

# **The Uses and Gratifications of TikTok among the Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates Generation Z's interaction with TikTok in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. Employing the uses and gratification framework, this study analyses user motivations, usage patterns, and satisfaction. A quantitative approach using surveys and demographic data collected (N=313) reveals a diverse sample with balanced male and female representation and ethnic backgrounds. The findings demonstrate that TikTok is evolving into a participatory platform, with users dedicating significant time to engaging with personal interests. User motivations for TikTok use are driven by a combination of cognitive, affective, escapist, and social needs, ultimately fulfilling a desire for gratification. These insights offer valuable strategies for content creators, marketers, educators, and policymakers to enhance their engagement with Generation Z on TikTok. The study highlights the platform's potential for entertainment, education, and fostering online communities. Additionally, it contributes to a deeper understanding of TikTok's role in contemporary digital culture and its impact on youth engagement in Malaysia and beyond.*

**Keywords:** *TikTok, Uses and gratification, Digital Culture, Audience Studies, Media Consumption*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this era of 5G innovation, characterised by a fully digital landscape, the dynamics of the portable internet have undergone profound transformations, continually reshaping the fabric of people's lives. The advent of short-form videos as a technological revolution in the portable realm has heralded a new era (Meng & Zhao, 2023). With the proliferation of smartphones, the cost of mobile communication has decreased, consequently lowering the production costs of short-form videos (Xiao, Li, & Zhang, 2023). Simultaneously, the proliferation of applications dedicated to short-form video on mobile platforms has expanded such as YouTube shorts, TikTok and Instagram reels (Mahetaji, 2022).

Boasting over 1.5 billion active users globally, TikTok has become a social media powerhouse (Press, 2024). This massive user base, which includes nearly 150 million in the US alone in 2023, has grown considerably, with the US market experiencing a staggering 1239% increase since 2018 (Dean, 2024). Revenue is also impressive, with estimates reaching \$14.3 billion in 2023. Notably, Generation Z and Y dominate the platform, making it a prime target for businesses looking to connect with this younger demographic (Muliadi, 2022). However, there are signs of a growing gender-balanced audience with a near-even split between male and female users globally.

Whenever a new platform emerges, like the ever-popular TikTok in today's new media landscape, it brings with it a wave of fresh content, trends, and cultural phenomena. Alongside this surge comes a space where understanding and comprehension of this new medium lag its rapid adoption. This space presents a unique opportunity, a canvas waiting to be filled with insights and exploration. Short video is the ultimate form of mobile Internet content (Zannettou et al., 2024). The goal of social media is to acquire information more efficiently. Videos are easier to gather information from than text initially. Additionally, shorter videos are more conducive to obtaining various information compared to longer ones (Feng et al., 2024). In 15 minutes, you can only read an in-depth article, but the audience can watch hundreds of short videos.

Furthermore, the interactive nature of short-form video formats facilitates deeper levels of emotional engagement and social interaction among users (Zhang et al., 2019). Research in uses and gratification has highlighted the importance of social influence and peer validation in shaping consumer behaviour (Chan, 2024). By enabling users to participate in challenges, duets, and collaborative content creation, platforms like TikTok foster a sense of community and co-creation, thereby strengthening user bonds and fostering a sense of belonging (Qian & Jain, 2024). Additionally, the ephemeral nature of short-form videos, characterised by their brevity and temporality, creates a sense of urgency and FOMO (fear of missing out), prompting users to engage with content promptly to avoid feeling left out or disconnected from ongoing trends and conversations (Goltsberg, 2023).

TikTok in Malaysia is experiencing a boom with a rapidly growing user base, estimates reaching over 10 million users by 2026 (Editorial, 2023). This young and vibrant audience skews heavily towards Gen Z (19-25 years old). The birth years for Gen Z are generally considered to be the mid-to-late 1990s to the early 2010s, Therefore, individuals who are currently 19-25 years old are part of the Gen Z age range (Kim, Jang, Choi, Youn, & Lee, 2022). Interestingly, Malaysia has a higher percentage of different ethnic users compared to the global average (Statistics Malaysia, 2023). With an ad reach potential that's grown by nearly 50% in a year, TikTok is a platform that Malaysian businesses looking to target a younger demographic shouldn't ignore.

Generation Z (Gen Z), the initial cohort to be immersed in pervasive internet accessibility since childhood, is notably inclined towards consuming content via online platforms rather than conventional mass communication channels (Sokolova, K., 2023). With smartphones and digital

devices being integral aspects of their lives, traditional media holds minimal relevance to them. Surveys indicate that 51% of Gen Z utilise digital devices for over an hour daily, often dedicating considerable time to watching videos on their phones (Kollárová, Koliščáková, & Trnka, 2023). Given their substantial impact on the market and their distinct media consumption patterns, Gen Z constitutes a pivotal consumer demographic for media enterprises. Hence, it is imperative for these companies to comprehend their utilisation of platforms like TikTok to sustain competitiveness and relevance amidst evolving media landscapes (Munsch, A., 2021).

To gain a complete understanding of the dynamics within the realm of short video applications, it becomes imperative to delve into the intricacies of user behaviour and conduct neuroscientific inquiries, alongside comprehending customers' wishes and behaviours via the prism of the uses and gratification concept. Uses and Gratifications concept (U&G) stands as a stalwart theoretical framework, specifically adept at losing light on why audiences are attracted to new media systems, mainly the younger demographic comprising adolescents and the young people. U&G idea posits that individuals actively are searching for out media to fulfil precise desires whether for facts, leisure, social interplay, or personal identity (McQuail et al., 1994). When carried out to the study of latest media like TikTok, it gives a lens through which we can understand the motivations behind personal engagement, content creation, and network formation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to data from Statista (2024), TikTok is primarily used by Generation Z individuals, who exhibit high levels of engagement on the platform, resulting in frequent exchanges by Gen Z users. Their tendency to overlook the potential consequences of sharing personal information. Building on the idea that media use fulfils individual needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevich, 1973), recent research by Young and Ha (2021) explores how TikTok use connects to entertainment needs. McKee (2021) further highlights the importance of enjoyment and satisfaction in meaningful TikTok use, which aligns with the platform's potential to address the psychological, emotional, and social needs of Generation Z.

Ahlse, Nilsson, and Sandstrom (2020) suggest that Gen Z uses TikTok to form peer relationships and self, as echoed by Hart (2022), who emphasises its role in identity formation and self-assessment. Further research on satisfaction is needed to allow for further research. Although TikTok users have penetrated all age groups, the younger generation shows a high level of involvement to improve their social media needs (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

Research by Scherr and Wang (2021) in China reveals that users derive satisfaction from TikTok through trends, escapism, and social connection, while Bossen and Kottasz (2020) found that self-disclosure, identity binding and online information dissemination are important factors in TikTok

usage in Denmark. Compared to the current study focusing on TikTok motivations in Sabah, Malaysia, this study promises to provide valuable insights into cross-cultural differences.

Moreover, in comparison to previous studies, most TikTok studies revolve around subjective exploration, and most analysts primarily dissect the correspondence content, correspondence method and attributes, and future improvement of TikTok short-form video application (Wang, 2020). This study focuses on how TikTok satisfies Gen Z needs, such as capturing divided time, capturing interest, satiating the public's thirst for knowledge, and the needs to communicate their opinions (Borges, 2023). The advantages of the TikTok stage are also discussed. Investigated the reasons for TikTok's rapid growth: fundamental activity, satisfying the crowd's, effectively demonstrating the crowd's competence, and driving the internet commercial economy. A few studies employ the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which dissects TikTok users' motivations for using the app, but no additional research is conducted.

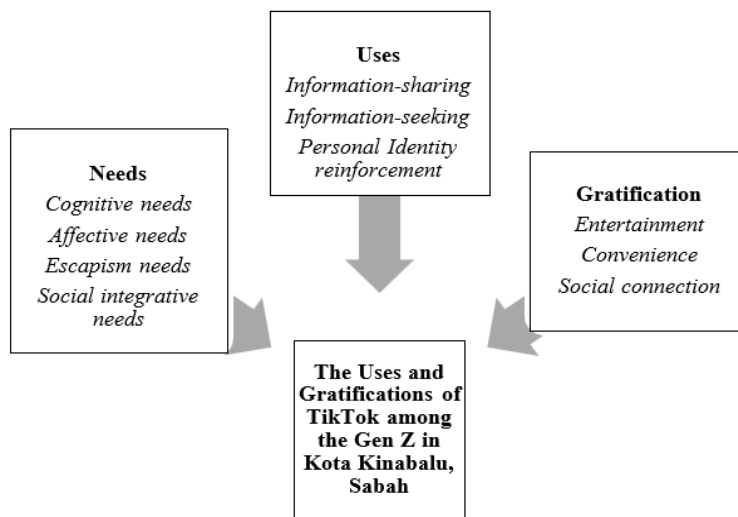
### **Uses and Gratification Theory**

According to Katz et al . (1973), the theory of use and gratification goes deeper into the psychological and behavioural importance of mass communication for individuals. It examines why audiences choose to interact with the media and how their specific requirements are thereby met. Unlike traditional approaches that focus only on the impact of communication on audiences, this theory emphasises the active role of audiences and emphasises preferences. According to this theory, audiences actively frame information: the communication process of informants and their media consumption is driven by their own preferences and needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). People use TikTok to fulfil their social, personal, and psychological needs. To effectively apply the "uses and gratification" principle and contribute to TikTok's growth, it is important for this research to understand the characteristics and needs of human interest.

Given the substantial prevalence of Generation Z users on TikTok and its potential ramifications, there is a pressing need for further examination of the underlying motives for their engagement. Existing uses and gratification research primarily concentrates on user motivations such as usage satisfaction, gratification, and core objectives, yet rarely explores the correlation between user preferences for TikTok content and these motivational factors (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021). Prior studies have investigated the determinants of sustained usage of short video applications, revealing significant impacts of individual creativity, diversion motivation, and subjective norms on usage behaviour, while also noting the influence of interpersonal reactions on recommended use (J. Yang & Mai, 2010). For adolescents and the younger generation, TikTok represents more than just a platform for sharing videos. It's a dynamic space where they can express themselves creatively, find belonging within niche communities, and navigate their evolving identities in a digital world. U&G theory helps us unpack the intricacies of this phenomenon, revealing how TikTok satisfies their needs for self-expression, social connection, and entertainment in ways that resonate uniquely with this demographic.

Despite TikTok's widespread global popularity, there exists a notable gap in comprehending the nuanced behaviours and motivations of Generation Z users in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, within the platform's ecosystem. Existing scholarly literature predominantly focuses on TikTok's broad appeal and its influence on youth culture yet lacks depth in exploring the specific socio-cultural context of Kota Kinabalu (Tan, 2023). Consequently, there remains limited insight into how TikTok shapes the social interactions, self-presentation, and information consumption habits of Generation Z within this local setting. This study aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive investigation into the underlying drivers of Generation Z's engagement with TikTok in Kota Kinabalu. By scrutinising its implications for identity formation, social interactions, information literacy, and critical thinking skills, this research seeks to uncover unique insights into the role of TikTok in shaping the digital behaviours and identities of young individuals in Kota Kinabalu. Through a uses and gratification analysis of local trends and global patterns, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of short-form video content platforms in contemporary digital culture.

## Research Framework



**Fig 1 The diagram of the research framework**

Uses and Gratification Theory provides this study a research framework for analysing how individuals in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, use TikTok to fulfil various needs. Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, boasts a rich cultural tapestry influenced by indigenous communities, Chinese and Malay immigrants (Treacher, 2010). Understanding this cultural context is crucial, as TikTok use can be shaped by cultural values and norms (Nguyen, 2017). Katz et al. (1973) proposed that people have needs on media that can categorise into cognitive needs, affective needs, social integrative needs, and escapism needs.

Other than that, the "social connection" component of U&G Theory suggests that Kota Kinabalu residents might leverage TikTok to connect with family and friends who are geographically dispersed, particularly those residing in other parts of Malaysia or abroad. Local creators might utilise the platform to showcase Sabah's unique cultural practices, fostering a sense of community and shared identity (Huang, 2020).

Furthermore, TikTok's emphasis on short-form video aligns with the "information seeking, Information sharing, personal identity reinforcement" component. Residents might use the platform to discover local businesses, tourist attractions within Kota Kinabalu and Sabah, or even learn about indigenous languages and traditions. Travel and food content, for example, are highly popular on TikTok (Clement, 2020). Local creators could leverage this trend to promote tourism within Kota Kinabalu, potentially contributing to the city's economic development.

However, it's important to acknowledge potential challenges. The "entertainment and convenience" component of U&G Theory highlights the potential for excessive social media use. Research suggests that excessive TikTok use can negatively impact mental health, particularly among younger demographics (Przybylski et al., 2020). Understanding these potential risks becomes even more important when considering the dominance of TikTok among younger users (Clement, 2020).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The current study's methodology was developed utilising the Perspective of Uses and Gratification (Katz et al., 1973). This theory seeks to understand the motivations underlying people's use of specific media. This study thinks that people use needs and gratification as reasons, so that TikTok applications can go viral in a short time. As a result, social media researchers have adopted the Uses and Gratification theory to better understand the uses, needs and gratification of using social media platforms. For example, according to (Introne et al., 2018) identified information exchange, entertainment, and social needs as some of the benefits people derive from social media use. Similarly, (Rowley, Dunne, & Lawlor, 2010) discovered that information seeking, and relationship conservation were related to social media use. Thus, from these initial previous studies, this study selected different variables why Gen Z would use social media application Tik- Tok. By these variables, this study can identify the uses, needs and gratification by questions in questionnaires that were completed by Gen Z in Malaysia.

As a result, the purpose of this study is to make up for the absence of previous studies by describing the content of TikTok videos. The TikTok APP will be used as the exploration object in this study, which will include among the Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Specifically, it will explore Gen Z's level of inclination towards TikTok video content, their sources of inspiration for using the platform, the sense of fulfilment they derive from using it, and their expectations from

the platform. Questionnaires will be used to gather data on these aspects, and the results will be analysed to gain insights into Gen Z's experiences with TikTok.

The online questionnaires were selected for their ability to provide an accurate portrayal or account of TikTok usage, needs, and gratification. This design was chosen to align with the research question of the study, specifically, to ascertain the usage patterns, needs, and gratification of Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah Malaysia. The online questionnaire is distributed to respondents via QR code, either physically or through various social media platforms. The sampling for this study is Gen Z individuals aged 19-25, regular TikTok users and must be residing in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah for more than 1 year. This study uses snowball sampling. The questionnaire will be distributed to a few representatives of various age groups in Kota Kinabalu, who will then distribute it to their acquaintances within one week. Following the administration of the questionnaires, this study employed SPSS for the coding process. The questionnaire is structured into three sections. Section 1 pertains to demographic information such as gender, age, and race. In Section 2, efforts were made to ensure that all Gen Z respondents surveyed were regular TikTok users. Data from participants who did not use TikTok were subsequently excluded to maintain the accuracy of the dataset. Finally, in Section 3, the study tested various variables against the questions posed in the questionnaire by using Likert-scale.

The data for this study were collected from a sample of 313 Gen Z individuals in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah who use TikTok at least once a week. By employing quantitative data analysis, this study examines questionnaire results that can be readily converted into numbers without losing their significance. Descriptive statistics, including measures such as the mean and standard deviation, are utilised in this study. This data analysis technique encompasses the process of summarising data samples to accurately portray the attributes of a dataset, facilitating insights and aiding in addressing research inquiries. After that, due to instances where some respondents did not respond to the questionnaires with the requisite seriousness, this study also undertook a rigorous data cleaning process to ensure the integrity and reliability of the dataset. This step aimed to eliminate any potential discrepancies or inaccuracies that might have arisen from incomplete or inconsistent responses, thereby enhancing the robustness of the analysis conducted. Every variable examined in this study demonstrated a high level of reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.90 or above. Face validity method has been applied to this study.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1 Demographic of respondents**

<b>Demographic Factor</b>	<b>Percentage Statistics</b>
<b>Age</b>	
19	45.0
20	23.3
21	12.1
22	8.2
23	7.2
24	2.2
25	1.0
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Malay	33.6
Chinese	24.4
India	23.4
Bumiputera Sabah	18.6
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	48.9
Female	51.1

The demographic composition of the respondents in this study reveals several noteworthy patterns. Primarily, the age distribution indicates a prevalence of younger individuals, with a significant majority (45.0%) falling within the 19-year-old category, followed by 20-year-olds comprising 23.3% of the sample. As the age increases, there is a gradual decline in representation, with 21-year-olds constituting 12.1%, and subsequent age groups declining further. Ethnicity among respondents displays a diverse representation, with Malays comprising the largest proportion at 33.6%, followed by Chinese (24.4%), Indians (23.4%), and Bumiputera Sabah (18.6%). Gender distribution indicates a nearly equal split, with a slight majority of female respondents (51.1%) compared to males (48.9%).



**Table 1 Average duration of TikTok usage**

Average	Frequency	Percentage
30 minutes to 1 hour	8	2.6
1 hour	30	9.6
1 hour to 2 hours	68	21.7
2 hours to 3 hours	206	65.8
More than 4 hours	1	0.3

The average duration of TikTok usage among respondents, categorised by time intervals. Among the respondents, 2.6% reported using TikTok for a duration ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour, while 9.6% indicated spending precisely 1 hour on the platform. A substantial portion of respondents, constituting 21.7%, reported TikTok usage spanning from 1 hour to 2 hours. Moreover, a majority of 65.8% reported spending between 2 to 3 hours on TikTok, signifying a significant portion of users engaging with the platform for extended periods. Interestingly, only a minimal fraction, accounting for 0.3% of respondents, reported using TikTok for more than 4 hours, suggesting that prolonged usage beyond this threshold is relatively uncommon among the surveyed population.

**Table 3 How often do you encounter content on TikTok that you find personally relevant or relatable?**

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	185	59.1
Often	84	26.8
Sometimes	32	10.2
Rarely	10	3.2
Never	2	0.6

Regarding the frequency with which respondents encounter personally relevant or relatable content on TikTok, categorised by a scale of frequency. Among the respondents, the majority, accounting for 59.1%, reported encountering such content "Very Often." A significant portion, comprising 26.8% of respondents, indicated encountering personally relevant or relatable content "Often." Additionally, 10.2% reported encountering such content "Sometimes," indicating a moderate frequency of occurrence among this group. A smaller proportion of respondents, 3.2%, reported

encountering relevant content "Rarely," suggesting infrequent occurrence. Remarkably, only a minimal fraction of respondents, constituting 0.6%, reported never encountering personally relevant or relatable content on TikTok.

**Table 4 Needs of TikTok of Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu**

<b>Needs of TikTok of Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu</b>	<b>M (<math>\mu</math>)</b>	<b>SD (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>
<b>Cognitive needs</b>		
I feel the need to stay updated on global and local trending topics on TikTok	4.47	0.788
It's important for me to know what other users are sharing and discussing on TikTok	4.46	0.763
I'm interested in understanding how people express their thoughts and feelings through TikTok content	4.50	0.797
<b>Affective needs</b>		
TikTok helps me feel connected and less lonely	4.48	0.973
It's important for me to feel relaxed and amused while using TikTok	4.50	0.768
I turn to TikTok for entertainment to cope with stress or boredom	4.46	0.828
<b>Escapism needs</b>		
I rely on TikTok to relax and unwind from daily stressors	4.50	0.777
I use TikTok as a source of entertainment to pass the time	4.49	0.743
<b>Social integrative needs</b>		
I enjoy discussing TikTok trends and videos with my friends and family	4.46	0.816
Sharing TikTok content and discussing it with friends on social media is something I enjoy	4.48	0.824
Finding friends on TikTok to connect and engage with about shared interests is important to me	4.47	0.828

The needs of Generation Z individuals in Kota Kinabalu concerning their usage of TikTok, categorised into different dimensions, each with several associated statements rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. First and foremost, Cognitive Needs: Respondents strongly agree with statements indicating their desire to stay updated on global and local trending topics (M = 4.47, SD = 0.788). They also express a high level of interest in understanding how people express their thoughts and feelings through TikTok content (M = 4.50, SD = 0.797). Regarding Affective Needs, TikTok serves as a platform for fostering connection and reducing feelings of loneliness, as indicated by a high mean score (M = 4.48, SD = 0.973). Respondents prioritise feelings of relaxation and amusement while using TikTok (M = 4.50, SD = 0.768). Additionally, TikTok serves as an outlet for entertainment to cope with stress or boredom (M = 4.46, SD = 0.828). Moreover, Escapism Needs: Respondents highly value TikTok as a means of escaping daily stressors and passing time (M = 4.50, SD = 0.777 and M = 4.49, SD = 0.743 respectively). Lastly, Social Integrative Needs: Enjoyment in discussing TikTok trends and videos with friends and family is evident (M = 4.46, SD = 0.816). Sharing TikTok content and engaging in discussions about it on social media platforms is also appreciated (M = 4.48, SD = 0.824). Furthermore, respondents' express importance in finding friends on TikTok with whom they can connect and engage based on shared interests (M = 4.47, SD = 0.828).

**Table 5 TikTok usage of Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu**

<b>TikTok Usage of Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu</b>	<b>M (<math>\mu</math>)</b>	<b>SD (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>
<b>Information sharing</b>		
I often share information with my followers on TikTok	4.40	0.932
TikTok is my main platform for sharing information with others	4.42	0.884
<b>Information seeking</b>		
I actively search for information on TikTok to learn more about specific topics or events	4.52	0.785

TikTok is one of my primary sources for finding reliable information on various subjects	4.43	0.868
Information about global and local trends are easily accessible on TikTok at any time	4.49	0.793
<b>Personal identity reinforcement</b>		
Tik Tok compels me to contribute and watch content because regarding of my culture	4.46	0.839
Tik Tok frequently obtains a lot of the same identities from my content (inbox, likes, comment, etc)	4.43	0.860

The TikTok usage patterns of Generation Z individuals in Kota Kinabalu are detailed in the provided data, focusing on several aspects. When it comes to Information Sharing, respondents demonstrate a strong inclination towards sharing information with their followers on TikTok (M=4.40, SD = 0.932). Moreover, TikTok serves as the primary platform for information dissemination among respondents (M=4.42, SD = 0.884). In terms of Information Seeking, there is a proactive approach towards seeking information on TikTok, as indicated by a high Mean score (M=4.52, SD = 0.785) for actively searching for information on specific topics or events. Additionally, TikTok serves as a significant source for accessing reliable information across various subjects, with (M=4.43, SD = 0.868). Respondents perceive TikTok as easily accessible for obtaining information about global and local trends, with a mean score (M=4.49, SD = 0.793). Lastly, concerning personal identity reinforcement usage, TikTok is viewed as an engaging platform that compels users to contribute and consume content due to its customisation factor. (M=4.46, SD = 0.839). Furthermore, respondents often receive positive feedback, such as likes, comments, and messages, contributing to the platform's identities aspect, with a mean score of (M=4.43, SD = 0.860).

**Table 6 Tik Tok gratification of Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu**

<b>Tik Tok gratification of Gen Z in Kota Kinabalu</b>	<b>M (μ)</b>	<b>SD (σ)</b>
<b>Entertainment</b>		
I engage in conversations with TikTok users about interesting things	4.42	0.855

TikTok helps me stay updated and informed related to exciting things <b>Convenience</b>	4.42	0.858
I find it quick and convenient to access information on TikTok	4.47	0.785
It is simple for me to share information, photo, and video on TikTok	4.49	0.777
Information about global and local trends are easily accessible on TikTok at any time <b>Social connection</b>	4.48	0.793
I connect people from TikTok content, both locally and globally.	4.43	0.864
TikTok will deliver appropriate information and people based on my passions, culture, life, and profession.	4.49	0.764

The gratification derived from TikTok among Generation Z in Kota Kinabalu is outlined in the provided data, highlighting various aspects: Firstly, Entertainment, I engage in conversations with TikTok users about interesting things ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 0.855$ ). TikTok helps me stay updated and informed about exciting things ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 0.858$ ). In terms of Convenience. I find it quick and convenient to access information on TikTok ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 0.785$ ). It is simple for me to share information, photos, and videos on TikTok ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 0.777$ ). Information about global and local trends are easily accessible on TikTok at any time ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 0.793$ ). Social Connection, I connect people about new knowledge from TikTok content, both locally and globally ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 0.864$ ). TikTok delivers appropriate information and people based on my passions, life, and profession ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 0.764$ ).

## CONCLUSION

The demographic study revealed interesting patterns among Generation Z users in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. The respondents were mostly young individuals, mostly 19 years old, indicating that young people are strongly on TikTok. This is in line with global trends of a younger demographic on social media platforms, especially those focused on short video content. Ethnic diversity was evident among respondents, reflecting the cultural diversity of Malaysian society. However, it is worth mentioning that Malay respondents were the most numerous, indicating possible cultural variations in TikTok usage influenced by ethnicity. The distribution of males and

females was almost equal, and a slight majority of female respondents. This gender balance shows that the appeal of TikTok transcends gender boundaries, making it an open platform. The findings shed light on the duration of TikTok usage among respondents, with a large proportion engaging with the platform for 2 to 3 hours per day. This establishes how engaging the platform is in its ability to attract long-term users. Encountering personal or related issues was a common experience among respondents, with most reporting frequent encounters. This highlights TikTok's algorithmic prowess in providing tailored content that matches users' interests and preferences.

Moreover, the study identified the needs and satisfactions of TikTok users among Generation Z in Kota Kinabalu. Psychological needs such as staying informed about trending topics were evident, reflecting users' desire for information and knowledge. Respondents valued emotional needs, including feelings of connection and entertainment, pointing to the role of TikTok in meeting emotional needs and creating a sense of belonging. Needs for escape proved necessary, and TikTok served as a source of relaxation and entertainment to cope with daily stress. This means that TikTok provides an escape route among its users. Social inclusion needs were evident, and respondents enjoyed discussing TikTok content with friends and family. Additionally, the platform facilitated communication based on shared interests, fostered social interaction, and built community. The findings provide valuable insights into the motivations and behaviours of Generation Z users on TikTok in Kota Kinabalu. Understanding these developments can inform manufacturers, marketers, and policymakers on more effective ways to engage with this demographic on the platform.

Given the important role the platform plays in information sharing and social networking, TikTok has the potential to support educational community building purposes. Content developers and educators can tailor content to user needs and preferences, enhancing both enjoyment and learning experiences. Policymakers should also consider the impact of TikTok's influence on youth culture and digital behaviour. Projects aimed at promoting digital literacy and responsible online interactions can empower users to engage social media more effectively and critically evaluate content. Future research could examine the longitudinal trends in TikTok use among Generation Z and the influence of culture and context on user behaviour. Moreover, conducting comparative research across diverse regions and demographics can offer deeper insights into the widespread appeal and usage patterns of TikTok. It's essential to investigate TikTok's impact on mental well-being and its potential educational advantages. Understanding how TikTok influences users' emotions and learning experiences can inform strategies for fostering positive engagement on the platform. In conclusion, while our study provides valuable insights into Generation Z TikTok users in Kota Kinabalu, there remains significant room for further exploration of social media dynamics in the digital era. By addressing these challenges and exploring new research avenues, we can enhance our understanding of TikTok's influence on contemporary culture and society.

## **ETHICS STATEMENTS**

This study has been conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. All the data have run through intercoder reliability tests and Cronbach alpha tests. 313 participants involved in this study provided informed consent prior to their participation. They were informed about the nature of the study, its objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion. Confidentiality of participant information has been strictly maintained throughout the study process.

## **AUTHOR STATEMENTS**

All authors contributed equally.

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## **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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