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The Impact of TikTok on Shaping Behavior and Purchasing Decisions on College Students

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Introduction

The impact that TikTok has on college students is significant and is important to investigate because college students face a unique targeting method for consumerism. TikTok is a relatively new social media platform that is incorporating methods of consumerism that people have not seen on other platforms. It is an online video-sharing platform that allows users to create, share, like, and comment on their own and others' content. Over the years, it shifted its direction to not solely just video sharing due to its popularity. Now, users can purchase items through the platform and creators can get paid for producing content. Business is thriving for TikTok, and college students are oblivious to the fact that the app is tracking what they like, to have a better idea of what and how to advertise things that interest the users. For some students, it has become an addiction to keep purchasing things just because they look interesting, are sold at a decent price, or have become a social norm. To stay on top of what is popular, people find out what the trends are, so if a product is noted as “trendy,” users are going to want those items to fit in.

TikTok products are being sold through the shop on the app or through influencers. When an influencer promotes a product on a live stream, users are more likely to have an increase in purchase intention due to streaming attractiveness and because the community can directly speak with the influencer and others on the live stream. On a live stream, it is easy to be persuaded by the community to purchase items quickly. It is interesting to learn that if a product or a person trying to sell a product looks attractive, it helps the users decide to purchase items. Also, TikTok tracks what users like, comment on, and share for content on the app, which impacts data collection from shopping trends through the shop and media behavior. This problem relates to communication because seeing influencers and products continuously being shown on college

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students' screens affects their behaviors and social influence. Also, there is an increase in media use and a vulnerability of targeted audiences because most of the users on the platform are college students, and they are constantly using TikTok.

If a product or person seems intriguing, students are more likely to purchase unnecessary items, putting them more in debt and allowing TikTok to continue to learn more about what they like. It can be hard to turn away from items that one constantly sees and if they like a person, it can be difficult to not believe that the item they are trying to sell is not worth it. In addition, if a social norm or trend is happening, most users want to join in on it. For example, if the TikTok shop made buying a pink coffee mug a trend, more users would be persuaded to purchase the item to fit in with the rest of society. Also, this issue can affect their mental states because most people suffer due to money problems and this situation only makes that much worse for these individuals.

Literature Review

Exploring the implications of TikTok on shaping college students' behavior and purchasing decisions would encompass the communication phenomenon of audio-visual media content, engagement, and influencers on TikTok (Erizal, 2021). This phenomenon allows for an examination of the impact of college students' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control towards consumerism, such as brands or products. This requires investigating how exposure to TikTok media frames students' internalized desirability of products and brands, their perceptions of social expectations, and their perceived ability to engage in desired behaviors (Rochman & Kusumawati, 2023). This research will also explore how these factors implicate intentions to engage in certain behaviors or purchase products promoted on TikTok (Meliawati, Gerald, & Aruman, 2023). Exploring this topic through the phenomena on TikTok will provide

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insight into the cognitive processes and social media influences that contribute to the decision-making processes of college students consuming the increasing communication and marketing strategies on TikTok.

The background of the phenomena can be found between the crossroads of communication, psychology, and consumer behavior research. Social psychologist Icek Ajzen, best known for his development of the theory of planned behavior, set up a theoretical framework to better comprehend and predict human behavior in various social contexts including consumerism (Connor & Armitage, 1998). With the rise of the relatively new TikTok platform, the necessity of the theory of planned behavior is clear to better understand how this platform is influencing the spending and behavioral patterns of consumers.

TikTok's high engagement opportunities offer unique opportunities for everyday content creators and diversely scaled brands to connect with audiences, particularly college students, who have heavy social media usage. Persuasive content that incorporates elements of entertainment, creativity, and diversity, allows for quantifiable research on TikTok's influence on users' attitudes, social norms, and controlled perceptions of users' actions. Studying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is crucial for understanding the underlying factors driving consumer behavior on the platform.

TPB offers a comprehensive framework for examining how college students' intentions to engage in specific behaviors on TikTok, such as liking videos or making purchases, are formed. "TikTok's innovative and fast-moving algorithm proves its appeal to young markets globally" (Weimann & Masri, 2021). By considering the influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, researchers can gain insights into the psychological processes that shape college students' intentions and subsequent actions on TikTok. "Findings indicate that

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TikTok features such as TikTok Shop, short video content, and live sales significantly influence students' purchasing decisions. However, the study also suggests that excessive exposure to these features may lead to extravagant and addictive behaviors” (Mustaffa, 2023). This understanding is essential for marketers and educators seeking to develop effective strategies for engaging with this demographic on the platform and influencing their behaviors and positive purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, TPB provides a means to predict and analyze college students' actual behaviors based on their intentions. By assessing the strength of intentions and the factors influencing them, researchers can make informed predictions about college students' engagement with TikTok content and their likelihood of following through with purchasing decisions.

“Brands are leveraging TikTok's massive engagement rate to focus their marketing campaigns and collaborate with influencers, capitalizing on the platform's influence over consumer behavior” (Fishbein, 2002). This predictive capability is invaluable for marketers seeking to optimize their advertising and promotional efforts on TikTok, as it allows them to tailor their strategies to effectively target college students, thus maximizing their impact on shaping behavior and purchasing decisions. In essence, studying TPB in the context of TikTok provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and predicting college students' behaviors and purchasing decisions, offering valuable insights for marketers, educators, and policymakers alike.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers insights into how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence individuals' intentions and subsequent actions. Attitudes towards TikTok, formed through interactions with various content and brand promotions, play a pivotal role in shaping intentions to engage in specific behaviors, such as

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liking videos or making purchases. Moreover, subjective norms, influenced by perceived social pressures and norms within the TikTok community, exert a significant impact on individuals' behavior. Additionally, perceived behavioral control, encompassing beliefs in one's ability to perform behaviors on TikTok, further shapes intentions and actions. Through an exploration of these components within the context of TikTok, people can gain valuable insights into how college students navigate and interact with the platform.

Previous research studies show that TikTok shops have found that the impact of digital marketing and sales promotions has influenced consumer behavior. In one of the cases, there was a survey made to collect data from 100 college students from Indonesia (Ratu, 2022). From the surveys, there was a common denominator indicating the digital market has positively influenced purchasing intentions on TikTok shops. Additionally, the data also shows results that sales promotions, particularly flash sales, have a boost in sales. Flash sales have been seen to encourage customers to make these purchases quickly and purchase more of the same item. Another discovery from the survey was that college students were willing to buy items on TikTok Shop by just viewing the item and without checking the reviews (Ratu, 2022). Therefore, it has been suggested that marketing and promotions have a positive impact on purchasing intentions. Alongside that, another research discovered that the attractiveness of advertisements has a positive effect on whether the student would purchase an item (Sandrina, 2022). Therefore, it is concluded that there is a positive correlation between product pricing and the likelihood the customer will make a purchase.

As said in one of the studies, "TikTok Shop is currently increasing new users and buyers because it is still a new feature or marketplace compared to other marketplaces" (Ratu, 2022). The studies done on TikTok Shop indicate that the following factors: digital marketing,

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advertisement attractiveness, sales promotion, and item pricing have a significant impact on purchasing decisions. On the other hand, few research cases show how it affects customers' mental health. Given that TikTok Shop is primarily targeted at college students, who may be facing financial difficulties. It will be interesting to do further research on whether an increase in purchasing trending items on TikTok Shop could lead to a shopping addiction, and if it will affect their mental health positively or negatively.

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