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Navigating Cyberspace: Attitudes, Motivations, and Perceived Impacts of TikTok Use among Female Undergraduates at University of Maiduguri

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes, motivations, and perceived impacts of TikTok use among female undergraduate students at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the key motivations for TikTok use, assessed its perceived benefits, identified the perceived risks associated with its use, and examined the major challenges experienced by female undergraduate students. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The study population comprised registered female undergraduate students of the University of Maiduguri during the 2024/2025 academic session. A sample of 374 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling technique, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The instrument was validated by experts, while its reliability was established through a pilot study, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 32.0, and descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to present the findings. The results revealed that entertainment, relaxation, and staying updated with social trends were the primary motivations for TikTok use. Respondents also perceived TikTok as a valuable platform for self-expression, creativity, social interaction, and confidence building. Despite these benefits, the study identified several challenges and risks associated with its use, including addiction, academic distraction, privacy concerns, cyberbullying, high internet costs, and societal disapproval. The findings further showed that although TikTok has educational value, its use among respondents was predominantly recreational and influenced fashion, lifestyle, communication, and self-expression. The study concludes that female undergraduate students generally exhibit positive attitudes towards TikTok; however, these attitudes are moderated by awareness of the platform's social, academic, and psychological implications. The study recommends strengthening digital literacy programmes, promoting responsible social media use, and implementing institutional awareness campaigns to encourage safe, balanced, and productive engagement with TikTok and other social media platforms among university students.

Keywords: TikTok; Female; Attitudes; Social Media; Cyberspace; Public University

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Introduction

TikTok, a short-form video-sharing social networking platform launched by ByteDance in 2016, has rapidly transformed into a global phenomenon, especially among young people. The platform allows users to create, edit, and share 15 to 60-second videos embedded with music, filters, effects, and visual storytelling features, making it highly engaging and user-friendly. With over a billion active users globally by 2024, TikTok has become a major force shaping digital culture, influencing music trends, fashion, humour, dance, and political activism (Anderson & Green, 2022). Unlike traditional social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, TikTok's algorithm provides users with personalised feeds, amplifying content based on individual preferences, regardless of followers, which democratises visibility and

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encourages creativity. Its virality potential appeals to users who seek quick recognition and social validation. However, the platform is not only used for entertainment but also for marketing, education, activism, and storytelling, thus playing a multifaceted role in contemporary digital life (Liu & Carter, 2023; Brookbank, 2025; López-Carril et al., 2026). With its increasing popularity, it has also become an important subject of study in digital sociology, psychology, and media studies, especially in the context of young female users and their behavioural attitudes towards the platform.

Thus, girls, particularly those in their teens and early adulthood, represent one of the most active demographics on TikTok, using the platform for a variety of reasons ranging from social interaction, self-expression, entertainment, and identity exploration. The attitude of girls towards TikTok can be seen as both enthusiastic and complex. On one hand, many girls embrace the platform as a safe space to share their talents, participate in viral challenges, engage with peers, and gain social recognition, which contributes positively to their self-esteem and digital literacy (Obasi & Nwachukwu, 2021). Ahmed and Suleiman (2022) posited that the pressure to conform to beauty standards, receive likes and views, and maintain online popularity often leads to anxieties, comparison, and reduced self-worth among teenage girls. Moreover, TikTok's content moderation policies and exposure to unsolicited comments, especially of a sexual or derogatory nature, influence how girls perceive and use the platform. Despite these challenges, many girls have developed adaptive behaviours by curating their content and interactions in ways that protect their digital boundaries while still engaging meaningfully with the app. Hence, the attitudes of girls towards TikTok are shaped by a mixture of empowerment, entertainment, vulnerability, and strategic navigation of online visibility (Montero Corrales, 2025).

Among university girls, attitudes towards TikTok take a more nuanced form, reflecting the intersection of digital engagement, academic identity, social awareness, and peer influence. According to Yusuf and Ibrahim (2023), university girls often perceive TikTok not only as a source of entertainment and relaxation amid academic stress but also as a platform for socio-political expression, educational content sharing, and economic empowerment through content monetisation by advertising products, goods and services (López-Carril et al., 2026). The diversity in their academic backgrounds and exposure to critical media literacy influences how they engage with the platform; some use it to showcase their talents and lifestyles, while others adopt it for academic tutoring, business promotion, or advocacy for gender rights and mental health awareness. However, concerns still remain about its addictive nature, time consumption, and potential conflict with academic responsibilities. Some university girls report feeling torn between the desire to maintain a digital presence and the fear of being negatively judged by peers or lecturers for being too active on social media (Ajzen, 2001; Ekanem & Bala, 2023). Despite these conflicting feelings, many university girls continue to develop positive attitudes towards the app, viewing it as a tool for networking, social validation, and cultural participation, especially in a society where youth voices are often marginalised (Bala & Ikenna, 2021; Brookbank, 2025; López-Carril et al., 2026).

Statement of the Problem

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed the way young people communicate, entertain themselves, and construct their identities. Among the various social networking platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential digital spaces for young adults, particularly female undergraduate students. In Nigeria, and especially at the University of Maiduguri, the increasing use of TikTok among female students has generated concerns regarding its implications for their academic engagement, psychological well-being, social relationships, and identity formation. While the platform offers opportunities for creativity, self-expression, networking, and access to trending information, its continuous use has also raised questions about whether these benefits outweigh the associated social and behavioural risks.

Female undergraduate students increasingly participate in dance challenges, comedy skits, lifestyle videos, fashion trends, and other forms of digital content creation that provide entertainment, relaxation, and a sense of belonging. However, prolonged engagement with the platform may contribute to excessive screen time, poor time management, reduced academic concentration, sleep disturbances, and diminished productivity. Furthermore, the highly interactive and public nature of TikTok exposes users to cyberbullying, online harassment, privacy violations, body shaming, unrealistic beauty standards, and

other forms of digital victimisation that may negatively affect their emotional and psychological well-being. These competing outcomes suggest that TikTok functions not merely as a recreational application but as a powerful social environment capable of influencing users' attitudes, behaviours, aspirations, and everyday experiences.

Within the socio-cultural context of northern Nigeria, female students also negotiate the tension between modern digital culture and prevailing cultural and religious expectations regarding femininity, modesty, and public self-presentation. Consequently, their engagement with TikTok extends beyond entertainment to become an important avenue for identity construction, self-confidence, social interaction, and personal agency. At the same time, such engagement may expose them to criticism, social disapproval, and conflicting expectations from family members, peers, lecturers, and the wider society, thereby creating additional psychological and social pressures.

Although previous studies have examined social media use among Nigerian youths, much of the existing literature either treats young people as a homogeneous group or focuses broadly on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter), with relatively limited empirical attention devoted specifically to TikTok and the experiences of female undergraduate students (see, Okafor and Benson, 2024). Similarly, many studies have concentrated on either the positive or negative effects of social media without simultaneously examining users' motivations, attitudes, perceived benefits, and challenges within a single analytical framework. This leaves an important knowledge gap regarding how female students perceive and experience TikTok within the unique socio-cultural environment of the University of Maiduguri.

Moreover, decisions by parents, lecturers, university administrators, and policymakers concerning students' use of TikTok are often based on anecdotal evidence, stereotypes, or moral concerns rather than empirical research. Such assumptions may result in inappropriate restrictions or insufficient institutional support for responsible digital engagement. Without context-specific evidence, interventions designed to promote healthy social media use may fail to address the realities experienced by female students.

Against this background, there is a need to investigate the attitudes of female undergraduate students at the University of Maiduguri towards TikTok by examining their motivations for using the platform, the perceived benefits they derive, the challenges they encounter, and the broader academic, social, and psychological implications of their engagement. Findings from this study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital media use among young women in Nigeria and provide evidence-based recommendations for universities, policymakers, parents, and other stakeholders seeking to promote safe, balanced, and productive use of TikTok and related social media platforms.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to examine the attitudes, motivations, and perceived impacts of TikTok use among female undergraduate students at the University of Maiduguri.

The specific objectives were to:

i. examine the key motivations behind TikTok use among female undergraduate students at the University of Maiduguri;
ii. assess the perceived benefits of TikTok use among female undergraduate students;
iii. identify the perceived risks associated with TikTok use among female undergraduate students; and
iv. examine the major challenges experienced by female undergraduate students in their use of TikTok.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the attitudes, motivations, and perceived impacts of TikTok use among female undergraduate students at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from a relatively large number of respondents at a single point in time and facilitated the description of prevailing patterns of TikTok use among the study population.

The study population comprised all registered female undergraduate students of the University of Maiduguri during the 2024/2025 academic session. A sample of 374 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling technique. At the first stage, faculties were selected; at the second stage, departments were selected; and at the final stage, respondents were selected proportionately from different levels of study using simple random sampling. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, which is widely used for survey research involving finite populations.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from previous studies on social media use and TikTok engagement among university students. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts in Sociology, Mass Communication, and Research Methods, whose observations were incorporated before the final administration. A pilot study involving 30 female undergraduate students from a university outside the study area was conducted to test the clarity and suitability of the instrument. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding an overall reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency.

The questionnaires were administered personally by the researchers after obtaining informed consent from all participants. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate university research ethics committee before data collection commenced.

The completed questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 32.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to analyse the data in line with the study objectives, and the findings were presented in tables.

Review of Relevant Literature

TikTok is a short-form video-sharing platform developed by ByteDance and launched internationally in 2016. It has rapidly become one of the world's most popular social media applications, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Unlike conventional social networking sites that emphasise text or photo sharing, TikTok enables users to create, edit, and distribute short videos using integrated features such as music, filters, visual effects, and artificial intelligence-driven recommendations. Its distinguishing feature is the "For You Page" (FYP), an algorithmically curated feed that personalises content based on users' viewing patterns, interactions, and preferences. This recommendation system has significantly enhanced user engagement and contributed to TikTok's global popularity (Anderson & Green, 2022; Liu & Carter, 2023; Brookbank, 2025; López-Carril et al., 2026).

Beyond entertainment, TikTok has evolved into an important digital environment for communication, identity expression, creativity, and social interaction. Young people increasingly use the platform to share experiences, participate in viral challenges, promote businesses, and engage with social and cultural issues. The platform's accessibility and ease of content creation have democratised digital participation by allowing users with minimal technical skills to reach large audiences. However, TikTok has become particularly popular among Nigerian university students, who use it for entertainment, social networking, educational content, and entrepreneurial activities (Ekanem & Bala, 2023; López-Carril et al., 2026).

Despite these opportunities, TikTok has attracted considerable scholarly attention because of concerns regarding excessive use, privacy, cyberbullying, and psychological well-being. Research indicates that prolonged engagement with the platform may contribute to academic distraction, problematic social media use, and exposure to unrealistic social comparisons, particularly among young women (Ahmed & Suleiman, 2022; Montero Corrales, 2025). Conversely, responsible use of TikTok has been associated with enhanced creativity, digital skills, self-expression, and access to educational and career-related information (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2023; López-Carril et al., 2026). These contrasting findings suggest that TikTok serves as both an opportunity and a risk, depending on users' motivations, engagement patterns, and level of digital literacy.

Given its widespread adoption among university students, TikTok represents an important aspect of contemporary cyberspace where social interaction, identity construction, and information exchange

increasingly occur. Understanding how female undergraduate students perceive and use the platform is therefore essential to explaining its broader social, educational, and behavioural implications within Nigerian universities (Olamide & Musa, 2022; Brookbank, 2025).

Positive attitudes towards TikTok are often associated with frequent use, content creation, and active participation, whereas negative attitudes are linked to cautious or limited engagement. To many female students in Nigerian universities, entertainment is the primary motivation for TikTok use. The platform's personalised content, short-video format, and interactive features provide relaxation and temporary relief from academic stress. More so, students are motivated by opportunities for self-expression, creativity, and identity construction. Through videos, music, and digital editing tools, users communicate personal experiences, opinions, talents, and lifestyles while developing an online identity that may differ from their offline self (Obasi & Nwachukwu, 2021; Montero Corrales, 2025).

Furthermore, social interaction is another important motivation. TikTok enables students to connect with friends, participate in trending challenges, exchange ideas, and become part of online communities. These interactions strengthen peer relationships and foster a sense of belonging, particularly among young women who use the platform to share experiences and participate in discussions on issues affecting their lives. In addition, exposure to educational videos, career advice, and entrepreneurial content has broadened the platform's appeal beyond entertainment, making it a valuable source of informal learning and professional development (Ekanem & Bala, 2023; López-Carril et al., 2026).

Economic aspirations have also emerged as a significant driver of TikTok use. Increasingly, female undergraduate students view the platform as a means to promote businesses, build personal brands, and attract commercial opportunities through content creation. The possibility of gaining visibility, social influence, and financial rewards encourages sustained engagement and strategic participation on the platform (Ahmed & Suleiman, 2022; Brookbank, 2025). Consequently, students' motivations for using TikTok extend beyond leisure to include educational, social, and economic objectives, reflecting the platform's growing significance within contemporary digital culture.

The platform enables users to create and share original content with accessible editing tools, thereby encouraging artistic expression, identity formation, and digital participation. Among female undergraduate students, TikTok provides opportunities to showcase talents, engage in public discourse, promote businesses, and develop personal brands. Recent studies further indicate that students increasingly use the platform to access educational content, acquire digital skills, and obtain information related to academic success, entrepreneurship, and career development (Ekanem & Bala, 2023; Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2023; López-Carril et al., 2026). These functions have expanded TikTok's role beyond entertainment to include learning and economic empowerment.

Despite these advantages, researchers have identified several risks associated with prolonged TikTok use. Excessive engagement has been linked to reduced academic concentration, poor time management, sleep disruption, and symptoms of problematic social media use. Because the platform continuously recommends personalised content through its algorithm, users may spend substantially more time online than intended, resulting in diminished academic productivity and increased psychological stress (Ahmed & Suleiman, 2022; Montero Corrales, 2025). Frequent exposure to idealised lifestyles and beauty standards may also encourage unhealthy social comparison, negatively affecting self-esteem and body image, particularly among young women.

Cyberbullying, online harassment, and privacy concerns remain significant challenges for female TikTok users. Students who actively create content may experience offensive comments, body shaming, gender-based harassment, or unauthorised redistribution of personal videos. Such experiences can discourage active participation, promote self-censorship, and adversely affect emotional well-being. In addition, limited awareness of digital privacy and data protection increases users' vulnerability to exploitation and reputational harm (Obasi & Nwachukwu, 2021; Montero Corrales, 2025).

The influence of sociocultural norms further shapes female students' experiences on TikTok. In relatively conservative settings such as Maiduguri, concerns about cultural expectations, family values, and public perception may influence the type of content students produce and their willingness to engage openly on

the platform. Consequently, many female users continuously negotiate the tension between digital self-expression and societal expectations. These findings suggest that while TikTok offers substantial opportunities for communication, learning, and personal development, its effective use requires digital literacy, responsible engagement, and supportive institutional interventions that minimise potential harms while maximising its educational and social benefits (López-Carril et al., 2026).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Symbolic Interactionism Theory, originally developed by George Herbert Mead and later advanced by Herbert Blumer. The theory posits that individuals develop meanings through social interaction and that these meanings shape their attitudes and behaviours (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). Rather than viewing behaviour as determined solely by social structures, Symbolic Interactionism emphasises how individuals interpret symbols, interactions, and experiences in their everyday lives.

The theory is particularly relevant to social media research because digital platforms are environments where meanings are continuously created, negotiated, and reconstructed through interaction. On TikTok, users communicate through videos, music, captions, emojis, hashtags, comments, and reactions, all of which serve as symbols that shape how individuals perceive themselves and others. Through these interactions, female undergraduate students construct identities, express opinions, seek social approval, and establish relationships within online communities.

Symbolic Interactionism also explains how attitudes towards TikTok emerge from users' experiences and interactions on the platform. Positive feedback, such as likes, comments, and followers, may reinforce favourable attitudes and encourage continued participation, whereas negative experiences, including cyberbullying, criticism, or social disapproval, may shape unfavourable perceptions and alter patterns of use. Consequently, students' motivations and perceived impacts of TikTok are influenced not only by the platform's technological features but also by the meanings they attach to their online experiences.

The theory is therefore appropriate for this study because it provides a useful framework for understanding how female undergraduate students at the University of Maiduguri interpret and engage with TikTok. It explains how social interaction within cyberspace influences their attitudes, motivations, and perceptions of the platform, thereby offering insight into the relationship between digital interaction and everyday social behaviour.

Results

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 18 years	37	10%
	18–22 years	168	45%
	23–27 years	131	35%
	28 years and above	38	10%
Sex	Female	374	100%
Study Level	100 Level	56	15%
	200 Level	75	20%
	300 Level	112	30%
	400 Level	94	25%
	500–600 Level	37	10%
Marital Status	Single	325	87%
	Married	41	11%
	Divorced/Widowed	8	2%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Residence	On Campus	157	42%
	Off Campus	217	58%
Total		**374**	**100%**

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 374 respondents. The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents, 168 (45.0%), were between 18 and 22 years of age, followed by 131 (35.0%) who were aged 23–27 years. In contrast, 37 (10.0%) were below 18 years, while 38 (10.0%) were aged 28 years and above. This age distribution suggests that TikTok use is predominantly concentrated among young adults, who constitute the largest proportion of the undergraduate population.

As expected, all 374 respondents (100.0%) were female, reflecting the target population of the study. Regarding the respondents' level of study, 112 (30.0%) were in 300 Level, representing the largest group, followed by 94 (25.0%) in 400 Level, 75 (20.0%) in 200 Level, 56 (15.0%) in 100 Level, and 37 (10.0%) in 500–600 Level. This distribution demonstrates that participants were drawn from different academic levels, thereby providing a broad representation of female undergraduate students.

However, with respect to marital status, the majority of the respondents, 325 (87.0%), were single, while 41 (11.0%) were married and 8 (2.0%) were divorced or widowed. This finding reflects the demographic composition of undergraduate students in Nigerian universities, where most students are unmarried. In terms of place of residence, 217 respondents (58.0%) lived off campus, whereas 157 (42.0%) resided on campus. The inclusion of both on-campus and off-campus students suggests that the findings capture the experiences of female undergraduate students from diverse residential settings within the University of Maiduguri.

Table 2. Key Motivations Behind TikTok Use among Female Undergraduates

Variable	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Primary reason for using TikTok	Entertainment and fun	150	40%
	To stay updated with trends	94	25%
	To follow celebrities/influencers	75	20%
	To create and share videos	55	15%
Introduced by	Friends	165	44%
	Siblings	75	20%
	Social media ads	56	15%
	Personal curiosity	78	21%
Frequency of daily use	Once or twice	67	18%
	3–5 times	112	30%
	More than 5 times	94	25%
	Always logged in	101	27%
Most attractive content	Comedy/skits	131	35%
	Fashion/beauty	94	25%
	Educational tips	75	20%
	Music/dance	75	20%
Use for academic content	Regularly	75	20%
	Occasionally	142	38%
	Rarely	94	25

Variable	Category	Frequency	Per cent
	Never	63	17%
Total		**374**	**100%**

Source: Field Work, 2025.

The findings indicate that 150 respondents (40%) used TikTok primarily for entertainment and fun, making it the most common motivation for platform use. Another 94 respondents (25%) reported using TikTok mainly to stay updated with trends, while 75 respondents (20%) used it to follow celebrities and influencers. Only 55 respondents (15%) indicated that creating and sharing videos was their primary reason for using the platform. These findings suggest that TikTok is predominantly perceived as a source of entertainment rather than a platform for content creation.

Regarding adoption of the platform, 165 respondents (44%) were introduced to TikTok by friends, demonstrating the important role of peer influence in social media adoption. In comparison, 78 respondents (21%) discovered the platform through personal curiosity, 75 respondents (20%) through siblings, and 56 respondents (15%) through social media advertisements. The results further show a high level of engagement with TikTok. While 67 respondents (18%) used the application once or twice daily, 112 (30%) accessed it three to five times daily, 94 (25%) used it more than five times a day, and 101 (27%) reported being almost always logged in.

Comedy and skits emerged as the most preferred content, attracting 131 respondents (35%), followed by fashion and beauty content (94 respondents, 25%). Educational tips and music/dance content each accounted for approximately one-fifth of respondents (75 respondents (20%) each). Regarding academic use, 142 respondents (38%) reported occasionally using TikTok for academic purposes, 94 (25%) rarely did so, 75 (20%) used it regularly, and 63 (17%) never used the platform for academic activities. These findings suggest that although TikTok has some educational value, it remains primarily a platform for entertainment and social engagement.

Table 3. Perceived Benefits of TikTok Use Among Female Undergraduates

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Main benefit gained	Stress relief and relaxation	135	36%
	Self-expression/creativity	105	28%
	Learning new skills	75	20%
	Networking/social connection	59	16%
Improvement in communication skills	Significantly	127	34%
	Slightly	157	42%
	Not really	67	18%
	Not at all	23	6%
Confidence through TikTok	Strongly agree	112	30%
	Agree	168	45%
	Disagree	75	20%
	Strongly disagree	19	5%
Fashion/beauty influence	Completely	94	25%
	To some extent	168	45%
	Not much	75	20%
	Not at all	37	10%
Academic inspiration	Frequently	67	18%
	Occasionally	135	36%
	Rarely	101	27%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Never	71	19%
Total		**374**	**100%**

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Table 3 shows that 135 respondents (36%) identified stress relief and relaxation as the major benefit of using TikTok, making it the most commonly perceived advantage of the platform. Additionally, 105 respondents (28%) reported that TikTok promotes self-expression and creativity, while 75 (20%) reported using the platform to acquire new skills. A further 59 respondents (16%) considered networking and social connection to be the primary benefit. These findings suggest that TikTok serves multiple social and psychological functions for female undergraduate students, with entertainment and emotional well-being remaining the most prominent.

Regarding communication skills, 157 respondents (42%) believed that TikTok had slightly improved their communication skills, whereas 127 respondents (34%) reported significant improvement. Conversely, 67 respondents (18%) indicated that the platform had little effect on their communication skills, while 23 respondents (6%) reported no improvement. Overall, the findings indicate that most respondents perceived TikTok as contributing positively to their communication abilities.

The findings further reveal that TikTok positively influenced respondents' confidence. Specifically, 168 respondents (45%) agreed and 112 respondents (30%) strongly agreed that the platform enhanced their self-confidence. In contrast, 75 respondents (20%) disagreed, and 19 respondents (5%) strongly disagreed. This implies that a substantial majority perceived TikTok as a platform that supports confidence building and personal expression. With respect to fashion and beauty, 168 respondents (45%) reported that TikTok influenced them to some extent, while 94 respondents (25%) indicated that it influenced them completely. Meanwhile, 75 respondents (20%) reported minimal influence, and 37 (10%) reported no influence. These findings demonstrate TikTok's considerable role in shaping fashion preferences and lifestyle choices among female undergraduate students.

Finally, although TikTok is primarily used for entertainment, it also provides academic value. 135 respondents (36%) reported that they occasionally obtained academic inspiration from the platform, while 67 respondents (18%) did so frequently. However, 101 respondents (27%) rarely used TikTok for academic purposes, and 71 respondents (19%) never did. This suggests that TikTok has emerging educational potential but continues to function predominantly as a platform for entertainment, creativity, and social interaction.

Table 4. Perceived Risks of TikTok Use Among Female Undergraduates

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Main risk	Addiction/time wastage	150	40%
	Inappropriate content	94	25%
	Cyberbullying	56	15%
	Loss of academic focus	74	20%
Distraction from studies	Always	105	28%
	Sometimes	150	40%
	Rarely	82	22%
	Never	37	10%
Privacy concern	Very much	131	35%
	A little	112	30%
	Not really	94	25%
	Not at all	37	10%
Online harassment	Frequently	45	12%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Once or twice	94	25%
	Know someone who has	150	40%
	Never	85	23%
Encourages risky behaviour	Strongly	82	22%
	To some extent	142	38%
	Not much	94	25%
	Not at all	56	15%
Total		**374**	**100%**

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Table 4 shows that 150 respondents (40%) identified addiction and time wastage as the greatest risk associated with TikTok use, making it the most frequently reported concern. Additionally, 94 respondents (25%) believed that exposure to inappropriate content constituted a major risk, while 74 respondents (20%) associated TikTok with loss of academic focus. A further 56 respondents (15%) identified cyberbullying as the principal risk. These findings suggest that respondents are aware of both the behavioural and social risks associated with intensive TikTok use.

Regarding academic distraction, 150 respondents (40%) reported that TikTok sometimes distracts them from their studies, while 105 respondents (28%) indicated that it always affects their academic concentration. Conversely, 82 respondents (22%) stated that they were rarely distracted, and 37 respondents (10%) reported no academic distraction. Overall, the findings indicate that TikTok may interfere with students' academic activities when not used responsibly.

Privacy concerns were also evident. 131 respondents (35%) expressed a high level of concern regarding privacy and personal data security, while 112 respondents (30%) reported being concerned to a lesser extent. In contrast, 94 respondents (25%) were not particularly concerned, and 37 respondents (10%) expressed no concern. This indicates that a majority of respondents recognised the importance of protecting their personal information while using the platform.

The findings further reveal that online harassment remains a notable concern. Although only 45 respondents (12%) reported experiencing harassment frequently and 94 (25%) had experienced it once or twice, 150 (40%) reported knowing someone who had been harassed on TikTok. Meanwhile, 85 respondents (23%) reported no experience of online harassment. These findings suggest that awareness of cyberbullying and online abuse is widespread among female undergraduate students.

Finally, 142 respondents (38%) believed that TikTok encourages risky behaviour to some extent, while 82 respondents (22%) believed it does so strongly. On the other hand, 94 respondents (25%) felt the platform has little influence on risky behaviour, and 56 respondents (15%) believed it does not encourage such behaviour at all. Overall, the findings indicate that many respondents perceive TikTok as having the potential to promote behaviours that may have adverse social and academic consequences.

Table 5. Challenges of TikTok Use Among Female Undergraduates

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Biggest challenge	Internet/data cost	135	36%
	Parental/societal disapproval	94	25%
	Time management	82	22%
	Technical/phone issues	63	17%
Pressure to imitate content	Often	56	15%
	Occasionally	112	30%
	Rarely	131	35%
	Never	75	20%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sleep interference	Always	75	20%
	Sometimes	131	35%
	Manage well	112	30%
	Not applicable	56	15%
Balancing academics	Very often	94	25%
	Sometimes	142	38%
	Rarely	101	27%
	Never	37	10%
Influence of norms	Very strongly	105	28%
	To some extent	131	35%
	Not really	82	22%
	Not at all	56	15%
Support for regulation	Yes	269	72%
	No	105	28%
Total		**374**	**100%**

Source: Field Work, 2025.

Table 5 indicates that 135 respondents (36%) identified the high cost of internet data as the greatest challenge associated with TikTok use, making it the most frequently reported constraint. This was followed by 94 respondents (25%) who cited parental and societal disapproval, while 82 respondents (22%) identified difficulties with time management. In addition, 63 respondents (17%) reported technical or mobile phone-related challenges. These findings suggest that financial, social, and technological factors collectively influence how female undergraduate students engage with TikTok.

Regarding pressure to imitate trending content, 112 respondents (30%) indicated that they occasionally experienced such pressure, while 56 respondents (15%) reported experiencing it often. Conversely, 131 respondents (35%) rarely felt pressured, and 75 (20%) stated they had never experienced such pressure. This suggests that although peer influence exists, many respondents are selective about participating in online trends.

The findings further show that TikTok affects respondents' sleeping patterns. While 131 respondents (35%) reported that TikTok sometimes interfered with their sleep, 75 respondents (20%) indicated that it always did so. However, 112 respondents (30%) believed they managed their usage effectively, whereas 56 respondents (15%) considered the issue not applicable to them. These findings highlight the potential impact of prolonged social media use on students' health and well-being.

Balancing academic activities with TikTok use also emerged as a notable challenge. 142 respondents (38%) stated that TikTok sometimes interfered with their academic activities, while 94 respondents (25%) reported that it did so very often. In comparison, 101 respondents (27%) experienced this challenge rarely, and 37 respondents (10%) reported no academic interference. This indicates that many respondents struggle to maintain a balance between social media engagement and their academic responsibilities.

Finally, 131 respondents (35%) reported that cultural and religious norms influenced their TikTok use to some extent, while 105 respondents (28%) indicated that these norms influenced them very strongly. In contrast, 82 respondents (22%) felt that such norms had little influence, and 56 respondents (15%) reported no influence. Furthermore, 269 respondents (72%) supported some form of regulation of TikTok, whereas 105 (28%) opposed it. This finding suggests that despite the popularity of TikTok among female undergraduate students, many acknowledge the need for measures that encourage responsible and safe use of the platform.

Discussion of Findings

The findings on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that the majority of the female students who participated in this study were aged between 18 and 22 years, followed by those aged 23 to 27 years, while only a few were below 18 or above 28 years. This age distribution suggests that most respondents fall within the youth bracket, a group often characterised by high digital literacy and curiosity about new social media trends. This finding agrees with This finding is consistent with Agoro and Akinoso (2022), who reported that undergraduate students in Nigerian universities are active users of multiple social media platforms, including TikTok, for communication, learning, and entertainment. The finding is further supported by recent studies showing that university-aged students remain the dominant users of TikTok and are highly engaged with its interactive features and digital culture (López-Carril et al., 2026).

On the key motivations behind TikTok use, the results indicate that most female students at the University of Maiduguri use TikTok primarily for entertainment and fun, followed by staying updated with trends and following celebrities. Only a smaller proportion reported using it to create or share content. This finding reflects the global shift in youth media consumption patterns, where entertainment outweighs information-seeking motives.This finding is consistent with López-Carril et al. (2026), who observed that entertainment, creativity, and social interaction remain the dominant motivations for TikTok use among university students. Similarly, recent studies demonstrate that entertainment, creativity, and social interaction remain the dominant motivations for TikTok use among university students, although educational engagement is gradually increasing (Yang et al., 2025; López-Carril et al., 2026).

On the perceived benefits of TikTok use, the findings revealed that the majority of respondents viewed TikTok as beneficial in terms of stress relief, relaxation, and self-expression, while a smaller proportion cited learning new skills and networking as advantages. This finding aligns with Montero Corrales (2025), who reported that TikTok provides opportunities for creativity, identity expression, and meaningful engagement among university students. A study by López-Carril et al. (2026) further indicates that TikTok can promote digital literacy, student engagement, professional development, creativity, and active learning when intentionally used for educational purposes in higher education.

On the perceived risks of TikTok use, the analysis revealed that the most significant risks associated with TikTok among respondents were addiction, exposure to inappropriate content, and academic distraction. This finding is consistent with Fagbola et al. (2022), who found that excessive use of social networking platforms among female undergraduate students was associated with addictive behaviours and adverse academic outcomes. Recent systematic reviews likewise conclude that although TikTok has educational potential, excessive exposure to non-educational content can reduce students' self-regulation, increase distraction, and negatively influence academic focus and performance.

On the challenges of TikTok use among female students, the study found that the major challenges faced by female students in using TikTok were high internet costs, societal disapproval, and time management difficulties. These findings are consistent with Ajayi-Ayodele (2025), who found that sociocultural values and societal expectations significantly influence how Nigerian university students engage with TikTok and other social media platforms. The findings are also consistent with recent studies showing that socio-cultural context, access to digital resources, and self-regulation significantly influence students' ability to use TikTok productively while avoiding negative academic and psychological outcomes (López-Carril et al., 2026; Yang et al., 2025).

The findings of this study are consistent with the assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism Theory. The theory argues that meanings and behaviours emerge through social interaction. Within the TikTok environment, female undergraduate students continuously interpret and respond to symbols such as videos, comments, hashtags, likes, and followers. These digital interactions shape their attitudes towards the platform, influence their motivations for participation, and affect their perceptions of both its benefits and risks. Positive interactions reinforce creativity, self-expression, and confidence, whereas negative experiences such as cyberbullying, social criticism, and privacy concerns contribute to more cautious patterns of engagement. Consequently, the findings demonstrate that students' attitudes towards TikTok are socially constructed through continuous interaction within cyberspace, thereby supporting the explanatory relevance of Symbolic Interactionism Theory.

Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of a cross-sectional survey design limited the study to observations at one point in time, making it impossible to establish causal relationships between TikTok use and the reported outcomes. Second, the study relied on self-reported responses, which may have been influenced by recall errors or social desirability bias. Third, the study was conducted among female undergraduate students at the University of Maiduguri only; therefore, the findings may not be generalisable to male students or students in other universities. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful empirical evidence on TikTok use among female undergraduates within the Nigerian university context.

Conclusion

The study concludes that TikTok plays an important role in the social lives of female undergraduate students at the University of Maiduguri. Entertainment, relaxation, and staying updated with trends were the primary motivations for its use, while self-expression, creativity, and social interaction were identified as key benefits. At the same time, respondents recognised important risks, including addiction, academic distraction, privacy concerns, and exposure to inappropriate content. Overall, although students demonstrated positive attitudes towards TikTok, they also acknowledged the need for responsible use to minimise its potential academic and social consequences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

i. The University of Maiduguri should organise regular digital literacy and responsible social media awareness programmes to educate students on the safe and productive use of TikTok and other social media platforms.
ii. Lecturers and academic support units should encourage students to utilise educational TikTok content to complement classroom learning and academic skill development.
iii. Students should be encouraged to practise effective time management and responsible social media use to minimise academic distraction, addiction, and other negative consequences associated with excessive TikTok use.

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