intensity can have positive impacts, such as fostering creativity and self-expression, but it can also lead to negative effects, including social pressure, low self-confidence, and identity crises (Malaifani & Julyyanti, 2023). For some adolescents, TikTok is not merely a source of entertainment but also a platform to demonstrate self-existence, gain social recognition, and build a self-image in the digital world (Ramadhani, 2024). However, excessive use of TikTok may also result in reduced real-life social interaction, social media addiction, and the formation of a pseudo-identity that is more oriented toward image construction (Avci, Baams, & Kretschmer, 2025).

A healthy self-identity is reflected in adolescents' ability to recognize their potential, set life goals, and maintain personal values. Conversely, an underdeveloped identity can lead to role confusion, uncertainty about life direction, and dependence on social validation from the surrounding environment, including social media (Pertiwi & Sutandi, 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand how TikTok use is related to the formation of self-identity among adolescents. Preliminary observations indicate that students are highly active in using TikTok, whether for entertainment, information seeking, or following current trends. However, there have been no programs or educational initiatives from the school or health professionals regarding healthy and responsible social media use. Guidance and Counseling teachers play a role in providing psychological support, but so far, they have not specifically addressed the impact of TikTok use on students' identity development.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative method with a correlational design and a cross-sectional approach, aiming to examine the relationship between the intensity of TikTok use and self-identity among adolescents High School. The cross-sectional design was selected to capture data on both variables at a single point in time, allowing for the identification of associations without manipulating the research setting. The population of this study consisted of all students at Senior High School 2 Wates Yogyakarta aged 15–18 years. A total of 79 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on specific inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria included students who actively use TikTok, are within the age range of 15–18 years, and are willing to participate in the study. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria included students who were absent during data collection or who did not complete the questionnaire.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed directly to respondents in one session. The independent variable in this study was the intensity of TikTok use, defined as the frequency and duration of TikTok usage in daily life. The dependent variable was self-identity, defined as an individual's perception, understanding, and evaluation of themselves, including aspects of self-concept and social roles. Both variables were measured using Likert-scale instruments, with responses ranging from low to high levels. Prior to data collection, the instruments were tested for validity and reliability to ensure accuracy and consistency. Data analysis was conducted using statistical software, involving univariate analysis to describe respondent characteristics and variable distributions, and bivariate analysis using an appropriate correlation test (such as Pearson or Spearman) to determine the relationship between TikTok usage intensity and self-identity. Ethical considerations were also applied, including informed consent, confidentiality of respondent data, and voluntary participation throughout the study.

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## RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency distribution of respondents (N=79)

| Variable                            | Results             |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Age (Mean±SD)(Range)(Year)          | (16.5 ± 1.0)(15–18) |
| <b>TikTok Usage Intensity (n/%)</b> |                     |
| Low                                 | 0/0.0               |
| Moderate                            | 4/5.1               |
| High                                | 75/94.9             |
| <b>Self-Identity (n/%)</b>          |                     |
| Low                                 | 0/0.0               |
| Moderate                            | 15/18.9             |
| High                                | 64/81.1             |
| <b>Behavior (n/%)</b>               |                     |
| Low                                 | 1/1.3               |
| Moderate                            | 48/60.8             |
| High                                | 30/37.9             |

Table presents the distribution of respondent characteristics and research variables. The mean age of respondents was  $16.5 \pm 1.0$  years, with a range of 15–18 years. In terms of TikTok usage intensity, the majority of respondents were in the high category (94.9%), followed by the moderate category (5.1%), and no respondents were classified in the low category. This indicates that most adolescents have a very high level of engagement with TikTok. Regarding self-identity, most respondents were categorized as having high self-identity (81.1%), while 18.9% were in the moderate category, and none were in the low category. This suggests that the majority of adolescents have a well-developed sense of self-identity. For behavioural aspects, most respondents were in the moderate category (60.8%), followed by the high category (37.9%), and a small proportion in the low category (1.3%). This indicates that adolescents generally demonstrate moderate levels of behaviour, with some showing higher behavioural tendencies.

## DISCUSSION

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the majority of adolescents have high and moderate levels of TikTok usage intensity, with no respondents

classified in the low category. This finding illustrates that most adolescents demonstrate a very high level of engagement with the TikTok application. The high intensity of TikTok use may be influenced by easy internet access, the platform's popularity, and features that support self-expression and social interaction. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that TikTok usage intensity among adolescents is very high and is associated with various psychosocial aspects. The longer the duration of TikTok use, the greater the likelihood that users are exposed to certain standards that may influence their self-perception. Repeated exposure to such content tends to encourage adolescents to compare themselves with popular artists or influencers on TikTok, which can ultimately affect their self-confidence and self-satisfaction (Indriyani, Wulandari, Razzaq, & Nugraha, 2025).

This phenomenon is closely related to theoretical perspectives which explain that the intensity of social media use is measured through frequency, duration, attention, and individual engagement with a digital platform. High TikTok usage intensity is not only influenced by technological factors but also by parenting styles. Adolescents raised in families with permissive parenting or minimal supervision of gadget

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use tend to have higher TikTok usage intensity. Thus, social and environmental factors significantly contribute to the level of TikTok usage among adolescents, highlighting the need for active involvement from parents and teachers in supervising and guiding social media use to ensure it is more beneficial. Parents can set time limits for gadget use and model responsible digital behavior. At this developmental stage, adolescents strive to assert their identity through social interaction and exploration of various roles, including through social media. TikTok serves as a medium for adolescents to express themselves, interact with peers, and construct a self-image based on values they perceive as relevant (Inayah, Yusuf, & Umam, 2021). These findings suggest that TikTok usage intensity among adolescents is relatively high and reflects active involvement in social and recreational digital activities. However, such usage tends to be oriented more toward entertainment and self-expression rather than deep identity formation. Therefore, it is important to guide adolescents so that TikTok use is not limited to entertainment but also becomes a platform for self-development and the formation of a positive identity (Ikhsanudin & Hartatik, 2025). School counselors and educational institutions can provide guidance on responsible social media use and encourage students to utilize digital platforms for productive purposes.

Based on the table, it is also found that the majority of adolescents have high and moderate levels of self-identity, with no respondents categorized as having low self-identity. This indicates that most adolescents have developed self-understanding, personal values, and a clear direction in life. Similar research conducted among adolescents in Kramat Jati, East Jakarta, found that respondents had achieved a high level of identity development, indicating that most adolescents are able to recognize who they are, what they believe in, and the direction they wish to pursue. This condition reflects that the process of identity formation in adolescents is progressing well, suggesting that they are entering a more stable phase of identity development, where awareness of values, goals, and social roles begins to emerge (Resmiwaty, 2020). These findings are in line with Erikson's psychosocial development theory, which states that adolescence is a crucial stage in identity formation (Muthmainnah & Pujiharti, 2020). This result also supports the view that self-identity consists of three

main components: physical, social, and moral identity (Azmi, 2024).

Adolescents not only understand themselves from a physical perspective but also through social relationships and moral values, as reflected in their ability to make decisions, demonstrate self-confidence, and adapt to their social environment (Puspita, 2024). If adolescents successfully resolve this developmental crisis, they will achieve a strong identity; otherwise, they may experience identity confusion (Muhammad & Andriana, 2025). This condition reflects the presence of a supportive school environment and social roles that help adolescents recognize and develop their identity optimally. It can be concluded that adolescents at Senior High School 2 Wates have reached a positive and mature stage of identity development, characterized by the ability to recognize their potential, set life goals, and commit to personal and social values. This indicates that their identity formation process is developing in a healthy and balanced manner across personal, social, and moral aspects (Nurmawati, Widodo, Putri, Kamila, & Diena, 2025).

Based on the results of the bivariate analysis, the correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) indicates that there is no significant relationship between the intensity of TikTok use and adolescent self-identity. Higher intensity of TikTok use is not necessarily associated with stronger self-identity, as the effect is minimal and not statistically significant. This may be because adolescents primarily use TikTok for entertainment and trend-following rather than for identity exploration. Social media use has not been found to have a significant relationship with adolescent identity development (Avci et al., 2025). Instead, self-identity is more strongly influenced by internal factors such as personality, self-confidence, and personal values, as well as external factors such as parenting style, family support, peer relationships, and social interactions within environments such as schools, all of which collectively shape an individual's identity (Rusuli, 2022). Democratic parenting, open communication, and responsible autonomy within families can encourage adolescents to recognize their potential, build self-confidence, and make independent decisions. Similarly, a supportive school environment plays an important role in strengthening identity formation. Adolescents with stable personalities and positive peer environments are more likely to develop

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a strong identity despite exposure to various influences from social media.

Social media has both positive and negative impacts on its users (Maulida, Wibowo, & Rusyidi, 2023). Its positive effects include enhancing social connectivity and providing a platform for adolescents to express creativity. Therefore, it is important for parents, educators, and the wider community to collaborate in guiding adolescents to use social media wisely in order to promote self-awareness, emotional well-being, and healthy real-life social interactions. The mental health program at Community Health Centers Wates is also expected to play a role in promotive and preventive efforts related to adolescent mental health, particularly in the context of social media use. The health center can organize educational programs, group counseling, and training on digital literacy and mental well-being for students and parents.

Overall, the findings indicate that the intensity of TikTok use does not have a significant influence on adolescent self-identity. Although TikTok can serve as a medium for self-expression and social image construction in the digital world, such activities do not necessarily reflect the true process of identity formation. Self-identity is a complex psychosocial construct shaped not only by social media use but also by direct interactions with family, peers, school environments, and everyday life experiences. In conclusion, this study reinforces the theory that adolescent identity is formed through the interaction of internal and external factors, rather than being solely influenced by social media use. In other words, the intensity of TikTok use does not have a significant relationship with self-identity, as identity formation is more strongly determined by family support, a conducive school environment, and healthy social relationships with peers. Adolescents who grow up in a positive environment are more likely to achieve a mature identity, even amidst the strong influence of social media.

## CONCLUSION

The intensity of TikTok use among adolescents was classified as high, with a small proportion falling into the moderate category and none in the low category. Meanwhile, the self-identity of adolescents at Wates State High School 2 was mostly in the high category, indicating that the adolescents had

achieved positive self-identity development, although some students with moderate self-identity were still found. Statistical test results using Spearman's rank correlation showed a correlation coefficient of 0.146 with a significance level of  $p = 0.199$  ( $p > 0.05$ ), indicating no significant relationship between the intensity of TikTok use and adolescents' self-identity.

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