

Relationships between motivations for TikTok use and mental well-being: The mediating role of perceived online emotional support

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Abstract: This study examined the associations between motivations for TikTok use and users' mental well-being as well as the role of perceived online emotional support as a mediator. Although previous studies have examined the relationships between motivations for social media use and users' mental well-being, findings remain inconclusive. Therefore, this study further sheds light on the factors driving TikTok adoption and how they impact users' perceived online emotional support and mental well-being within a small developing island such as Mauritius, where TikTok's popularity has surged. Data were collected through a survey of 235 young adults (aged 18–35) via both online and face-to-face methods. Descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, multiple linear regression, and mediation analysis (Hayes PROCESS macro) were employed. Results showed that social interaction, self-expression and information-seeking were significant predictors of online emotional support. Only information-seeking motive and age predicted mental well-being of TikTok users, which was explained through the mediator role of perceived online emotional support. The findings provide implications for mental-health professionals to render social media users mindful about the proper use of TikTok. While TikTok has recently been perceived as an emerging information hub, mental health professionals should be encouraged to create valuable informational content that can satisfy users' cognitive needs and foster perceived online emotional support, thereby improving one's mental well-being.

Keywords: TikTok motivations; uses and gratifications theory; mental well-being; perceived online emotional support; young adults; Mauritius

1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of technology, the use of social media has become an integral part of modern societies, influencing interactions among individuals and groups of people globally. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok have led to a surge in the number of users worldwide irrespective of age. Data shows that there are an estimated 5.04 billion social media users worldwide (Statista, 2024).

Over the past few decades, substantial research has explored the impact of social media on mental health outcomes, yielding mixed and often contentious findings (Cunningham et al., 2021; Faelens et al., 2021; Hancock et al., 2019). Recent studies have emphasized the influence of social media, highlighting both its potential risks and benefits to psychological well-being (Lin et al., 2023; Masciantonio et al., 2021; Verduyn et al., 2017). While extensive attention has been devoted to the dark side of social media, documenting negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety,

depression, and social comparison (Baccarella et al., 2018; Primack et al., 2021; Salo et al., 2019), there is a growing interest in understanding its bright side (Clark et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2023; Kross et al., 2021). Research within this emerging stream has begun to elucidate how active and intentional social media use fosters well-being by promoting perceived online social support and social connectedness (Clark et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023). Specifically, social media provides an alternative channel for meaningful online social interactions, facilitating exchanges of emotional support by enabling users to voice fears, express emotions, and provide psychological reassurance within online communities (Marzouki et al., 2021; Yan and Pedraza-Martinez, 2019).

Evidence further suggests that online emotional support, a functional dimension of online social support, acts as a critical buffer against negative mental health outcomes (Hu et al., 2022; Van der Velden et al., 2020). However, despite its alluring potential, empirical evidence on how perceived online emotional support influences users' mental well-being remains scant (Hu et al., 2022). Furthermore, while the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides a robust framework for understanding motivations behind social media use, relatively few studies have extended this perspective to examine how these motivations affect users' well-being (Baek et al., 2014; Gao et al., 2023; Jarman et al., 2021) and online emotional support.

Among the plethora of social media platforms, TikTok has emerged as a dominant player, particularly among younger demographics, due to its engaging blend of short-form content and participatory culture (Su et al., 2020; Montag et al., 2021). TikTok's community-driven algorithms and interactive features, such as duets and challenges, provide users with unique opportunities for social interaction, emotional expression, and community-building (Yue et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023). However, despite TikTok's growing popularity and influence, empirical research specifically examining its role in fostering perceived online emotional support and enhancing mental well-being remains sparse. Most existing studies focus on other platforms, yielding somewhat inconsistent findings, and fail to address TikTok's distinctive affordances and their potential impact.

In Mauritius, TikTok has gained significant traction among young adults, making it a timely and relevant context for exploring how this platform supports emotional well-being. By investigating TikTok's ability to facilitate perceived emotional support through its participatory features, this study seeks to address critical gaps in the literature. Such an investigation could offer valuable insights into leveraging emerging social media platforms like TikTok to promote emotional well-being in an increasingly digitalized world.

2. Literature review

2.1. Uses and gratification theory of social media

One of the most widely adopted theoretical frameworks for understanding social media motivations is the Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory. It was primarily developed by Katz et al. (1973) to assess users' motivations for using social media that lead to gratification of needs and desires. According to Katz et al. (1973), U&G rests on

the premise that people use social media in distinct ways to satisfy their psychological and social needs and wants. The researchers emphasized five main needs encompassing personal integrative needs (enhance credibility, status), affective needs (emotion, pleasure, feelings), cognitive needs (obtain information, knowledge), tension release needs (escape & diversion) and social integrative needs (interact with family & friends). Nevertheless, due to the highly interactive nature of social media, recent research identified a myriad of motivations, including information seeking, communication, social interaction, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, convenience, surveillance or knowledge about others, archiving, self-expression, escapism, peeking and self-status seeking (Alhabash and Ma, 2017; Khan, 2017; Lee et al., 2015; Omar and Dequan, 2020).

Prior studies adopting the UGT emphasized that the motivations would vary across social media platforms depending on the gratifications sought and obtained from them (Alhabash and Ma, 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020). Park et al. (2009) found consistent motive themes for Facebook use, namely socialization, entertainment, seeking self-status, and information, while Sheldon and Bryant (2016) identified other novel motives for Instagram usage encompassing surveillance, documentation, coolness and creativity. However, some media platforms share common motivations for use with each other. For instance, “Entertainment” was found to be a salient motive for several social media use including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat (Alhabash and Ma, 2017). Manasijević et al. (2016) found overlapping motives for Snapchat and Facebook, for instance, staying in contact with close and distant friends, informational and educational needs, time-pass and promoting self. Building on these findings, Krasnova et al. (2017) postulated that the dimensions of general social media use can broadly be categorized into four main distinct groups, namely: informational, entertainment, relational and self-expression.

2.2. Uses and gratification dimensions of TikTok use

Recently, researchers across different cultures around the world have studied TikTok social media through the lens of Uses and Gratification theory (Montag et al., 2021). Findings reveal that TikTok users predominantly use TikTok for entertainment, escapism, relaxation, information seeking, social interaction, and self-expression (Bossen and Kottasz, 2020; Chao et al., 2023; von Fedak and Langlais, 2024; Omar and Dequan, 2020; Ramsden and Talbot, 2024; Shao and Lee, 2020). According to von Fedak and Langlais (2024), entertainment and stress relief were most salient among teens and young adults, while information-seeking and social interaction motives were reported mostly by the older student population.

Moreover, Bossen and Kottasz (2020) elucidated that the drive behind passive consumption, contributory and participatory behaviors on TikTok is mainly due to fulfillment of entertainment and affect. The researchers posited that passive consumption was central among pre-adolescents and adolescents and that contributory behaviors were motivated by needs to widen one’s social network, seeking fame, expressing oneself innovatively and creating one’s identity. Additionally, the qualitative study conducted by Falgoust et al. (2022) revealed six main emerging

categories of TikTok motivations namely entertainment, convenience and utility for widespread communication, interpersonal communication, social support, seeking and sharing information, and escapism. However, these motivations play a crucial role in determining whether TikTok contributes positively or negatively to psychological outcomes. For instance, entertainment and social motives have often led to positive experiences, while escapism has been linked with problematic usage patterns. Therefore, each motive is distinct and can influence mental well-being in different ways.

2.3. Social media use, online social support and mental well-being

A substantial body of research has investigated the psychological outcomes of social media use, yet there is still a lack of consensus across the empirical findings. As such, recent studies advanced a bright-dark duality of social media use on psychological outcomes through different mediators explaining the underlying positive and negative association (Lin et al., 2023; Masciantonio et al., 2021; Verduyn et al., 2017). Several studies also differentiated between well-being impact of active and passive use of social media, hypothesizing that the former has a positive impact and the latter has rather a negative influence on mental well-being (Dienlin and Johannes, 2020; Verduyn et al., 2017; Valkenburg et al., 2022; Zhang, 2017).

Additionally, some researchers highlighted that well-being impact of social media use should be assessed through its motivations based on the U&G theory as each motivation may differently influence users' well-being (Guo et al., 2014; Wen et al., 2016). Nevertheless, past studies have mostly focused on the following three motivations, namely social interaction, information seeking and entertainment. Social interaction and information-seeking motives, often regarded as active social media use, were found to increase users' well-being, while social media lurkers using it for entertainment purposes did not report such findings (Wang et al., 2014; Guo et al., 2014; Baek et al., 2014). Conversely, Jarman et al. (2021) did not observe a significant association between social interaction motives and well-being. However, they reported that other, more passive forms of social media use, including information sharing, passing time, and escapism, were negatively correlated with well-being. It is also crucial to differentiate between motivations, as information seeking and information sharing purposes are distinct from each other, and so their influence on well-being.

Nevertheless, with the rapid proliferation of new media technologies, obtaining emotional support from the virtual world is possible as social media users can socially connect with people worldwide. Rosen et al. (2022) postulate that social media can act as an emotional tool for seeking and maintaining social support during crisis times. Social media sites, being an excellent communication channel, can foster meaningful social interactions, thus facilitating the exchange of online emotional support by voicing fears, expressing feelings and emotions, and supporting each other (Marzouki et al., 2021; Shensa et al., 2020). This can have a buffering effect on overall mental health, notably reducing anxiety and affective disorders. Interestingly, few studies reported that social media motives, including mutual information sharing and meaningful social interaction, were found to reinforce perceived social support (Wohn et al., 2016; Yue

et al., 2023).

TikTok, being the fastest-growing social media platform has recently garnered scholarly attention, mostly grounded on the U&G framework. Despite this, empirical research on TikTok's unique affordances, its role in online social support, and implications for psychological well-being remains limited. The association between TikTok use and well-being is often seen as complex and inconclusive due to its dual-edged nature. Ramsden and Talbot (2024) found that TikTok can be both a coping mechanism and a psychological burden among university students. On the positive side, adaptive escapism (short breaks from studies) provided students with temporary relief from stress, anxiety, and negative moods. It was stressed that when adaptive escapism was used as a healthy coping strategy to temporarily manage one's mood, it enhanced short-term well-being (REF). On the contrary, its dark side revealed that students were using it for negative escapism as coping was likely to indulge in addictive behaviours, that is, using the platform for procrastination, escaping from real-life adversities and responsibilities (REF). This had an adverse impact on well-being by increasing stress in the long run. Also, those using it for prolonged escapist scrolling were more at risk for upward social comparison and reduced well-being when they viewed content from successful and happier peers, thereby decreasing their self-esteem level and exacerbating feelings of inferiority (REF). Further evidence substantiates the finding that when users are motivated by escapism or avoidance, they experience heightened anxiety, depression, and stress (Chao et al., 2023; Virós-Martín et al., 2024). On the other hand, Turuba et al. (2024) found that TikTok facilitates mental health information sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work underscored that TikTok serves as an important informal platform for mental health education, emotional support, and peer connection among youth and young adults (ages 12–24). During the lockdown period when traditional support services were restricted, TikTok users could readily access mental health information and necessary tools. TikTok also enhanced peer connection and normalization of help-seeking conversations on mental health topics through relatable and user-generated content. Young people while engaging with such content, felt seen, understood, less alone and more comfortable discussing stigmatized topics (#mental health issues). Besides, exposure to mental health content catalyzed actions, for instance, adopting new coping techniques, talking about mental health with family and peers and even trying to seek professional help.

Based on the bright side of TikTok use and the positive findings emanating from the broad literature, it is hypothesized that:

- H1.** *Motivations for TikTok use positively and significantly predict mental well-being.*
- H2.** *Motivations for TikTok use positively and significantly predict online emotional support.*
- H3.** *Online emotional support positively and significantly influences mental well-being.*

2.4. Mediating role of online social support between social media use and mental well-being

Past studies have investigated social media use through the lens of UGT motivations and examined its link with well-being (Baek et al., 2014; Gao et al., 2023; Jarman et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2014). Interestingly, some scholars explained the underlying positive effect mechanism of the association between social media use and well-being through the mediator of perceived online social support (Gao et al., 2023; Nabi et al., 2013; Masciantonio et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2017). This empirical evidence has essentially highlighted the protective influence of online social support against poor mental health outcomes. Similarly, online emotional support can play a significant role in the association between motivations for social media use and mental well-being of users. However, reviews of the broad literature reveal limited empirical evidence on the influence of perceived online emotional support from social media use on mental health outcomes (Shensa et al., 2020).

According to Longest and Kang (2022), online emotional support had no association with depressive symptoms among young adults during the lockdown period and they posited that it couldn't replace the long-term benefits of offline emotional support on mental wellness. Further, Shensa et al. (2020) found that online emotional support slightly increased the likelihood of depression, whereas Face-to-face (FTF) emotional support decreased the odds of depression. One reason for this could be that online emotional support is sometimes superficial and short-lived compared to FTF emotional support. For instance, users seeking online support may receive only surface-level responses (likes, emojis, brief comments) which may not be sufficient enough to meet their needs for genuine empathy and connection, potentially exacerbating feelings of loneliness or depression. These findings reflect previous literature stressing the distinction between general FTF and online social support and the former's stronger protective role in enhancing mental health (McCloskey et al., 2015; Teo et al., 2019). Conversely, prior studies argued that both real-life and online emotional support were efficient in lowering depressive symptoms and were associated with improved life satisfaction (Indian and Grieve, 2014; Nick et al., 2018). Recently, Masciantonio et al. (2021) extended the existing conceptual model of Verduyn et al. (2017) by examining the well-being impact of different social networking sites through the mediators of online social support and upward social comparison and found that online social support mediated the positive relation between active Instagram and Twitter use and well-being-related variables. He further concluded that each SNS must be investigated as a single entity due to its unique motivations and affordances and so will their mental health impact be different. Drawing from the positive effect of social media use on mental health and the mediating role of online social support, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. *Online emotional support mediates the relationship between motivations for TikTok use and mental well-being.*

2.5. Theoretical model of the study

Drawing upon the Uses and Gratification perspective of social media use (Katz et al., 1973) and prior literature, this study proposes a framework to investigate how dimensions of TikTok use in terms of users' motivations and online emotional support impact users' mental well-being. Given that several studies have explained the significant positive relationship between social media use and positive mental health outcomes via the buffering psychological effect of online perceived social support (Masciantonio et al., 2021; Verduyn et al., 2017; Yue et al., 2023), it is assumed that TikTok motives will lead to better mental well-being through online emotional support. **Figure 1** shows the current study's conceptual model.

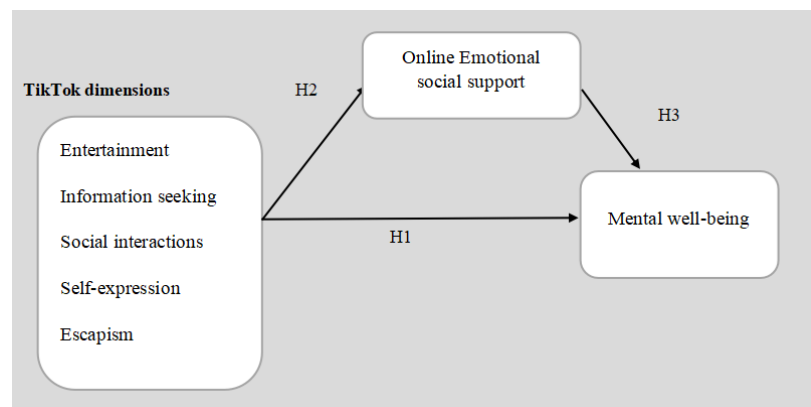


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model of study.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Scales

A self-reported questionnaire was designed using existing validated measurement scales to assess the constructs under study. Adaptations of the scales to the context of the TikTok platform were made. The instance age, gender, relationship status and employment status, (2) motivations for using TikTok, (3) online emotional social support and (4) mental well-being. All the scales demonstrated high internal consistency as shown in the following tables.

3.1.1. Motivations for using TikTok

The questionnaire assessed five key recurring motivations for TikTok use, adopted from prior TikTok research (Bossen and Kottasz, 2020; Omar and Dequan, 2020; Meng and Leung, 2021; Scherr and Wang, 2021; Falgoust et al., 2022): entertainment, social interaction, information seeking, self-expression, and escapism. Participants had to rate the statements of each measured dimension on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Entertainment was assessed using a 5-item scale adapted from Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011). The original scale was devised to assess Facebook use, therefore, the wording of the statements was rephrased from “I use Facebook because ...” to “I use TikTok because ...”. The measures for social interaction and information seeking were adapted from Khan (2017) comprising of four items in each subscale. Self-expression was measured using a five-item scale adapted from Lee et al. (2015), originally designed for Instagram. The “self-expression” scale

of Instagram was deemed applicable to TikTok context as the latter is perceived to share more functional similarities with Instagram compared to other social media applications in terms of allowing access to short-form visual content (Instagram: reels, photos), commenting, likes, messaging (Omar and Dequan, 2020). Similar to previous studies adapting the scale for TikTok context, a high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.85 was obtained indicating high internal reliability (Deng et al., 2023; Omar and Dequan, 2020). Lastly, escapism was assessed using the subscale of escapist addiction devised by Scherr and Wang (2021) to assess TikTok use. One item from the escapism subscale by Lee et al. (2015) was merged into the list of items by Scherr and Wang (2021) forming a final list of 6 items measuring this dimension. An average score was calculated for each dimension to indicate their corresponding value.

3.1.2. Online emotional support

Online emotional support was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Nick et al. (2018). To contextualize the scale for TikTok users, the word "online" was replaced with "TikTok" in the original items. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = A Lot), with higher mean scores indicating greater perceived online emotional support.

3.1.3. Mental well-being

Mental well-being was assessed using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) developed by Tennant et al. (2007). This 14-item instrument comprises positively worded statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = None of the Time to 5 = All of the Time). Higher mean scores indicate better mental well-being.

3.2. Research participants and data collection procedure

A purposive sampling technique was used targeting young Mauritian adults aged between 18 and 35 years old who were either active or passive TikTok users. Participants who were below 18 years old, non-Mauritians, and non-TikTok users were excluded from the study. Data were collected from May to June 2023 through an online questionnaire designed using Google Forms. The survey link was distributed across various social media platforms targeting TikTok users in Mauritius. Respondents were invited to fill in the questions and share them with their networks, including family, online, and offline friends who were TikTok users. The online management of the questionnaire was deemed suitable for this study as the target population comprises mainly generations Y and Z, recognized as digital natives (Magno, 2017). A total of 300 participants were targeted to participate in both an online and a face-to-face survey. Out of these, only 235 completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 78%. Of the 235 participants, 135 responded via online survey and 100 via the offline questionnaire, yielding an online-to-offline ratio of 1.4. The final sample consisted of 133 (56.6%) women and 102 (43.4%) men. A detailed demographic profiling of the participants is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage distribution of sample characteristics (n = 235).

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	102	43.4
Female	133	56.6
Marital Status		
Single	195	83
Married	38	16.2
Divorce	2	0.9
Professional Status		
Student	109	46.4
Employed	103	43.8
Unemployed	11	4.7
Self-employed	12	5.1
Type of user		
Active user	86	36.6
Passive user	148	63
Frequency of use		
Daily	169	71.9
Weekly	23	9.8
Every 2 weeks	10	4.3
Monthly	33	14
Time spent		
Less than 30 min	78	33.2
30 min to 1 h	63	26.8
1–2 h	47	20
2–3 h	29	12.3
More than 3 h	18	7.7

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics v23.0. Prior to analysis, the dataset was checked for missing values and outliers using boxplots. Normality of the data was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, as well as visual inspection of histograms, normal Q-Q plots, and boxplots. Skewness values ranged from -0.80 to 1.37 , and kurtosis values ranged from -0.32 to 1.84 , indicating acceptable levels of normality (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2022). All the skewness and kurtosis values fall within the ± 2 range; thus, it can be concluded that there is no substantial departure from normality (Hair et al., 2022), and can be used for further analysis.

Descriptive statistics were performed to examine participants' demographic characteristics. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to examine the factor structure of the TikTok motivation subscales. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive strength of motivations for TikTok use and online emotional support on mental well-being while controlling for demographic variables. Assumptions of linearity, multicollinearity, and independence of residuals were tested to ensure the validity of regression models. Mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) to explore the mediating effects of online emotional support on the relationship between TikTok motivations and mental well-being.

4. Results and analysis

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows that there were 133 women (56.6%) and 102 men (43.4%) in the study sample. Regarding marital status, 195 were unmarried (83%), 38 were married (16.2%) and only 2 participants (0.9%) were reported to be divorced. Students and working people were predominant in the study sample followed by almost the same number of unemployed ($n = 11$) and self-employed ($n = 12$) individuals. The majority of respondents use TikTok on a daily basis ($n = 169$, 71.9%) with females being higher in number ($n = 104$) compared to male users ($n = 65$) followed by on a monthly basis ($n = 33$, 14.0%) where males ($n = 20$) reported more monthly usage compared to females ($n = 13$). As for duration of use, it was estimated that 33.2% of the participants use TikTok for less than 30 min, while 26.8% use it for 30 min to 1 h per day. Only 7.7% of TikTok viewers spend more than 3 h on the platform with slightly more females than males. The mean time spent on TikTok was found to be between 30 min and 1 h.

4.2. Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) based on principal component analysis with varimax rotation was carried out on the 18 items measuring TikTok motives to determine the factor structure of the measure used in this study.

A strong Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.883 was obtained which is greater than 0.50, suggesting that the sampling was adequate enough for factor analysis (Khan and Jan, 2019). A high KMO value of 0.88 also suggests a good factor structure. Bartlett's test of sphericity was strongly significant ($\chi^2 = 3203.86$, $df = 276$, $p \leq 0.01$) which demonstrated enough intercorrelations between the five dimensions of TikTok use.

Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation method extracted five components with eigenvalues > 1 which were 7.55, 4.22, 1.74, 1.39 and 1.30 accounting for 15.45%, 14.61%, 14.07%, 12.05% and 11.31% of variance respectively. The EFA output revealed a five-factor structure that accounted for 67.50% of cumulative variance. All the 18 items had a factor loading of above 0.60 which satisfied the minimum threshold criteria of 0.50 considered ideal for accepting the items (Truong and McColl, 2011). Therefore, the 18-item self-reported instrument proved to be a valid measurement tool for assessing TikTok use.

Reliability analysis

The internal consistencies of the study constructs encompassing TikTok motivations (entertainment, escapism, self-expression, information seeking and social interaction), online emotional support and mental well-being were assessed using reliability analysis in SPSS. **Table 2** illustrates that all measures had strong Cronbach's α ranging from 0.89 to 0.95 which are above the expected threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006). The results show good reliability of all the measures used in this study.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, factor loadings and Cronbach’s alpha values of key study variables.

Variables	M	SD	Loading	Eigenvalue	Alpha (α)
Factor 1: Entertainment	3.50	0.89		7.55	0.89
I use TikTok because it is enjoyable.	3.75	1.03	0.692		
I use TikTok to be entertained.	3.86	1.01	0.713		
I use TikTok because it relaxes me.	3.32	1.08	0.807		
I use TikTok because it allows me to unwind.	3.30	1.08	0.785		
I use TikTok because it is a pleasant rest.	3.29	1.11	0.829		
Factor 2: Escapism	3.02	1.01		4.22	0.85
I use TikTok to get a break from what I am doing	3.39	1.26	0.671		
I use TikTok when I don’t want to work or study.	3.12	1.39	0.790		
I use TikTok to forget unpleasant things from work, school, or life.	3.19	1.34	0.728		
I use TikTok because I can’t stop using it	2.51	1.36	0.606		
I use TikTok as it gives me something to do to occupy my time.	3.24	1.24	0.718		
I use TikTok to avoid loneliness	2.71	1.42	0.707		
Factor 3: Self-expression	1.80	0.88		1.74	0.85
I use TikTok to provide my updates.	2.37	1.32	0.710		
I use TikTok to be noticed by others.	1.79	1.15	0.759		
I use TikTok to express my actual self (Who I really am).	1.86	1.13	0.742		
I use TikTok to share my personal information with others.	1.54	1.01	0.808		
I use TikTok to show off.	1.45	0.94	0.793		
Factor 4: Information seeking	3.68	0.95		1.39	0.85
I use TikTok to get information about things that interest me.	3.76	1.15	0.763		
I use TikTok to learn how to do things.	3.64	1.13	0.799		
I use TikTok to find out what is new out there.	3.80	1.12	0.774		
I use TikTok to keep up with current issues and events.	3.51	1.16	0.628		
Factor 5: Social interaction	2.14	0.94		1.30	0.84
I use TikTok to stay in touch with other users.	2.14	1.05	0.783		
I use TikTok to meet interesting people.	1.99	1.15	0.785		
I use TikTok to feel like I belong to a community.	2.00	1.16	0.726		
I use TikTok to connect with people who share some of my values.	2.43	1.22	0.737		
Online emotional support	1.74	1.91			0.94
Mental well-being	2.85	0.97			0.95

4.3. Regression analyses

4.3.1. Evaluation of assumptions for regression analyses

Results showed a linear relationship between all the predictor variables and the outcome variables for both multiple and hierarchical regression analyses; thus, the assumption of linearity was met. The presence of multicollinearity was evaluated based on the VIF and tolerance values as shown in **Tables 3** and **4** which were all well above 0.10 and below 5.0, respectively, showing that multicollinearity was not an issue for any variables explored in this study (Steven, 2001). Lastly, the Durbin-Watson test was used to examine the independence of residuals and presence of autocorrelation. Durbin-Watson test scores for multiple and hierarchical regression analyses were 1.98 and 2.12, respectively, and a mean residual of zero met the assumption for independence of residuals and no autocorrelation as the values lay within the acceptable threshold

value.

Table 3. Results of multiple regression analysis for predictors of online emotional support.

Predictor variable	β	SE	t	Tolerance	VIF
Entertainment	-0.030	0.073	-0.411	0.559	1.790
Social interaction	0.291***	0.064	4.389	0.660	1.515
Information seeking	0.120*	0.067	1.724	0.596	1.678
Self-expression	0.284***	0.066	4.418	0.699	1.432
Escapism	0.104	0.062	1.506	0.609	1.642
$R^2 = 0.337$					
$\Delta F = 23.268***$					

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table 4. Summary of the hierarchical regression analysis for predictors of mental well-being.

Variables	SE	β	t	Model			Collinearity statistics	
				R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	Tolerance	VIF
Block 1				0.046	0.046	2.757**		
Gender	0.126	-0.043	-0.66				0.984	1.016
Age	0.015	-0.258***	-2.965				0.549	1.821
Marital status	0.192	0.117	1.452				0.637	1.571
Employment status	0.089	-0.009	-0.119				0.792	1.262
Block 2				0.067	0.022	1.761		
Gender	0.128	-0.03	-0.457				0.942	1.062
Age	0.016	-0.201**	-2.229				0.507	1.972
Marital status	0.192	0.099	1.228				0.628	1.591
Employment status	0.089	-0.014	-0.191				0.779	1.283
Frequency of use	0.067	0.014	1.192				0.724	1.382
Time spent	0.059	0.114	1.482				0.695	1.438
Type of user	0.147	-0.077	-1.041				0.758	1.319
Block 3				0.137	0.07	3.582***		
Gender	0.129	-0.063	-0.956				0.888	1.126
Age	0.016	-0.153*	-1.705				0.483	2.07
Marital status	0.191	0.091	1.135				0.601	1.663
Employment status	0.087	-0.039	-0.542				0.763	1.311
Frequency of use	0.067	0.045	0.594				0.679	1.472
Time spent	0.063	0.077	0.943				0.576	1.736
Type of user	0.15	-0.007	-0.098				0.696	1.438
Entertainment	0.099	0.082	0.896				0.465	2.152
Social interaction	0.081	0.11	1.394				0.629	1.591
Information seeking	0.085	0.168**	2.015				0.558	1.792
Self-expression	0.084	0.087	1.14				0.663	1.509
Escapism	0.079	-0.049	-0.588				0.571	1.752
Block 4				0.148	0.011	2.820*		
Gender	0.128	-0.0059	-0.893				0.886	1.128
Age	0.016	-0.139	-1.545				0.479	2.088
Marital status	0.191	0.087	1.089				0.601	1.665
Employment status	0.087	-0.04	-0.56				0.763	1.311
Frequency of use	0.067	0.04	0.537				0.679	1.474
Time spent	0.063	0.075	0.918				0.576	1.736
Type of user	0.151	0.011	0.14				0.682	1.467
Entertainment	0.099	0.088	0.966				0.464	2.155

Table 4. *Cont.*

Variables	SE	β	<i>t</i>	Model			Collinearity statistics	
				R ²	Δ R ²	Δ F	Tolerance	VIF
Social interaction	0.083	0.075	0.923				0.587	1.703
Information seeking	0.085	0.153*	1.829				0.551	1.814
Self-expression	0.086	0.054	0.681				0.62	1.613
Escapism	0.079	-0.059	-0.713				0.568	1.761
Online emotional support	0.083	0.131*	1.679				0.633	1.579

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

4.3.2. Influence of TikTok on online emotional support

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to demonstrate the influence of motivations to use TikTok on online emotional support. Findings revealed a statistically significant model where TikTok motivations accounted for 33.7% of change in online emotional support ($F [5, 229] = 23.26, p < 0.001$), $R^2 = 0.34$. As shown in **Table 3**, social interaction, self-expression and information seeking were positive and significant predictors of online emotional support. Among these, social interaction demonstrated the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.291, p < 0.001$), followed by self-expression ($\beta = 0.284, p < 0.001$). Information seeking was statistically significant at $\beta = 0.120, p < 0.10$, which is generally regarded as marginal and less robust compared with the other predictors. Entertainment and escapism motives did not contribute significantly to the model. Accordingly, H2 was only partially supported.

4.3.3. Influence of TikTok, online emotional support on mental well-being

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to assess the relative strength of the five TikTok motivations and online emotional support in predicting mental well-being while controlling for all other variables. Four hierarchical models were tested.

Model 1 included demographic variables and explained 4.6% of the variance in mental well-being ($\Delta R^2 = 0.046, F [4, 230] = 2.76, p < 0.05$). Age was the only significant predictor ($\beta = -0.26, p < 0.01$), suggesting that mental well-being decreased with increasing age.

Model 2 added TikTok usage characteristics (frequency, time spent, and type of user), increasing the explained variance to 6.7% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.022, F [7, 227] = 2.35, p < 0.05, R^2 = 0.067$). Age ($\beta = -0.20, p < 0.05$) remained significant.

Model 3 introduced TikTok motivations, further improving the model ($F [12, 222] = 2.94, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.137$). Motivations accounted for an additional 7.0% of the variance, with information seeking emerging as a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.05$), exceeding the predictive strength of age ($\beta = -0.15, p < 0.10$). H1 was partially supported due to information seeking being significant in predicting well-being.

Model 4 incorporated online emotional support, yielding a statistically significant model ($F [13, 221] = 2.95, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.148$). Online emotional support significantly predicted mental well-being ($\beta = 0.13, p < 0.10$), thereby supporting H3. However, information seeking remained a stronger predictor ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.10$). These results suggested a potential mediation effect of online emotional support, which was subsequently tested.

4.4. Mediation analysis

Prior to mediation testing, the assumptions for mediation were verified. Findings from hierarchical and multiple regression analyses revealed that only information seeking motive predicted both online emotional support and mental well-being. Online emotional support also influenced mental well-being. Therefore, to test H4, Hayes’s (2013) regression PROCESS macro version 4.2 was employed. The statistical significance of indirect effects was determined using *p*-values less than 0.05 and 95% bootstrap confidence intervals, excluding zero indicating significance. In the current study, only the information-seeking motive was entered as the independent variable (X), mental well-being as the dependent variable (Y) and online emotional support as the mediator variable (M) while controlling for age in the analysis.

Results from the mediation analysis showed a statistically significant direct effect of X on Y ($\beta = 0.1992, p < 0.01, CI = 0.0697$ to 0.3287). Results also revealed significant indirect effects of X on Y at 95% bootstrap confidence interval which did not include zero ($\beta = 0.0628, BootLLCI = 0.0249$ to $BootULCI = 0.1092$). **Table 5** shows the individual indirect pathways encompassing the indirect effect of X on M ($\beta = 0.2722, p < 0.001, CI = 0.154$ to 0.390) and in turn M on Y ($\beta = 0.2306, p = 0.001, CI = 0.0948$ to 0.3664). Statistical significance was evaluated based on acceptable *p*-values and confidence intervals excluding zero. The total effect of X on Y was $0.2620 (p < 0.001, CI = 0.1351$ to $0.3888)$. Therefore, online emotional support partially mediated the relationship between information seeking motive and mental well-being hence partially supporting H4 of this study. **Figure 2** illustrates the mediation model with standardized path coefficients.

Table 5. Direct and Indirect effects.

Relationships	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
				LLCI	ULCI
Total effect	0.2620	4.0690	0.0001	0.1351	0.3888
Direct effect					
Information seeking → Mental well-being	0.1992	3.0296	0.0027	0.0697	0.3287
Indirect effects					
Information seeking → online emotional support	0.2722	4.5436	0.0000	0.1542	0.3903
Online emotional support → Mental well-being	0.2306	3.3468	0.0010	0.00948	0.3664

Note: *** $p \leq 0.001, **p \leq 0.01$.

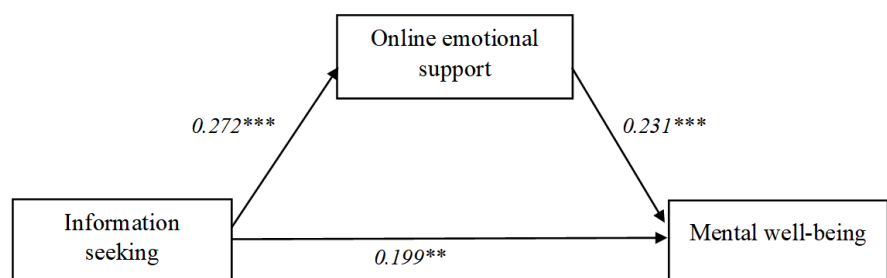


Figure 2. Conceptual mediation model of the impact of information-seeking motive on mental well-being.

Note: *** $p \leq 0.001, **p \leq 0.01$.

5. Discussion

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of UGT and models proposed by Verduyn et al. (2017), this study examined the impact of TikTok motives on mental well-being through online emotional support within the Mauritian context. The current study further broadens the social media field literature regarding the influence of TikTok motivations on mental well-being through enhanced perception of online emotional support, a construct which has been given less attention in the broader literature. The results revealed that social interaction, information-seeking, and self-expression were significant predictors of online emotional support (H2 partially supported). Therefore, the finding substantiates prior studies where both interpersonal utility and information-seeking motives were positively related to SNS usage time and online social support (Giota and Kleftras, 2014; Wen et al., 2016). Consistent with Jang et al. (2016), the results of this study indicate that online peer engagement fosters connectedness and enhances perceived online social support. The findings may suggest that media users perceive TikTok as an informative and communicative space (Shao and Lee, 2020; Bhandari and Bimo, 2022; Omar and Dequan, 2020), where they can socially connect with others and also access various relevant and meaningful information. More specifically, users can socially interact with other TikTok users through content creation and sharing. For instance, content creators while sharing their personal stories, trends or challenges, a means for self-expression, can improve community engagement and get encouraged through views, comments and direct messaging. As a result, this satisfies users' cognitive and social integrative needs, which in turn foster perceived online emotional support.

Lastly, self-expression, another salient TikTok motive (Bossen and Kottasz, 2020; Omar and Dequan, 2020), predicted online emotional social support in this study. This aligns with Barta and Andalibi (2021), who emphasized TikTok's culture of authenticity and "just be you" ethos, encouraging users to share both positive and difficult emotions, thereby eliciting supportive interactions. Based on previous studies, self-disclosure, a proxy of self-expression was positively and significantly associated with both bonding and bridging social capital (Chen and Li, 2017), both of which facilitate social support (Leung and Lee, 2005). Lu and Hampton (2017) posited that self-expression in the form of regular Facebook status updates promotes better emotional support compared to those who rarely provide such updates. Besides, self-disclosure on Facebook during times of stress led people to receive enacted online social support which in turn improved life satisfaction (Zhang, 2017). Conversely, Masciantonio et al. (2021) assessed multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok in relation to well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that both active and passive use of TikTok did not yield any significant association with well-being. One possible reason could be that adults at that time did not use TikTok primarily for social connection, therefore limiting its potential relationship with social support or well-being. Hence, this study further substantiates the literature on the association between motivations for TikTok use and perceived emotional support in the digitalized world. One possible explanation for the positive findings could be that

it was conducted during the post COVID-19 pandemic context where social media platforms like TikTok were somewhat free from stress and fear around the pandemic. Thus, users were better able to actively engage with TikTok for different motivations and gain gratification from fulfilment of their core needs thereby possibly inducing a sense of perceived online emotional support.

Besides, the current study revealed a significant and positive relationship between TikTok information seeking and mental well-being (H1 partially supported) while the other TikTok motives (e.g, social interaction, entertainment, self-expression and escapism) were not significant in predicting well-being. Indeed, some researchers found that when motivations were strongly associated with active use, a marked improvement in well-being was noted while with passive use, such as entertainment-focused use (e.g., browsing for fun or time-pass) no relationship was established with well-being (Guo et al., 2014; Jarman et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2014). Therefore, prior evidence pertaining to passive motivations, including entertainment and escapism motives, aligns with the findings of this study in the context of TikTok use. The finding is also consistent with Guo et al. (2014) who posited that informational motive of SNS was linked to increased positive well-being. Perhaps, information seeking motivation is regarded as one of the most constructive motivations as it has been observed to increase life satisfaction and promote good mental health outcomes (Guo et al., 2014; Verduyn et al., 2017; Wen et al., 2016; Shao and Lee, 2020). In contrast, Gao et al. (2023) found no direct relationship between information acquisition motive and subjective well-being as it may entail passive activities like browsing or lurking, which lack the social feedback (like comments or validation) required to enhance well-being. They argued that the information-seeking motive is likely to influence well-being indirectly through perceived social support and self-presentation behaviors. In other words, how users engage with the information through meaningful social feedback or self-expression is more important than merely seeking information. Furthermore, Baek et al. (2014) revealed that information-seeking motive had no significant effects on well-being. One explanation for this disparity is that Baek et al. (2014) defined “information-seeking” more as casual browsing for updates since Facebook at that time was mostly a social and entertainment-driven platform while Guo et al. (2014) defined information-seeking motive as news and purposeful knowledge acquisition including learning. Therefore, differences in definitions may explain the mixed findings in the literature. According to the self-determination theory, this kind of shallow information consumption does not satisfy the deeper competence and curiosity needs linked with well-being. Furthermore, past studies have stressed that when social and information motivations were positively correlated with active SNS use, they significantly improved well-being (Wang et al., 2014; Guo et al., 2014) and when they were related to passive usage behaviour, no association was found with well-being (Jarman et al., 2021).

As a result, due to platform differences, measurement variations, and user diversity, there is no consensus on whether (and how) social media use motivations predict well-being. The same motivation has been observed to affect well-being differently. For instance, info-seeking on TikTok, Weibo, and sometimes Instagram

is cognitively rewarding, but the same motivation on Facebook may be passive and trivial which may not enhance well-being. However, it is crucial to highlight that TikTok's information-seeking motive is distinct compared to that of Instagram as TikTok provides highly personalized For You Page (FYP) allowing users to search for short-form, practical, often algorithm-recommended knowledge (e.g., life hacks, mental health tips, current trends, "edutainment"). In contrast, Instagram information-seeking is more aesthetic based and provides social knowledge around fashion, lifestyle, fitness tips, cultural trends. Also, its content is less about hard news or deep learning compared to TikTok short form videos. Although both TikTok and Instagram facilitate the process of information discovery on various themes through hashtags, Instagram's stories or reels are rather ephemeral trend-based information while TikTok algorithm offers relevant and meaningful informational content on users' FYP even without active search. Besides, TikTok algorithm-driven information doesn't necessarily rely on "following the page" like Facebook and Instagram, but depends on video interactions (likes, shares, comments, watch time) and content preferences (captions, hashtags, music). Algorithm-recommended information allows users for self-improvement which can sustain well-being. Based on U&G theory, information seeking motivation fulfilled TikTok users' cognitive needs (curiosity, problem-solving, learning), which in turn enhanced well-being.

However, it is noteworthy that although social interaction and self-expression are regarded as active social media consumption (that is, commenting, posting, content creation and self-presentation), they were insignificant in predicting well-being in our study. This may have stemmed from the sample's passive usage characteristics, that is they engaged less in social interaction and self-expression. The study sample also consisted of more passive users compared to active users further explaining why the two motives were insignificant. This has been addressed in the limitation section as sample bias and warrants future studies to consider a more representative sample.

Another intriguing finding of this study is that online emotional support mediated the relationship between information seeking motive and mental well-being. However, the other TikTok motivations were not significant in predicting well-being thus our finding partially supported hypothesis H4. Past research indicates that information seeking was positively related to social, emotional and information online support as social media offers a good tool for maintaining and increasing social capital (Wang et al., 2019). As such they can experience empathy and validation through meaningful interactions. In addition, Gao et al. (2023) found that information seeking motivation was positively and significantly linked with well-being through the mediator of online social support. However, unlike our study they also found online social support to mediate the relationship between entertainment and social interaction motives and well-being. Recent research studying TikTok reveals that users with chronic illness share their experiences (self-expression) with the large public to raise awareness about illnesses and to also seek emotional support from their online peers (Zehring and Chen, 2024). Interestingly, these self-disclosure videos, when viral, allow users to view relevant informational content on their FYP and if the latter satisfies their cognitive needs, they are likely to gain more clarity, guidance and problem solving-skills

which fosters emotional reassurance and validation and thereby decreasing stress and anxiety. They can also feel emotionally supported and encouraged through empathetic interactions with supportive peers which may ultimately have a positive influence on their mental well-being. Given that the findings of this study substantiate prior studies where the link between social media use and mental well-being was explained through the mediational path of online social support, the result indicates that online emotional support plays an important role in explaining the association between information seeking and well-being.

6. Implications

6.1. Theoretical implications

The current study contributes to the existing literature by going beyond the conventional methodological approaches in terms of dose-effect measurement to a multidimensional approach of social media use. It adopted a sophisticated conceptualization of TikTok use by utilizing the Uses and Gratification theory to better capture and comprehend the psychological impact of the broad dimensions of UGT. The findings further substantiated the UGT by demonstrating how TikTok use can gratify users' varying needs. Therefore, this theoretical perspective still remains as one of the most fundamental grounds to understand social media use.

Given that previous research mainly focused on the meditative role of general perceived online social support, overall perceived social support or emotional support from real-life context (Verduyn et al., 2017; Masciantonio et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2023; Yue et al., 2023), this study extends the literature on online social support theory by examining online emotional support, an under-researched sub-dimension of online social support. This study thus contributes empirically to the growing body of literature supporting the bright side of social media use through online emotional support. Specifically, it stressed the value of positive social interaction, information-seeking and self-expression in enhancing perceived online emotional support among users. As such, the UGT has served as an effective tool to decipher how different motives of TikTok use influence mental well-being through perceptions of online emotional support.

6.2. Practical implications

The current study also presents some practical implications. Fundamentally, it highlights the importance of engaging in meaningful and purposive TikTok use, for instance, positive social interaction, information-seeking and self-expression that can induce perceptions of online emotional support. Therefore, it is undoubtedly beneficial for TikTok users in pursuit of obtaining a sense of perceived emotional support especially those who have restricted informational resources and interpersonal connections in real life. In fact, prior studies have underlined that general social media use might be rewarding to users if utilized in its most effective and appropriate way (Craig et al., 2021; Subramanian, 2017; Lin et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2023).

The findings therefore provide mental health implications for practitioners, especially psychologists or counsellors to encourage young people to be mindful about

their usage behaviour. Rather, TikTok should be adopted for valuable purposes such as information seeking, social interaction and self-expression as they may foster emotional support among users. Besides, mental health professionals can create informative video content that aims to enrich users' knowledge about a particular physical or mental health issue. TikTok users should be encouraged to share their personal experiences of successfully overcoming a particular issue as a means of self-expression and to disseminate valuable information to the public. For instance, one can relate to their personal addiction recovery journey from drug use which can encourage other users to attain sobriety through perceived emotional support as they can identify themselves and relate to these groups of people and improve their mental well-being. In other words, it can serve as an online health community for targeted people seeking such information and emotional support. TikTok users can also follow motivational pages and profiles which can potentially fulfill individuals' emotional needs. For example, posts that are inspirational and positive can boost people's self-esteem or confidence which in turn can foster positive mental health. Therefore, the public should be encouraged to benefit from this social media in the best way possible, especially as a stress reliever while being mindful of being addicted.

While information seeking is a salient motive in predicting mental well-being with the enhancing role of perceived online emotional support, practitioners should further seize the opportunity of this video-based platform to raise awareness on taboo topics related to physical and mental health issues or can even use the platform to address issues of cyberbullying and suggest effective coping strategies. Besides, practitioners can render the population aware of the early signs of mental health problems through short-video content, thereby successfully implementing secondary prevention strategies for several global health issues.

7. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Although this study offers useful insights into TikTok use among young Mauritian adults, it is subject to a number of limitations that warrant discussion. First, the relatively modest sample size ($n = 235$), with an overrepresentation of students (46.4%), may have introduced sample bias, limiting diversity in age and usage patterns. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as they may not be generalizable to the wider TikTok population. Future studies should consider a larger diverse sample size for a representative sample. Also, a mixed method approach using surveys and interviews can be used to better capture the nexus between TikTok use motivations and mental well-being and the key role of online emotional support providing a more nuanced understanding of the findings. Moreover, stratified sampling would further improve robustness. Second, this study assessed TikTok use through the dimensions of U&G theory of social media use which could not reflect TikTok's uniqueness, an algorithm-driven platform. Future research should consider assessing distinct TikTok motives, for example, algorithm-driven information acquisition based on users' preferences or other motives like viral and trend participation (also referred to as challenges). Third, this study did not control for confounding factors like TikTok user type (e.g., content creators vs. viewers) and content type preferences

(e.g., mental health-related hashtags) when assessing the link between motivations and mental well-being. Hence, new research should statistically adjust for key confounding variables to isolate the effect of TikTok motivations on well-being. Fourth, the timeliness of the data represents a limitation as TikTok is evolving rapidly. For instance, our 2023 does not account for TikTok's rapid iteration (e.g., the new feature "TikTok Now"). While the findings of this remain valuable in highlighting key associations, they should be interpreted with caution especially regarding the generalizability of results. Thus, future studies are recommended to use more up-to-date features of TikTok or even consider longitudinal datasets that provide greater accuracy and showcase the evolving trends over time.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between TikTok motivations and mental well-being through the mediator role of online emotional support. The findings revealed that information seeking, entertainment and escapism were salient motivations for TikTok use among young Mauritian adults. When TikTok is used for social interaction, self-expression and information seeking, it tends to facilitate online emotional support. Besides, online emotional support mediated the relationship between information seeking and mental well-being, while the other four motivations for use showed no significant effect. Extending from previous research, this study emphasizes TikTok as an emerging information hub (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022), where users seek diverse information which fosters a sense of online emotional support among users leading to improved mental well-being. While the present study offers valuable insights into TikTok use and well-being, future research avenues are warranted with careful consideration of the limitations. To conclude, the findings of this study highlight the importance of TikTok both as a technological platform and a social context in which motivations, community dynamics, and well-being outcomes interact.

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