

The Influence of the Tiktok Application on Diploma Programme Selection at Politeknik Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail

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Abstract. The rapid advancement of digital communication technology requires stakeholders to adapt swiftly in order to remain relevant. This study examines the influence of TikTok as a strategic medium to enhance new student enrollment in engineering diploma programmes at Politeknik Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail (PTSN). The objectives were to (i) identify the level of TikTok's influence, (ii) determine whether there are differences in TikTok's influence based on gender, and (iii) examine the relationship between TikTok's influence and study programme selection. A quantitative approach was employed using a descriptive-correlational survey design. The sample consisted of 387 first-intake diploma students in their first semester, selected through purposive non-random sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire distributed through conventional means. The findings revealed that TikTok's influence was at a high level. Significant differences were found between TikTok's influence and gender, and a significant relationship was observed between TikTok's influence and study programme selection. These results highlight the importance of leveraging TikTok as an effective promotional channel to support sustainable strategies for student recruitment. This study concludes that TikTok is a viable platform for promoting PTSN, particularly in engineering diploma programmes. However, strong support and commitment from all stakeholders are essential to ensure the success of this initiative by 2030, in alignment with the Polytechnic Transformation Roadmap 2023–2030 and the National TVET Policy 2030.

Keywords: TikTok, student enrollment, engineering diploma, social media promotion, Polytechnic education

1. INTRODUCTION

The global proliferation of the TikTok application began in 2016 with its creation by ByteDance, a China-based company [1]. The use of TikTok has increased annually, surpassing other applications such as Facebook and Instagram, as it allows users to create short videos lasting from three to fifteen seconds [2] with background music, without requiring them to register an account before watching videos on the platform. In addition, videos can be edited using filters to appear more engaging, with various background music genres that can be included when uploading to a user's account [3]. By February 2020, TikTok had reached 800 million users worldwide, the majority of whom were in China. Similarly, countries across Asia such as Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam were also influenced by the wave of TikTok's popularity [4]. Statistics in 2023 indicated that TikTok users in Malaysia reached 19.3 million aged 18 and above [5]. In this context, TikTok's influence as an effective promotional medium for disseminating information to the Gen Z generation is highly significant [6].

1.1 Background of the Study

The Department of Polytechnic and Community College Education (JPPKK) has set a national target to increase polytechnic enrolment to 120,000 students by 2030, compared to the current figure of 79,119 students as reported on the official JPPKK portal updated on 25 February 2025. To achieve this aspiration within less than five years, the Polytechnic Transformation Framework 2023–2030 was introduced. This framework encompasses 18 Strategic

Objectives (SO), 13 Critical Reform Agendas (CRA), three Strategic Reform Initiatives (SRI), and four overarching goals, covering core domains such as governance, programmes, students, graduates, staff, industry, and community engagement. The success of this initiative requires strong stakeholder support, effective governance, and agile delivery systems to position Malaysian polytechnics as competitive TVET institutions comparable to those in developed countries.

In line with the National TVET Policy 2030, polytechnics are expected to contribute significantly to the nation's skilled workforce development, with a projected output of 24,000 graduates annually by 2030. This will not only meet the demands of a dynamic industry but also reduce reliance on foreign labour. Consequently, innovative strategies are needed to attract new student enrolment, particularly among Generation Z.

The rapid advancement of digital communication has transformed how information is disseminated, with TikTok emerging as one of the most influential platforms. TikTok's proliferation has created new opportunities for engagement and promotion, especially among younger audiences. Recognising this trend, this study investigates the influence of TikTok in shaping students' decisions to pursue diploma programmes at Politeknik Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail (PTSN). Specifically, it aims to (i) identify the level of TikTok's influence, (ii) examine gender-based differences in its impact, and (iii) explore the relationship between TikTok's influence and programme selection. The findings are expected to inform more effective, competitive, and sustainable recruitment strategies through social media, in line with the Polytechnic Transformation Roadmap 2023–2030 and the National TVET Policy 2030.

1.2 Problem Statement

A comprehensive guideline has been outlined through the National TVET Policy 2030 as the government's aspiration and direction to achieve Malaysia's goal of becoming a developed nation driven by a skilled workforce through responsive, flexible, and inclusive TVET programmes [8]. Meanwhile, the Polytechnic Transformation Roadmap 2023–2030, which is aligned with the National TVET Policy 2030, aims to increase polytechnic enrolment from 120,000 to 140,000 students by 2030 [7]. According to the 2024 PolyCC KPI Achievement Report (January–December) for KPI 10: Percentage of SPM/equivalent school leavers enrolling in polytechnics and community colleges based on the set benchmark, 100 out of 128 POLYCC institutions, representing 78.13%, successfully achieved the annual target, while the remaining 28 POLYCC institutions failed to meet the annual target [9]. In reality, Politeknik Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail (PTSN) was listed among the 28 POLYCC institutions that did not achieve the set target, attaining only 75.10% compared to the 85% benchmark. Following this performance, a study is required so that recommendations for corrective measures can be proposed to overcome this issue and prevent it from persisting. Failure to address this challenge may hinder the achievement of Malaysia Polytechnic enrolment targets for 2030, thereby making it difficult to realise the aspirations of the National TVET Policy 2030.

SPM or equivalent school leavers aged between 18 and 20 years belong to Generation Z, who represent the largest group of TikTok users in Malaysia. In line with the advancement of digital technology, TikTok serves as the most effective promotional medium due to its user-friendly features, ability to attract large audiences, and creative elements that support the production of engaging visual content [10]. The strength of TikTok as a promotional tool lies in its short yet impactful video content, which makes it an effective communication strategy for students, as they can easily relate it to their daily lives. Digital technology and social media have played a significant role in their lives from a young age, shaping the way they think and learn [11]. Therefore, this study aims to identify the extent of TikTok usage and analyse how its uploaded content influences students' decisions in selecting study programmes at PTSN.

1.3 Objectives

There are three objectives targeted in this study, namely to:

- i) identify the level of influence of the TikTok application,
- ii) determine whether there are differences in TikTok's influence based on gender, and
- iii) examine the relationship between TikTok's influence and study programme selection.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

This study is guided by two hypotheses formulated to address the second and third research objectives. The hypotheses are as follows:

- i) Hypothesis (Ho1): There is no significant difference between the influence of the TikTok application and gender.
- ii) Hypothesis (Ho2): There is no significant relationship between the influence of the TikTok application and study programme selection.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study is limited to first-intake, first-semester students enrolled in Session I: 2025/2026 at Politeknik Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail (PTSN). The focus on this cohort ensures that the findings reflect the perspectives of newly admitted students, who are most relevant in examining the influence of TikTok on programme selection. However, as the sample does not include students from later intakes, senior semesters, or other institutions, the results cannot be generalised to the broader population.

1.6 Research Significance

This study is significant to the following stakeholders:

- i) Student Affairs Department, PTSN

The study helps the department's management understand the impact of TikTok on students' decisions when selecting fields of study. The findings can serve as a guide for developing more effective digital marketing strategies to attract new students.

- ii) e-Learning Unit, PTSN

The results support the unit in designing long-term strategic plans related to the use of social media as a teaching aid, as well as for promotion and dissemination of academic information.

- iii) Promotion Coordinator & Student Admission Task Force, PTSN

The findings can be used as a guide to produce more creative promotional materials (short videos, student testimonials, course information) to capture students' attention through the TikTok platform.

- iv) Lecturers

The study raises lecturers' awareness of the role of social media in influencing students' perceptions. Therefore, lecturers can adapt their teaching and learning approaches to align with the latest digital trends of the new student generation.

- v) Policy Makers

The findings can serve as a reference for the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and JPPKK to better understand the impact of social media applications in the context of study programme selection, and subsequently to design more effective policies or guidelines for educational promotion.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is adapted from the model[12], which categorises the gratification construct into five dimensions: technological, hedonic, social, utilitarian, and content, based on the uses and gratifications (U&G) theoretical framework. The U&G theory provides an understanding of the consequences of

an individual's active or less active engagement with media [1]. In the context of this study, gratification refers to programme selection influenced by the TikTok application through two constructs, namely usage and content.

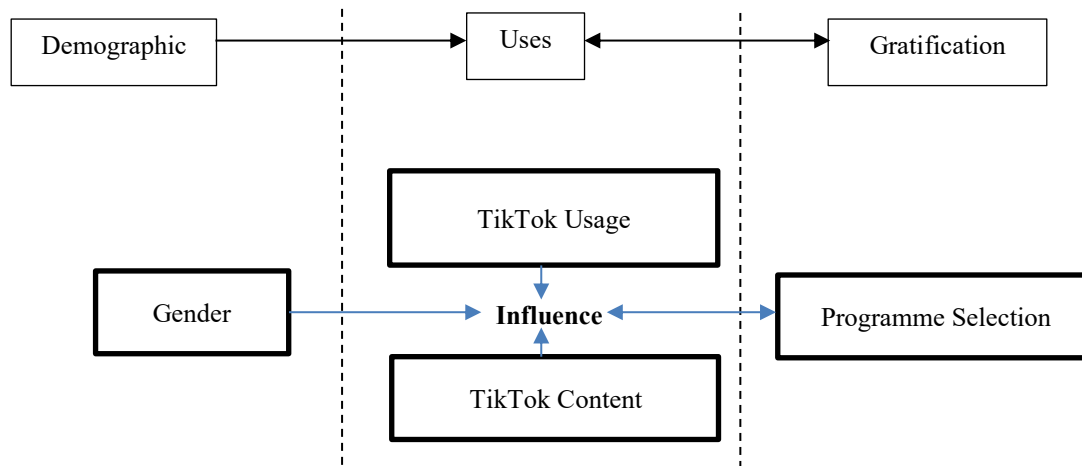


Figure 1. The conceptual framework

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is discussed based on the conceptual framework of the study adapted from [12], grounded in the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theoretical framework. The assumptions of U&G theory are as follows: (1) Users are active. (2) Users select a medium or computer-mediated communication system that is goal-oriented and purposeful with specific expectations. (3) Users are aware of their needs and expectations when using a particular medium or computer-mediated communication system. After usage, the users' needs are either satisfied or unsatisfied. If their needs are satisfied, their continued usage will be further reinforced [15].

2.1 TikTok Application

According to [13], TikTok is the most popular social media platform among teenagers compared to other applications such as Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook. There are many factors that influence teenagers to prefer using TikTok, as [14] states that TikTok is not merely an application for creating videos but offers much more than that. The platform enables its users to imagine and be creative in producing content. Referring to the U&G theory, TikTok is considered a medium or computer-mediated communication system. From a critical perspective, TikTok's dominance among Generation Z can be explained by its alignment with their digital consumption habits. Unlike other platforms that often prioritize static images or text, TikTok emphasizes short-form video content with integrated music, filters, and interactive features that match Gen Z's preference for fast, engaging, and visually stimulating information. Moreover, TikTok's algorithm is highly personalized, allowing users to quickly connect with content that resonates with their interests and cultural trends. This not only sustains user engagement but also reinforces TikTok's role as both an entertainment tool and an influential medium in shaping perceptions and decision-making among young audiences.

2.2 Gender Factor

This study also focuses on the gender factor to examine differences in the level of TikTok's influence. In study [11], it was found that female students were more motivated, demonstrated positive behavior, and had higher self-confidence when interacting with Facebook. However, the findings of study [16] indicated that there was no significant influence between gender and social behavior. Regardless of whether male or female, TikTok has become a common platform of use in today's society. In contrast, study [17] found that the negative effects of TikTok usage, which lead

to academic stress and contribute to academic procrastination, were more prevalent among male students compared to female students.

From a Malaysian Gen Z perspective, these findings highlight an important dynamic. Gen Z students in Malaysia, who are digital natives, engage with TikTok not merely for entertainment but also as a space for self-expression, information-seeking, and identity-building. Although gender differences in usage motivation may exist, TikTok's pervasive popularity among both male and female students suggests that its influence transcends traditional gender boundaries. However, the concern that male students are more vulnerable to academic stress and procrastination due to TikTok aligns with the competitive academic environment in Malaysia, where distractions from social media may impact study performance. This underscores the need for institutions such as PTSN to consider gender-sensitive strategies in leveraging TikTok for academic promotion while also mitigating potential negative academic consequences.

2.3 Influence

According to the *Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Edisi Empat* (online version), the definition of *influence* is the power exerted by a person (or object, etc.) over another person (or object, etc.). In the context of this study, influence refers to the power exerted by the TikTok application on first-semester students in their decision to pursue a diploma program at PTSN. There are two types of TikTok influence examined in this study, namely its usage and its content.

i) Usage of TikTok Application

Based on study [1], it was concluded that the use of TikTok does indeed serve as an influence on one of the developmental functions of adolescents, namely self-confidence. The more frequently TikTok is used, particularly among adolescents under the age of 18, the more it can influence their attitudes and thinking. This conclusion was also supported by [13], which found that students nowadays spend much of their routine time using TikTok through a variety of activities and creative outputs such as daily logs showcasing their happiness, which they upload to the platform. In addition, this application also allows them to share pictures and videos. This was further affirmed by study [4], which stated that the impact of TikTok usage on students' lifestyles is more likely to be positive. Study [14] also supported this argument, noting that social media applications frequently used in contemporary society, such as TikTok, have a more effective impact on the community. However, in contrast, study [17] focused on the negative effects of TikTok usage, which was also supported by [13], who argued that if TikTok usage is uncontrolled, its adverse impact will affect students' learning. Conversely, in the context of TikTok usage as a promotional channel, study [6] suggested that TikTok is easy to learn and user-friendly. Therefore, it was recommended that TikTok should be adopted as a primary medium for promotion through creative approaches, in order to attract the interest of TikTok users who view and follow content on the platform at any time, depending on their convenience.

ii) Content of TikTok Application

The findings of study [5] highlighted that TikTok offers accessible, interactive, and flexible learning content. This allows users to learn anytime and anywhere. However, study [14] challenged this conclusion, arguing that some individuals do not focus on the actual content of the videos but are instead more attracted to the views or the personality of the content creator. According to study [4], the video content uploaded on TikTok receives positive responses from students, as reflected in the comments, and this indirectly serves as an example for other users. Furthermore, the study emphasized that TikTok can influence students to adopt a more ethical and quality lifestyle. In study [10], TikTok was identified as an effective media strategy that rapidly penetrates wide markets through creative and communicative visual content. The strength of TikTok's algorithm, combined with storytelling approaches, the use of popular music and effects, as well as the optimization of posting time, can enhance content appeal while simultaneously strengthening brand identity. Meanwhile, study [13] pointed out that the diversity of TikTok content makes it a major attraction for people of all age groups, thereby increasing the number of users each year.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative design using a non-experimental approach, specifically a survey method. The data collection instrument used was a questionnaire, while the sampling technique applied was purposive non-random sampling. The deliberate selection of samples was made to meet the requirements of the study and to facilitate the research process [18]. According to Chua in [19], the characteristics of this sampling include the use of a large sample size, obtaining information directly, and enhancing the ability to generalize the research findings. The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

3.1 Sampling

The sample of this study comprised 387 first-semester students who newly enrolled in the first intake on July 28, 2025, for all diploma programs offered at PTSN.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument of this study was a questionnaire divided into four sections: Section A – Respondents' demographics, Section B – five items measuring the construct of TikTok application usage, Section C – five items measuring the construct of TikTok application content, and Section D – five items measuring the construct of study program selection. Sections B, C, and D employed a five-point Likert Scale, namely: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, and 5 – Strongly Agree. For the interpretation of the mean score, this study referred to the classification by [6], which categorized mean values into three levels: low (1.00–2.33), moderate (2.34–3.67), and high (3.68–5.00). In terms of inferential analysis, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to assess whether there were differences in the influence of TikTok application based on gender, while the Spearman correlation test was used to examine the relationship between TikTok application influence and study program selection. These analyses were conducted to address and achieve the predetermined research objectives.

3.3 Pilot Test

According to [20], the recommended sample size for a pilot study suggested by previous researchers ranges between 10 and 30 respondents. This sample is not part of the actual study population but shares similar characteristics with the study participants. Accordingly, this pilot study was conducted with 24 first-semester students from the Foundation in Engineering Technology program at PTSN, with the aim of testing the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items developed before implementation in the actual study. An effective strategy to minimize problems in research is to ensure that the instrument undergoes a pilot study process [21]. The results of this pilot study indicated that the Cronbach's alpha value obtained was 0.97. Based on the reliability interpretation in [22], this score is categorized as excellent and effective, reflecting a high level of internal consistency.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The distribution of respondents' demographic information is presented in Table 1, analyzed based on the collection of 387 completed questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed conventionally in printed form, where respondents were given time to complete them and return the questionnaires before the e-Learning Briefing session held on the first day of registration during the Student Transformation Week for Session I: 2025/2026 at the Higher Education Hub Convention Hall, Pagoh.

For this first intake, the population of first-semester diploma students at PTSN was 387, consisting of 213 male students and 173 female students. The majority of respondents, 346 students (89.6%), were 18 years old, followed by 28 students (7.3%) who were 19 years old, and 12 students (3.1%) aged 20 years and above. Respondents from the DTM program were the largest group with 86 students (22.3%), while the DEI program recorded the smallest group with 46 students (11.9%). This was followed by respondents from the DPC program with 82 students (21.2%), the DFO program with 70 students (18.1%), and both the DPE and DCE programs with the same number of respondents, 51 students each (13.2%).

Based on previous studies as cited in [3], the majority of TikTok users in Malaysia are aged 18 and above. This finding is supported in [1], as evidenced in this study where 369 respondents (95.6%) reported being TikTok users, and 376 respondents (97.4%) indicated that they owned a TikTok account.

Table 1. Demographic information

Characteristics (N=387; missing=1)	Frequency(n)	Percent (%)
Gender:		
Male	213	55.2
Female	173	44.8
Age:		
18 years	346	89.6
19 years	28	7.3
Above 20 years	12	3.1
Diploma Programme:		
Diploma in Process Engineering (Petrochemical)-DPE	51	13.2
Diploma in Chemical Engineering – DCE	51	13.2
Diploma in Mechanical Engineering (Petrochemical)-DPC	82	21.2
Diploma in Electrical and Instrumentation Engineering – DEI	46	11.9
Diploma in Food Technology – DTM	86	22.3
Diploma in Chemical Technology (Fats and Oils) - DFO	70	18.1
Are you a TikTok user?		
Yes	369	95.6
No	17	4.4
Do you have a TikTok account?		
Yes	376	97.4
No	10	2.6

Referring to Table 2, the level of TikTok application influence was found to be high, with an overall mean score of 3.93, which measured the first objective of this study. The highest mean score was contributed by item B1 under the TikTok usage construct (M = 4.12), while the lowest mean score was recorded by item B3 under the same construct (M = 3.62), which was at a moderate level. All five items from the TikTok content construct were recorded at a high level.

These findings support the statements of studies [13] and [10], which indicate that TikTok has been able to achieve increasing levels of usage annually due to its attractive and user-friendly features. TikTok is not merely a social media platform like others; rather, its content has the potential to influence society towards practicing a more ethical and quality lifestyle [4].

Table 2. The level of influence of the TikTok application

Item	Mean	Level
Construct: TikTok usage		
B1. I use TikTok almost every day	4.12	High
B2. I spend more than one hour per day using TikTok	3.89	High
B3. I follow TikTok accounts related to education or motivation	3.62	Medium
B4. I have viewed TikTok content related to polytechnics	4.08	High
B5. TikTok is one of the main social media apps I use	3.86	High

Construct: TikTok content

C1. TikTok content gives an attractive impression of the academic programmes	4.02	High
C2. TikTok videos make polytechnic life appear enjoyable	3.97	High
C3. Student testimonials on TikTok have influenced my decision to pursue a diploma programme	3.80	High
C4. I get a lot of information about polytechnics through TikTok	4.02	High
C5. TikTok content has strengthened my decision to pursue studies at a polytechnic	3.86	High
Overall mean	3.93	High

Table 3 shows the results of the Mann-Whitney U test analysis, which found that the value ($z = -2.831$, $p = 0.005$) is significant at the level of $p < 0.05$, since $p = 0.005$ is less than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis (Ho1) in addressing the second objective is rejected, indicating that there is a significant difference between the influence of the TikTok application and gender. Consequently, the findings of this study support [11] and [17], which stated that gender differences do exist in the issue studied, but differ from [16], which found no gender influence on social behavior in its study titled “*Gender and Social Behavior of TikTok Users: Necessity, Popularity, or Lifestyle?*”

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U test results

	Gender	Mean rank	z	Sig.
Influence of the TikTok application	Male Female	179.03 211.31	-2.831	p=0.005

* $p < 0.05$

The descriptive analysis in Table 4 is presented to fulfill the requirement of achieving the third objective, which concerns the dependent variable, namely the choice of study. Overall, the mean is at a moderate level, as four out of the five items in this construct fall within the moderate level, while only one item is at a high level.

Table 4. The level of programme selection

Item	Mean	Level
D1. I decided to pursue a diploma programme after watching related content on TikTok	3.11	Medium
D2. TikTok plays a role in my decision to further my studies	3.51	Medium
D3. I believe that content on TikTok provides useful educational information	4.03	High
D4. I compared programmes through TikTok videos before making a choice	3.58	Medium
D5. TikTok influences my perception of certain study programmes	3.60	Medium
Overall mean	3.56	Medium

Meanwhile, based on Table 5, the correlation coefficient value, r , is 0.578, and according to the interpretation by [23], this indicates that the relationship between the influence of the TikTok application and the choice of study is moderate. This analysis also rejects hypothesis (Ho2) because $p < 0.001$ is smaller than the significance level of $p < 0.05$, which means there is a significant relationship between the influence of the TikTok application and the choice of study. The findings of the analysis show that there is a moderate-strength relationship between the influence of the TikTok application and the study program choices of first-semester diploma students at PTSN. In conclusion, the higher the influence of TikTok, the higher the likelihood of students choosing to pursue their studies at PTSN. These findings are supported by [13], which states that the main attraction of TikTok’s diverse content has led to an increase in the number of users year after year. Furthermore, [6] highlighted that due to its vast global user base, TikTok can serve as a primary medium of promotion, acting as a powerful attraction to boost product sales through a creative and user-friendly approach.

Table 5. Analysis of Spearman's Rank correlation test

Influence of the TikTok application	Programme selection	
	r	p
	0.578	< 0.001

*p<0.05

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research confirm that the momentum of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, is undeniable in today's context. The majority of students aged 18, who are school leavers from the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) and chose to pursue a diploma at PTSN, were found to be active users and account holders of TikTok. Consequently, the level of TikTok's influence is high, particularly in terms of usage and content, among first-semester diploma students in the initial intake at PTSN. However, the results also indicated a significant difference between TikTok influence and gender. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should explore the characteristics of TikTok usage and content that contribute to gender-based differences. The implications of such studies are expected to support the development of institutional strategic plans that adopt TikTok as a promotional tool while addressing gender variations effectively. This research further revealed a significant relationship between TikTok influence and study program selection. Hence, immediate action plans should be implemented to promote diploma programs at PTSN through TikTok in order to achieve the targeted student intake across all fields. In reality, this initiative requires well-planned strategies and strong commitment from all stakeholders to ensure that student enrollment at PTSN remains aligned with the prescribed intake norms. The implications of this research serve as an initial step toward actionable efforts that will contribute to the realization of the Polytechnic Transformation Roadmap 2023–2030 and the National TVET Policy 2030, as envisioned.

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