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The Influence of TikTok Social Media on the Character of Elementary School Students: A Literature Review

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Abstract

TikTok is widely used by elementary school children, yet its relationship with their character development is still debated. This study aimed to describe TikTok use among elementary school students, examine its influence on student character, and identify the factors behind that influence. A literature review was conducted by collecting books, scientific journal articles, and previous studies on the topic, and the data were analysed descriptively. The review shows that TikTok is popular among elementary students because it is easy to use and has attractive features. Reported positive impacts include creativity, self-confidence, communication skills, digital literacy, and its use as an engaging learning medium. Reported negative impacts include reduced learning concentration, weaker discipline and responsibility for school tasks, less face-to-face interaction, and imitation of inappropriate behaviour. The influence depends on the intensity of use, the type of content, family environment, parental and teacher supervision, and children's ability to evaluate information critically. Because the evidence comes largely from perception-based and small-scale studies, the findings indicate associations rather than causal effects. Proper guidance and supervision are therefore essential so that TikTok is used constructively, and field studies with students are needed.

Keywords: TikTok; social media; student character; elementary students; character education

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INTRODUCTION

Advances in information and communication technology have changed many aspects of life, including education. Elementary school children now use technology not only for entertainment but also to obtain information and interact socially. One of the social media platforms most used by children is TikTok, which is popular because it offers short, attractive videos, is easy to access, and lets users interact through various features (Agustyn & Suprayitno, 2022). Studies in Indonesian elementary schools have examined its link with pupils' behaviour,

character, and social life (Alpian et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2023; Yusro & Desiningrum, 2025). Its use among elementary students keeps growing as smartphones and internet access become easier to obtain. Students use it to watch entertainment videos, follow trends, create content, and look for learning information.

TikTok brings certain benefits, such as creativity, communication skills, knowledge, and a means of entertainment and self-expression (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2020; Sambas & Kurniawan, 2021; Amalia & Nafi'ardina, 2024; Ratri et al., 2024). Excessive use, however, can have negative effects on children's character development, such as lower learning concentration, social media addiction, less direct social interaction, and a tendency to ignore the surroundings (Agustyn & Suprayitno, 2022; Amalia & Nafi'ardina, 2024).

Character is an important part of education, especially in elementary school, where students are forming attitudes, behaviour, and habits. Continuous exposure to social media content can shape how students think, speak, and act, and children of this age are still vulnerable because they cannot yet fully separate good from bad content (Amaruddin et al., 2020). Phenomena often reported include weaker learning discipline, imitation of poor language or behaviour from social media, reduced face-to-face interaction, and impolite attitudes towards others (Amaruddin et al., 2020; Apriliyani & Mujazi, 2025; Fitriani et al., 2025). The influence does not arise automatically; it depends on factors such as limited parental supervision, high intensity of use, peer environment, the ability to filter information, and low digital literacy (Deriyanto & Qorib, 2018; Pons-Salvador et al., 2022).

Based on these conditions, this study aims (1) to describe TikTok use among elementary school students, (2) to examine its influence on student character, and (3) to identify the factors that cause TikTok to influence student character. The results are expected to inform teachers, parents, and schools in guiding the wise use of social media by elementary-age children.

METHODS

This study used a literature review (library research). The method collects reference sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, and previous studies related to TikTok use and the character of elementary school students. The collected data were analysed descriptively to understand how TikTok is used, what influence it has on student character, and which factors explain that influence. Using this method, the researchers obtain relevant and in-depth information based on theory and earlier findings.

The sources were scholarly articles and books on TikTok or social media use and the character of elementary school children, mostly Indonesian journal articles published between 2018 and 2026. A source was included when it addressed TikTok use, its effects on children's character, or the factors behind those effects. The selected sources were read, grouped by the three research questions, compared in Table 1, and synthesised narratively.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

The reviewed studies are summarised by the three research questions. Table 1 compares the reported positive and negative impacts on character, and Figure 1 summarises how use, mediating factors, and impacts relate.

Table 1. Reported Impacts of TikTok Use on Elementary School Students' Character

Domain	Reported positive impact	Reported negative impact	Sources
Creativity and expression	More creative video making and editing; more confident self-expression	–	Bashiroturrohmah et al. (2023); Amalia & Nafi'ardina (2024); Ratri et al. (2024)
Learning	Wider knowledge from educational content; higher learning motivation and interest	Less learning time and concentration; neglect of school tasks	Bashiroturrohmah et al. (2023); Anisa et al. (2025); Amalia & Nafi'ardina (2024)
Discipline and responsibility	–	Weaker time management and discipline; lower responsibility for tasks	Agustyn & Suprayitno (2022); Ratri et al. (2024); Fitriani et al. (2025)
Social interaction and manners	–	Less face-to-face interaction; less polite behaviour; slow response when called by parents	Sutisna et al. (2024); Dikdayanto & Hariyanto (2024); Apriliyani & Mujazi (2025); Alpian et al. (2024)

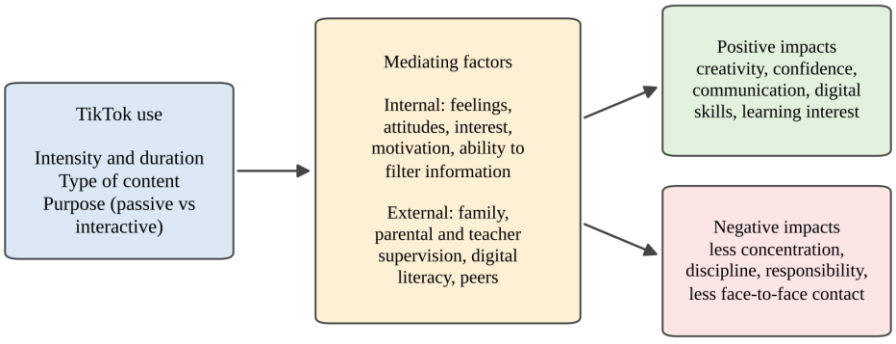


Figure 1. Relationship between TikTok use, mediating factors, and impacts on student character as synthesised from the reviewed literature

TikTok Use among Elementary School Students

Based on the findings of several studies, TikTok is among the most used applications among elementary school students. Students use it for entertainment, to fill free time, to watch videos, and to upload creative work. The content most often accessed includes animation, games, memes, viral news, K-pop, dance, and

other entertainment videos, and most students spend between one and five hours a day on TikTok (Agustyn & Suprayitno, 2022). Use is not limited to entertainment: educational content can motivate some students, whereas heavy exposure to entertainment content lowers enthusiasm for learning in others (Anisa et al., 2025). TikTok use has also been linked to arriving late at school and lower learning motivation (Alpian et al., 2024).

Influence of TikTok on Student Character

The reviewed studies report both positive and negative effects. The positive impacts identified include greater creativity in making and editing videos and wider knowledge through educational content (Bashiroturrohmah et al., 2023; Amalia & Nafi'ardina, 2024). Negative impacts observed more often include students caring less about their surroundings, spending more time in front of electronic devices, reduced face-to-face interaction, and less polite behaviour towards parents and the community (Nurhayati & Mulyati, 2026; Sutisna et al., 2024). Some students also respond less when their parents call them because they are absorbed in TikTok (Dikdayanto & Hariyanto, 2024). Findings on politeness and morals are mixed, however. Heavy TikTok use was associated with weaker akhlakul karimah (moral character) in one correlational study (Hofifah et al., 2025) and with less polite language in others (Belinda & Abidin, 2023; Fitriani et al., 2025), whereas two studies found no direct effect on politeness where parental supervision and school habits were strong (Mutmainah & Barkah, 2026; Sa'diyah et al., 2026). Dance-challenge videos have been reported to raise creativity and technological awareness while weakening self-discipline and religious values (Ratri et al., 2024), and wider social-media use may still leave favourable attitudes such as punctuality, creativity, and responsibility (Jariah et al., 2024).

Content matters as well. Too much exposure to age-inappropriate content can harm children's mental and emotional development, and long hours in front of a screen reduce social interaction and the activities appropriate for the child's age. Research on younger children points the same way: screen time is generally linked to weaker socio-emotional and cognitive development, with more favourable outcomes under time limits, co-viewing, and educational content (Streegan et al., 2022), and noneducational or fast-paced content is linked to more psychological difficulties in toddlers (Luo et al., 2024). Not every impact is negative, however: media such as TikTok can support students' cognitive development, with independent, interactive, and visual learning that raises learning motivation, critical thinking, and creativity, provided educators and parents guide its use.

Factors Behind TikTok's Influence on Student Character

Factors in TikTok use can be divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors include feelings, attitudes, individual characteristics, expectations, attention, learning processes, physical condition, values, needs, interests, and motivation. External factors include family background, the information received, the knowledge and needs of the surroundings, intensity, and the novelty or familiarity of the object. Feelings are one internal factor: if a person does not enjoy using the application, he or she will not use it.

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's dependency theory offers another lens. It holds that the more a society depends on media, the more the media change and the broader their influence becomes, and digital media addiction is one form of such dependency. Parental and teacher supervision is also a factor: parents busy with their own activities supervise gadget use less, and easy access and varied content can make children addicted. Parental mediation is protective: a systematic review found that parental mediation guards against excessive internet use and that active and restrictive strategies moderate the link between digital media use and mental health (Flaibam Giovanelli et al., 2025), and parents' digital competence matters for guiding and supervising young children's internet use (Pons-Salvador et al., 2022).

The reviewed literature further indicates that longer screen time raises the potential for mental fatigue and sensory overstimulation, because the developing brain keeps receiving visual and auditory stimuli that can disturb self-regulation, and heavy gadget use reduces sleep and social activity, which matter for emotional stability. Passive use, such as watching entertainment videos without interaction, appears to carry a higher risk of loneliness and loss of focus than interactive or educational use. Family is an important moderating variable: children with active parental supervision and open communication show lower emotional disturbance even with high exposure, whereas permissive homes without time limits strengthen the risk (Muthmainah et al., 2026). Longitudinal evidence from early childhood suggests that the link between screen time and socio-emotional problems may run in both directions: more screen exposure was associated with internalising and externalising problems at age 3, and externalising problems at age 3 predicted more screen time at age 5 (Soto-Ramirez et al., 2025).

Discussion

The reviewed literature consistently presents TikTok as widely used by elementary school students because of its short videos, music, filters, and visual effects, and its ease of access through mobile phones. Use is not purely for entertainment; many students also use it as a source of information and a learning medium. The long daily use reported (one to five hours) is the point at which supervision becomes necessary, because time spent on the platform competes with learning and with face-to-face interaction (Alpian et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2023).

The influence of TikTok on character is two-sided. The positive impacts, such as creativity and confident self-expression, arise because the platform's features let students develop ideas and make their own videos, and educational content can increase interest in learning because information is presented attractively and in an easily understood way. The negative impacts arise mainly because children of this age are still developing and tend to imitate what they see. Exposure to content that conflicts with educational values and social norms can lead to imitation of language, style of speech, and behaviour, and excessive use reduces study time, concentration, and discipline in managing time. The influence of TikTok on character is therefore neither wholly negative nor wholly positive; it depends on how the platform is used and supervised, a pattern also found for motivation to learn and for character values (Anisa et al., 2025; Ratri et al., 2024). This reading fits the dependency perspective,

in which stronger reliance on media enlarges its influence, and it fits the finding that family supervision moderates the effects of screen time (Flaibam Giovanelli et al., 2025; Muthmainah et al., 2026).

The role of the school follows from this. Teachers can integrate digital literacy and self-control into learning so that students learn to filter information, and schools can balance technology use with physical and social activity, acting as a preventive agent. Parents, in turn, need to set time limits, discuss content with their children, and keep communication open at home. Teachers' everyday example also shapes pupils' character, which suggests that modelling responsible digital behaviour is part of the school's role (Andriani et al., 2025), and schools and teachers have been urged to act on children's digital safety (Martin et al., 2023; Pons-Salvador et al., 2022).

This review has limitations that qualify these conclusions. First, it relies on secondary sources, and many of them are small-scale studies based on perceptions of parents or observations, so the findings show associations rather than causal effects; they cannot show whether TikTok changes character or whether children with certain tendencies use it more, a direction that longitudinal work on screen exposure suggests may run both ways (Soto-Ramirez et al., 2025). Second, the sources do not control for other media and for children's home contexts. Third, the search and selection procedure of this review should be documented more fully to allow replication. Future studies should collect data directly from elementary students, parents, and teachers, use measured indicators of character, and examine TikTok as a learning medium that supports character education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature reviewed, TikTok influences the character of elementary school students in both positive and negative ways, depending on the duration of use, the type of content, the surrounding environment, and parental and teacher supervision. Positive impacts include creativity, self-confidence, expressiveness, and digital skills. Uncontrolled use can reduce learning concentration, discipline, and responsibility, and encourage imitation of behaviour that does not fit educational values.

The influence of TikTok depends not only on the platform but also on how it is used and on the quality of guidance provided. Parents, teachers, and schools therefore need to take an active role in guiding and supervising social media use so that students use TikTok wisely and responsibly. Further research is recommended to collect field data directly from students and to develop TikTok as a learning medium that strengthens character education.

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