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Trend Culture Among Algerian Teenagers Using Short Video Applications - TikTok as a Case Study: An Exploratory Clinical Study on a Sample of Adolescents in the City of Oran

Abstract

The present study aims to examine the trend culture from the perspective of Algerian teenagers who use the short video application TikTok. It explores their obsession with trends, regardless of their context, and the satisfaction they derive from following, imitating, or creating trends. TikTok, as the dominant platform for viral content, plays a central role in shaping digital social interactions among teenagers. To achieve these objectives, we conducted a qualitative study involving 10 teenagers (5 males and 5 females) from Oran, aged 14 to 18 years. The study employed a clinical approach using the life story narration method. The findings reveal that many teenagers are deeply engaged with trends as a means of reinforcing their sense of digital belonging. Trends also serve as a primary source of news and influence their opinions, often without concern for accuracy or fact-checking. Influencers act as media intermediaries, shaping the narratives that teenagers consume. Additionally, many adolescents are drawn more to superficial entertainment content rather than meaningful or educational material. This preference may stem from the aspirational images projected by content creators, who portray success and popularity, as well as TikTok's algorithm, which prioritizes engaging and viral videos. Moreover, the study indicates that the design of adolescent TikTok accounts reflects a blend of creativity necessary for self-expression and individuality, and trend imitation, which ensures visibility at the cost of originality. This suggests that teenagers are highly influenced by prevailing TikTok trends, often shaping their digital identities around them.

Keywords: trend culture, popular content, Algerian teenagers, short video applications, TikTok

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Qısa video proqramlarından istifadə edən Əlcəzairli yeniyetmələr arasında trend mədəniyyəti – TikTok Case Study kimi: Yeniyetmələr nümunəsi üzrə kəşfiyyatlı klinik tədqiqat Oran şəhərində

Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat, qısa video tətbiqi olan TikTok-dan istifadə edən Əlcəzairli yeniyetmələrin perspektivindən trend mədəniyyətini araşdırmağı hədəfləyir. Tədqiqat, yeniyetmələrin kontekstdən asılı olmayaraq trendlərə olan həvəsini və bu trendləri izləmək, təqlid etmək və ya yaratmaqdan aldıkları məmnuniyyəti araşdırır. TikTok, viral məzmun üçün əsas platforma kimi çıxış edərək, yeniyetmələr arasında rəqəmsal sosial qarşılıqlı əlaqələrin formalaşmasında mərkəzi rol oynayır. Bu məqsədlərə çatmaq üçün Oran şəhərindən 14-18 yaş aralığında olan 10 yeniyetmə (5 oğlan və 5 qız) seçilmiş və keyfiyyət təhlili aparılmışdır. Tədqiqat, həyat hekayəsinin nəql edilməsi metodundan istifadə edilərək klinik yanaşma əsasında həyata keçirilmişdir.

Nəticələr göstərir ki, bir çox yeniyetmələr trendləri rəqəmsal mənsubiyyət hissini gücləndirmək vasitəsi kimi qəbul edirlər. Trendlər, həmçinin əsas xəbər mənbəyi rolunu oynayır və onların fikirlərinə təsir edir, lakin çox vaxt məlumatın dəqiqliyi və fakt yoxlanışına əhəmiyyət verilmir.

İnfluencerlər media vasitəçiləri kimi çıxış edərək yeniyetmələrin istehlak etdiyi hekayələri formalaşdırırlar. Bundan əlavə, bir çox yeniyetmələr mənalı və ya maarifləndirici məzmunundan çox, səthi əyləncəli məzmunlara üstünlük verirlər. Bu seçim, məzmun yaradıcılarının uğur və populyarlıq nümayiş etdirən motivasiyaedici obrazlar təqdim etməsi ilə yanaşı, TikTok-un daha çox diqqət cəlb edən və Populyar məzmun üstünlük verən alqoritmindən qaynaqlana bilər.

Tədqiqat həmçinin göstərir ki, yeniyetmələrin TikTok hesablarının dizaynı özünü ifadə və fərdilik üçün vacib olan yaradıcılıqla, həm də görünürsüzlüyü təmin edən, lakin orijinallıq hesabına başa gələn trend təqlidi ilə qarışıqdır. Bu, yeniyetmələrin TikTok-da mövcud olan trendlərdən ciddi şəkildə təsirləndiyini və rəqəmsal kimliklərini çox vaxt bu trendlər ətrafında formalaşdırdıqlarını göstərir.

Açar sözlər: trend mədəniyyəti, populyar məzmun, Əlcəzairli yeniyetmələr, qısa video proqramlar, TikTok

Introduction

In today's digital era, where social media is ubiquitous, trends have become one of the most prominent cultural and social phenomena captivating young people, including teenagers, both globally and in Algeria. With youth making up a significant portion of the population, platforms like TikTok have emerged as popular spaces, attracting millions of users across various age groups. However, it is particularly teenagers who are most influenced by and actively engaged in the trends circulating on this platform.

Recently, there has been much discussion about the challenges faced by teenagers on social media platforms, particularly regarding their constant pursuit of trends. Each new trend tends to overshadow the previous ones, creating a cycle that drives teenagers to obsessively browse these platforms. This constant search for the latest interactive events and trends becomes a way for them to stay at the forefront of social media, always eager to be part of the latest happenings.

What stands out is that these phenomena and behaviors have made their way into the school environment. One of the most notable examples is students engaging in pranks or "challenges" a trend popularized on TikTok- within classrooms, often filming and sharing them online. This shift raised numerous questions and sparked our scientific curiosity about the culture of trends and the extent of teenagers' obsession with them. It is particularly concerning that such behaviors have reached spaces traditionally focused on discipline and proper upbringing, like schools (Abdul Aziz Haydar Hussein Al-Moussawi, 2013).

Statement of the problem:

The widespread reach of social media and its continuous updates to enhance functionality have transformed it from a mere communication tool into interactive platforms that foster subcultures and social phenomena, such as the trend phenomenon. This trend directly reflects digital globalization, where ideas and content are rapidly transmitted to millions of users. Platforms like TikTok have played a significant role in establishing this culture by offering a space for users to create short, engaging content designed to capture attention and dominate the digital scene (Alain Dono, 2015).

In the Algerian context, the trend phenomenon among teenagers has become particularly noteworthy, as they actively engage with challenges, popular songs, and viral movements. Given this growing involvement, it is essential to raise questions to better understand the dimensions and effects of this phenomenon. Exploring what trends represent for Algerian teenagers using the short video platform TikTok can provide deeper insights into their social behaviors, digital interactions, and the broader cultural impact of these trends (Boucebci Mahfoud, 1978).

Engaging with individuals interested in social media trends particularly those known as "TikTokers", or active users of the TikTok app reveals a culture centered around discussing non-serious events, viral challenges, and trending dances. These users exhibit a strong desire to stay updated and avoid missing out on any emerging trend. This behavior aligns closely with the concept of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), a term originally used in marketing and advertising but now widely associated with social media culture.

Similarly, the term "the happenings" as described by Ibrahim Al-Sakran (Ibrahim Al-Sakran, 2015, p. 52), captures this phenomenon, referring to the compulsive pursuit of online events. Social

media users constantly scroll through their feeds, anticipating new content with each swipe, encountering posts and videos that are different from those seen just moments earlier. This continuous engagement often leads to distraction, keeping individuals glued to their screens even when important tasks demand their attention (Djoumouaa Shaimaa Izzeddine, 2020).

Interest in trends goes beyond passive browsing; it also involves actively sharing videos that replicate the "trend of the moment" on social media platforms. TikTok, in particular, stands out as the leading platform facilitating this trend-driven culture. Several factors contribute to its dominance, with the most significant being its format of short, engaging videos, the integration of music and audio tracks, and features like personal profile pages and live streaming. These elements make it effortless for users to create, share, and engage with trending content in real time (Freud, 1932).

The situation becomes more concerning when an interest in trends escalates into an obsession. Individuals immerse themselves in browsing, replicating viral short videos, and constantly engaging with the latest trending topics. Their smartphones or devices turn into virtual salons, where discussions -whether meaningful or trivial- dominate their time and attention. This digital world begins to overshadow the real one, tightening its grip on users for a simple reason: the fear of missing the trend. This creates a never-ending cycle, as new trends emerge while others fade, making it difficult to disengage. The concept closely parallels what American psychologist **Kimberly Young** described as Internet addiction, which she classified as an impulse control disorder that does not require a narcotic substance (Abdel Majid & Abdel Latif, 2006). In this context, it can be argued that we are now witnessing a new form of addiction, an addiction to chasing trends, where individuals feel compelled to continuously ride the wave of digital virality.

Research

The term "trend" or "most interactive events" refers to the prevailing course of news and discussions at a given moment. It can take various forms, such as fashion trends, viral challenges, music paired with dance routines, debate topics, or controversial events. Social media has played a pivotal role in shaping this culture, fostering a sense of participation and engagement among users. Many feel compelled to comment on and react to trending topics, often without verifying their accuracy, questioning their source, or applying logical analysis. The primary concern is not missing the opportunity to share an opinion, as each comment fuels further responses, triggering an endless cycle of interaction until a new trend emerges, replacing the old one. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (Zygmunt Bauman, 2016) highlights the distinction between the real world we inhabit and the virtual world we engage with, emphasizing how the digital realm increasingly dominates reality. This influence extends beyond perceptions and interests, shaping the ambitions and behaviors of many users. As a result, numerous individuals construct an online persona that significantly differs from their real-life identity, allowing them to experience and achieve things in the digital space that may seem unattainable in reality.

Some scholars have argued that existence is increasingly tied to visibility on social media. Guy Debord, in "The Society of the Spectacle", explores how individuals exhibit their lives and daily experiences, gauging their achievements and sense of being through their online presence and the frequency of their posts. In the pursuit of likes and followers, many eagerly follow trending waves, immersing themselves in one after another to remain at the heart of the digital spectacle. However, this relentless engagement often leads to conformity, stripping individuals of their uniqueness and distancing them from authentic self-expression.

Maybe "The System of Mediocrity" also explains how mediocrity has managed to rise to the top. According to Deneault, the author of the book, the function of mediocrity is to push people, by all possible means, to surrender rather than think, to accept the unacceptable as an inevitable fate, and to perceive what is repugnant as a necessity. It turns people into fools (Deneault, 2015), rushing to follow trends and express opinions before even delving into them. Impulsiveness and recklessness become assets that boost viewership rates, driving individuals into battles of responses and comments that reflect nothing but toxic content, flooding social media platforms and digital applications with meaningless trivialities. All of this unfolds under the illusion of self-fulfillment, while in reality, they have accomplished nothing of true value.

Although social media has many positive aspects serving as platforms for virtual interaction, opinion exchange, and talent showcasing they also present certain challenges. TikTok, for instance, provides users with tools to create short and innovative content, supporting education and knowledge sharing through informative tips, awareness campaigns, and educational videos on various topics. Additionally, it has become a powerful marketing tool, helping small businesses promote products creatively and reach wider audiences. However, alongside these benefits, there is a concerning trend: the rise of trivial content and its creators to the status of digital symbols. Many content creators whether YouTubers, Instagram influencers, TikTokers, or fashionistas have gained massive followings, not necessarily due to valuable contributions, but rather through content that often lacks depth or quality. This shift raises questions about the impact of social media in elevating superficial entertainment over meaningful discourse and knowledge.

In this study, we aim to explore the trend culture among adolescents who use short video applications, as well as the satisfaction they derive from this engagement. Notably, research on the trend phenomenon remains limited, but we have drawn upon existing studies that examine the use of short video content among adolescents from various perspectives. These studies come from foreign, Arab, and Algerian sources, offering diverse insights into the subject. Among the foreign studies, (Wong, 2010) investigated the effectiveness of short videos on TikTok and the psychological and persuasive factors influencing user responses. Using an experimental approach on a sample of 81 participants, the study found that humor plays a significant role in shaping user interactions with the platform. The results highlighted that humor not only enhances engagement but also fosters a greater inclination toward adopting new technologies, making it a key factor in TikTok's success and its unique impact on users.

Another relevant study is the Malaysian study by Dequan & Omar (Omar, Dequan, 2020), which examined usage patterns of TikTok among individuals aged 20 to 34 years. Using the Uses and Gratifications Theory and a survey-based methodology on a sample of 385 young people, the study found that user motivations significantly influence their engagement with TikTok. These motivations include escaping daily pressures, fostering social interactions, and expressing oneself, highlighting the platform's role in fulfilling various psychological and social needs.

Regarding Arab studies, the research conducted by Hicham Fouli Abdel Mouiz (2020) explored the relationship between short video applications and their psychological and social effects on users. This survey-based study, conducted on a random sample of 614 individuals from Egyptian society, revealed a statistically significant link between the use of short video applications and negative psychosocial effects. Moreover, the study identified TikTok as the most widely used platform, with an adoption rate of 77.5%, surpassing other short video applications in popularity.

Another relevant study is Djoumouaa Chaima Izzeddine's (2020) research, which aimed to analyze the nature of marketing videos on TikTok using both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The study involved 21 semi-directed online surveys with users aged 15 to 27 years. The findings revealed that users primarily engage with TikTok for entertainment and to pass time, often by watching celebrity videos and imitating them using the platform's lip-sync feature. Regarding Algerian research, we reviewed the study by Samah Jaaoud (Samah Jaoud, 2020), which examined TikTok usage among Algerian children through a descriptive approach, analyzing 95 videos. The study found concerning trends, such as children appearing in music clips with immoral connotations, with girls representing 87% of cases in inappropriate clothing, exposing them to electronic harassment.

Another significant study is by Achraf Leghawaydia & Khaled Aouni (Khaled Aouni & Achraf Lagwaidia, 2019), which explored the values embedded in TikTok content using the Technological Determinism Theory. By employing a descriptive and analytical survey approach, the researchers examined 30 videos from the accounts of 10 influential TikTok users in Algeria. The study concluded that values were negatively influenced by content, with dancing, singing, and lip-sync videos being the most prevalent. These findings highlight the platform's role in shaping cultural trends and behavioral patterns among Algerian users.

From our review of the existing literature, we have identified several common themes across previous studies. Notably, all the studies examined have focused on a single short video application TikTok due to its widespread popularity and extensive usage. Additionally, they have primarily targeted children and adolescents as their study populations. A key finding across these studies is the psychological, social, and value-based effects of TikTok usage. Researchers have explored both the motivations behind its use and the gratifications users seek, which include social interaction, entertainment, humor, stress relief, and self-expression. However, one significant research gap we have observed to the best of our knowledge is the lack of studies linking TikTok specifically to the phenomenon of trends. While previous research has examined TikTok's impact, its role as a tool for trend creation and trend participation remains largely unexplored, making this an important area for further investigation (Marwa Mohamed Galal Mohamed Othman & Azza Ahmed Gamal El-Bry, 2023).

To frame our current study, we have outlined the research problem as follows:

1. What is the "trend" culture among teenagers using short video applications such as TikTok?
2. How do teenagers perceive the popular "trend" culture, and what are the practices and gratifications they achieve through the use of short video platforms like TikTok?

Given that our study is primarily exploratory, we aim to seek answers through fieldwork without forming hypotheses in advance.

Study Objectives:

1. Understanding the concept of "trend" from a teenager's perspective, by collecting insights on how they perceive this new culture.
2. Exploring the practices of users on short video applications, particularly TikTok, which hosts the majority of trends circulating on social media.
3. Identifying the satisfactions teenagers derive from following, imitating, or creating trends on TikTok.
4. Investigating why teenagers become preoccupied with temporary trends those that appear and fade quickly and why they persist in following all events on TikTok, despite their fleeting nature.
5. Explaining the phenomenon of "panting after network events", where teenagers browse social networking sites frantically to stay updated on the latest trends and happenings.

Importance of the study:

The importance of the current study lies in its exploration of a prominent aspect of adolescent life their relationship with the contemporary world, and how they perceive it. Teenagers today increasingly see the world through the lens of their mobile phones and small screens, making this study especially relevant. The phenomenon of trend culture among adolescents is both new and emerging, and it has become widespread in society, making it a topic that warrants thorough investigation. Given its prevalence, it is crucial to approach this phenomenon with a serious, specialized perspective to better understand the behaviors, motivations, and effects on young people. Adolescents spend significant amounts of their time in the virtual space, particularly on platforms like TikTok, which is central to the trend culture. Therefore, this study is necessary to grasp the implications of this culture on a generation increasingly immersed in the digital world (Moutassem Badra, Sbaa Fatima Zohra, Jaoui, 2010).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

To effectively investigate the topic of trend culture among adolescents using the TikTok application and the satisfactions they derive from it, it is essential to define key procedural terms that form the basis of this study.

Trend:

- **Economic Definition:** In an economic context, trend refers to the general direction in which market values or original prices develop. It can be upward, downward, or sideways based on the movement of raw materials or prices. This understanding of trends is commonly used in financial analysis to track market behaviors.

● **Linguistic Definition:** The term "trend" is also used in everyday language, with a broader meaning. According to the dictionary of meanings, trend refers to various related concepts such as Direction, orientation, or current in a particular context.

Desire, course, or doctrine that drives social behaviors or ideas. Inclination, tendency, or fashion, which is particularly relevant to the way trends manifest in social media and digital platforms like TikTok.

In the context of this study, the trend refers to the social phenomenon where certain ideas, behaviors, or styles gain popularity and spread rapidly, often propelled by the viral nature of platforms like TikTok. These trends could involve challenges, dances, memes, or any form of viral content that captures the attention of users, particularly teenagers.

The term trend on social media platforms carries various meanings and connotations among its users. It functions as a fundamental means for exchanging information and diverse content, taking many forms such as images, video clips, and audio clips. Specifically, it refers to:

- Trending topics: Popular events or common themes being widely discussed by social media users at any given time.
- The hottest and most talked-about event on social media platforms.
- Hourly events refresh according to different occurrences in our lives but in the virtual world.
- News or events that don't necessarily have global reach but are popular in specific contexts, such as fashion trends or widespread clothing styles (Marwa Othman, 2024, 238-249).

Operational Definition:

A **trend** is a prevailing phenomenon that others tend to imitate. It gains popularity and is widely discussed, particularly on the Internet and social media platforms. In this study, we specifically focus on the TikTok application as a prominent space for trend creation and dissemination.

Short Video Applications and Their Uses (TikTok as an Example):

The rise of short video applications began in early 2012 when Dom Hofmann and his colleagues launched the VINE application, which was later acquired by Twitter in October of the same year. Vine's key feature was allowing users to record video clips of just six seconds in length. However, the platform was shut down in 2017 following the circulation of inappropriate content (Abdelmouiz, 2020, 3407-3462).

Following Vine's closure, several Chinese and American companies developed new applications that added more technical features. These apps allowed users to create password-protected accounts, and upload, browse, and share videos either recorded directly within the app or from the phone's existing video library. They also offered tools for users to combine their clips with audio and visual effects, such as music, stickers, and emojis. These apps made video editing quick and simple for users. Some of the most prominent apps in this category include Lakee, Vigo Video, Lolita, Jaco, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok (Hicham el Fouli Abdel Mouiz, 2020).

TikTok: TikTok is the most popular app for creating free short videos, widely recognized and available in the app stores of global software and tech companies. Launched in September 2016 and made available internationally in 2017, it is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, where it is known as Douyin.

Described by Google Play as a private social platform for watching and sharing short music videos with friends and followers, TikTok only requires users to create an account. As one of the most downloaded apps globally, it is available in over 150 markets and more than 50 languages. According to 2024 statistics (Al Arabiya website, 2024), the app has surpassed 4.5 billion downloads worldwide.

When users open TikTok, videos play consecutively, allowing them to watch hours of content effortlessly. These clips can also be shared on other social media platforms. TikTok has become a popular space for challenges, particularly among young people. Due to its vast global user base, videos on TikTok often gain widespread recognition, enabling users to achieve fame and build a loyal following (Rabab Talaat, 2018).

Algerian teenager:

Adolescence is a period marked by rapid physical and mental growth, often accompanied by emotional disturbances and complex challenges, particularly when adolescents are misled or

misguided (Al-Moussaoui, 2013, 163). This transitional stage, which falls between childhood and adulthood, does not have clear-cut beginnings or endings, as it varies based on the natural environment and social context in which the adolescent lives. It also emerges as a result of modern industrial progress, a phenomenon that was not recognized in earlier times. According to Guasch (Guasch, 1973, p. 17), it is a civilizational phenomenon.

In the context of Algeria, adolescence is influenced by both psycho-physiological and socio-cultural factors. Biological changes, such as puberty, along with psychological developments like body image, self-esteem, and the search for independence and identity, play key roles. Additionally, the formation of new social relationships introduces new models into the adolescent's life, prompting a reevaluation of previous perceptions. In Algeria, this phase is also shaped by the socio-cultural environment, various group affiliations, and the influence of social institutions that play a crucial role in shaping the adolescent's values and behaviors.

The Algerian adolescent is undoubtedly immersed in a cultural environment filled with conflicting and impersonal images (Boucebci, 1978, 31). He is navigating a phase of socio-cultural transformation marked by clear indicators of change, both at the individual and group levels. A study by the Center for Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology in Oran highlighted that these indicators manifest as expressions of discomfort and anxiety, which can be interpreted as either symbolic or, in clinical terms, symptomatic (Moutassem & Sbaa & Jaoui, 2010).

Adolescence in Algeria has become an extended phase, further prolonged by current circumstances. For example, the pursuit of higher education delays marriage, leading the adolescent to remain under the family's responsibility for a longer period. This extended dependency often creates a gap between the adolescent's desire for independence and freedom and their inability to achieve it, fueling psychological and family conflicts. These tensions are often expressed through opposition to society and authority.

Verbal expression is frequently seen in the form of speech that diverges from conventional language, accompanied by increased physical gestures. Behavioral manifestations include withdrawal, mocking others, bullying, graffiti, and the desire to emigrate or form groups. Adolescents might also engage in unstudied aggressive behaviors, while others express their dissatisfaction through body modifications such as tattoos, unconventional hairstyles, and fashion trends. These behaviors all contribute to a sense of difference, alienation, and generational conflict, signaling a disconnection from society (Kelfah, 2018).

In a country undergoing significant changes and embracing global openness through digital communication, adolescent often finds themselves in a state of confusion, struggling to define their goals and identity. This experience is not unique to Algeria but is shared by adolescents worldwide in the face of a rapidly evolving cultural landscape. This context makes adolescents a rich subject for study, offering insight into the new cultures and values they adopt and conceptualize.

Operational Definition: This refers to any individual within the adolescent stage, which in this study is determined by chronological age.

Applied Aspect of the Study:

Study Sample: To gather information on trend culture among adolescents using TikTok, and to understand the impact of modern digital phenomena on the new generation and their integration into the culture of digital globalization, a purposive sample was selected from the city of Oran. After completing a form to collect relevant information, the sample consisted of 10 adolescents aged between 14 and 18, all of whom are students in middle or secondary school. TikTok is one of the most frequently used platforms among the sample, and trends serve as a means of social interaction for them.

Study Methodology: The methodology for this study involved selecting appropriate tools to explore the topic of trend culture among adolescents using short video applications, allowing them to express their perceptions of the phenomenon. Given the exploratory qualitative nature of the research, we directly collected information from the sample using the following tools:

Life Storytelling: This qualitative method is suitable for understanding the meanings behind human and social phenomena over time, using free discourse to narrate the life story or focus on a

specific aspect of it according to the study's requirements. We chose this method because it allows individuals to share their perceptions about a particular phenomenon. As trends have become a cultural element for young people, we engaged with them through life story narration, highlighting their views on trends and TikTok usage. This was done with an audio recording after explaining the research topic and obtaining permission to record (Mohamed Hossam El-Din, 2010).

During each session, we focused on the following key points:

- The adolescent's social positioning within various affiliations (family, school, and social groups outside).
- Usage of TikTok (in terms of duration, intensity, and type of content).
- Their perception of the trend as a form of popular culture among young people.
- Motivations for using TikTok and their stance on emerging trends.
- Gratifications are obtained from trends, including both following and creating content.
- A description of their page or account, or if suitable, sharing it with us.

Clinical Observation is a methodological tool that accompanies the specialist or researcher throughout their research and life in general. It enables them to ask relevant questions and formulate hypotheses. The phenomenon under study is often built upon a set of structures, including moral and material aspects, which highlight the importance of utilizing observation. This tool offers deep insights into the individual and their life, allowing for a more thorough understanding of their behaviors, interactions, and experiences.

Analyzing Life Narratives and Key Findings:

In this study, we aimed to explore the concept of trends for teenagers using the short video platform TikTok, particularly in the context of the rapid development of social communication. Social media has provided unprecedented opportunities for connecting with people globally, a trend that reached its peak during the COVID-19 pandemic. With lockdowns in place, millions of people were confined to their homes, and social media platforms played a crucial role in offering entertainment, staying connected, and providing updates about the pandemic. This period significantly elevated the importance of social media in everyday life (Kelfah Amel, 2018).

Given that adolescents are among the most active users of social media, particularly TikTok, we focused on this group for our research. TikTok, with its dynamic nature and viral trends, is central to the lives of many teenagers, who actively engage with it to follow and participate in popular trends. As this study is exploratory, our goal was to understand what the "trend" means to teenagers, the motivations behind their use of TikTok to engage with trends, and the purpose they derive from it. By analyzing their life narratives, we identified several key insights:

1-Teenagers' Obsession with TikTok's Trending Content and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): The TikTok app holds a significant place in the lives of adolescents. The narratives indicated that all participants in the study spent considerable time interacting with it, often even during study periods, checking their phones in brief moments to ensure they did not miss out on the latest trends. This behavior reflects a strong obsession with TikTok's popular content. Some of the expressions from the life narratives that illustrated this obsession include:

- *"I wait every time something new comes out. Nothing escapes me. TikTok has become a part of my life."* — Ghizlan (Case 8)
- *"I put my phone on silent in my wallet so I can look at it from time to time and not miss anything."* — Salah El-Din (Case 2)
- *"I can't wait to have my phone in my hand all the time, wherever I go, in literally any place."* — Romaissa (Case 7)

What becomes evident is that this form of browsing behavior is more than just a habit; it can be classified as an obsession or even an electronic addiction, particularly among the teenagers in this study. Their motive for browsing is not tied to free time or leisure, but instead occurs during school classes and in almost every setting. This behavior aligns with the concept of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), a term that describes the anxiety or unease people feel when they fear missing an event, piece of information, or social interaction. The term, which was added to the Oxford Dictionary in 2006 by Patrick McGinnis, is now widely used to describe the psychological state that drives individuals to

constantly check social media platforms to ensure they are up to date with the latest developments (Wagih Abdel Majid & Wagdy Shafiq Abdel Latif, 2006).

FOMO is closely linked to the increasing reliance on digital communication, especially through social networking sites, and is often exacerbated by the compulsive need to stay connected and informed. This condition draws the individual away from the present moment and into the virtual world, leading them to search through social media for the latest news or updates. In particular, the obsession with videos or content is driven by the fear of missing out on something important whether it's an event, piece of information, or viral content.

This behavior is further amplified by the design of platforms like TikTok, which uses continuous notifications and attention-grabbing headlines like "This is the video you're looking for" or "Watch before it's deleted" to stir anxiety and excitement. These enticing phrases create a sense of urgency, encouraging users especially teenagers to click on links and watch the content before it disappears, reinforcing their FOMO-driven behavior (Jung Anna-Katharina, 2022).

2-The need to feel a sense of belonging to the network community (seeking identity in the digital space):

Many of the adolescents in this study believe that their immersion in the TikTok platform is driven by a lack of other opportunities for engagement and activities. This, they say, pushes them to explore the world through their mobile phones, aiming to develop themselves, stay current with trends, and escape the monotony of daily life by entering a world full of novelty. This sentiment was shared by all the participants. A particularly telling example comes from Amine (case 3), who expressed: *"Everyone travels to change the atmosphere, except for me, sitting and the atmosphere changes on me. When we open TikTok, we travel and I sit in my place, and when I create a trend, I feel that I am present and influential somewhere and not forgotten in the country of Mama Africa."*

This statement highlights deep feelings tied to identity, belonging, and the desire for recognition that these adolescents feel they are missing. According to Carl Rogers, individuals are always striving to align their self-image with the ideal they wish to project in the eyes of others (Rogers, 2018). Amin's comment reflects a need to feel significant and connected through participation in trends, an effort to validate his identity and existence in a social context even a virtual one away from feelings of isolation or marginalization. His involvement in trends provides him with a sense of appreciation and recognition through online engagement.

Erikson also highlights that adolescence is a period of identity formation, where individuals strive to belong to a group (Erikson, 2011). From the adolescents' statements, particularly Amin's, it's evident they are seeking identity in the digital realm, where they feel part of a global community. This sense of belonging compensates for the feelings of isolation and marginalization they experience in their immediate surroundings, which Amin refers to as "Mama Africa." His statement reveals his sense of deficiency due to an inability to travel or experience significant life changes. However, he compensates for this lack by engaging in trends on TikTok, feeling present and valued through these actions in hopes of gaining social recognition (Rakesh kumar & kishore kamal & al, 2024).

Alfred Adler's theory suggests that individuals often seek to overcome feelings of deficiency by achieving success, both socially and personally. In a similar vein, J. Deborah argues in "The Show Society" that there is a direct link between existence and appearance in the digital world (G Debord, 2013). For many, the measure of their existence, their role in life, and their social or professional success is reflected in the visibility of their posts or photos, as well as the number of likes they receive. As a result, these adolescents are drawn to follow trends and interact with them, seeking affirmation and a sense of belonging in the digital space.

At the level of individual psychological functioning, the ego strives to strike a balance between unconscious desires and external reality (Freud, 1932). In the case of Amine and his peers, whose responses were similar, this could indicate an internal conflict between feelings of real and imagined isolation (internal and external realities) and a deep desire for fame and belonging (unconscious motives). Their adoption of popular content or trends might reflect a desire to be seen and acknowledged, serving as a compromise between their inner needs and the external world they navigate.

From the life story narrations of the teenagers, it became clear that there is a strong drive for recognition and social belonging through the TikTok platform. By spending long hours browsing, sharing, and engaging with trends, they are fulfilling an internal need for existence and appreciation. Participating in trends offers them an opportunity to express themselves, whether through personal identity or a desire to belong to the digital community. This involvement helps compensate for the feelings of deficiency and isolation they experience in their everyday lives, providing them with a sense of connection and significance.

3-Shaping the Collective Mind Through Trends on TikTok: Posts and Following

Content sharing on TikTok often plays a significant role in shaping common trends and collective opinions among users. These phenomena can be understood in terms of how trends influence the collective mindset through posts, shared content, and the act of following and circulating popular material.

This was evident in the responses of the teenagers when asked about the purpose of participating in and representing trends, and what value following them provides despite the circumstances. Most of the adolescents in the study indicated that trends offer them the chance to engage with emerging, popular phenomena, allowing them to express alignment with new ideas that have collective, national, regional, or global significance. Trends also help them connect with the majority's views and ideas, as expressed by Touraya (Case 6): *"A dance or a song, for it to become a trend, I master it and film it in my own way. This gives me the feeling that I am connected to others in this world."*

The behavior observed in Rimaissa and her peers, can be understood through several theories. When these teenagers engage with a trend, they do so to strengthen their sense of belonging to the group and show their alignment with the shared values of that group. The importance of belonging is crucial for adolescents. Henri Tajfel highlighted that individuals seek to reinforce their connection to a specific group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Albert Bandura also noted that people learn by observing and imitating others. When they see a trend gaining attention and acceptance, even if it seems trivial, they tend to imitate it to conform to the group (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, individuals are influenced by social pressure from their peers. If a trend is widely accepted, it gains social legitimacy, which is part of what is described by the social impact theory. Consequently, there is little resistance to engaging with such trends, as seen with the adolescents in the study and other individuals (Latané, 1981).

These teenagers shared that the more effectively they could replicate a trend, the more likes and interactions they received. Ghizlan (Case 8) explained: *"They see that I have a beautiful, well-proportioned body, and I am a skilled dancer. I memorize the moves quickly and I also sing. I don't have a public account, but I get a lot of likes from my friends on TikTok. They tell me that I could be a successful influencer. If it weren't for my family, I'd probably be doing that."*

From this storytelling, it's clear that many encourage Ghizlan to dance and re-enact the trend or to open her channel, reinforcing this behavior. This is particularly true because she is receiving rewards in the form of likes and interactions. Teenagers like Ghizlan continue to imitate trends because they gain admiration and acceptance from others, which aligns with what Skinner referred to as positive reinforcement (Skinner, 1938). Ideas and behaviors spread through social interactions, and as a result, trends grow into cultural phenomena due to the repeated engagement of individuals. Social media platforms also play a significant role in shaping behaviors and values, as individuals are influenced by repetitive content and come to view it as a standard of acceptable behavior.

On TikTok, when someone posts a video that becomes a trend, others follow by producing similar content, driven by an internal desire to emulate the behavior and achieve the same level of fame or status. This creates a collective phenomenon or shared mindset, where individuals adopt the same behaviors and practices within a technological space, which strengthens their sense of belonging and participation. By following trends, a form of indirect communication emerges, as people align their actions with common behavioral patterns, leading to the spread of unified behaviors. Over time, these behaviors evolve into a collective unconscious, shared across the group (Latané Bibb, 1981).

4-TikTok Trends as a Source of News and Shaping Public Opinion (Challenges in Balancing Objectivity and Subjectivity): TikTok has become a key platform for spreading news and shaping

public opinion, particularly among young people. The app's short video format allows content to spread rapidly, fitting the fast-paced nature of modern life, and making it a powerful tool for transmitting information and influencing followers regardless of its accuracy or source. Many teenagers in the study mentioned that they rely on TikTok to stay informed about local, national, and global events. Ayoub (Case 5) shared, *"TikTok is always up to date with everything new, especially since at this time everyone carries a phone in their pocket that can transmit the news and publish it directly."* Nour Al-Huda (Case 1) added, *"I follow the news about artists and influencers—like who got married, who divorced—TikTok keeps you informed. Sometimes we watch live streams and want to know who won, and what's the goal? I learn new phrases, get to know scandals and risks, and sometimes regret wasting my time, but still, we want to know the end of the live."*

Oussama (Case 10) emphasized that *"there are many analysts on TikTok political commentators, sports analysts, and religious preachers. It's like we're hanging out with them in a coffee shop. We discuss things, understand people's political views, and analyze events through the trends."*

Thanks to TikTok's algorithms, which recommend content based on users' interests, each of these teenagers is exposed to the news and content they enjoy. For example, Nour El-Huda (Case 1) gravitates toward celebrity news and scandal-based content, and as a result, the app suggests videos tailored to her preferences. The same applies to Oussama, Ayoub, and others, creating a direct influence on their opinions and contributing to the rapid spread of information, which ultimately shapes public opinion. However, this information may often be subjective for several reasons. Since TikTok's news is largely based on personal experiences and opinions of users, the app's algorithms trap them in "information bubbles" that reinforce their existing beliefs. Additionally, emotionally charged and sensational news is heavily promoted because it captures attention, even if it lacks objectivity or truth. It's also important to note that the desire for speed often outweighs the need for accuracy, with users rushing to keep up with the trend without verifying the information's authenticity.

5- Influencers as Media intermediary: The Challenge of Truth and Subjective Bias

Many teenagers who use TikTok turn to influencers they follow for news, information, and analysis, making these influencers key media intermediaries. For instance, Oussama (Case 10) relies on political, sports, and even religious analyses from some influencers to understand certain issues and news, even though most of them aren't experts in those areas. He also doesn't verify the accuracy of the content, even though many of these influencers lack reliable sources, which leaves them vulnerable to spreading rumors. On digital platforms like TikTok, it's easy for inaccurate or misleading information to spread, leading to the formation of misguided opinions. This is especially true since the platform often uses visuals, music, and emotional appeal to influence its audience. When an event becomes a trend, Mark Poster argues that it triggers a battle of analyses and opinions, which are often presented as facts without verification, replacing the truth and leading to scattered, conflicting opinions. Everyone speaks without knowledge, without knowing when to remain silent. The key goal is gaining views and participating in trends so that engaging with popular content becomes more about following the crowd than expressing one's true self (Hussam El-Din, 2010).

When news, whether global or local, breaks, users like Oussama (Case 10) quickly rush to comment on others' reactions and may even get involved themselves. In every event, participation and speaking out become essential, regardless of whether the news has been verified for objectivity. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, an individual's sense of existence is determined by their visibility on social media, and their sense of self diminishes when they stop showing up or engaging online (Bauman, 2016). People are naturally drawn to information that supports their pre-existing beliefs and tend to avoid content that contradicts them. This cognitive bias, known as best-worst scaling, is further amplified by TikTok's algorithms, which curate content aligned with users' opinions and interests. This in turn strengthens their beliefs and shape's public opinion, as seen with the adolescents in this study. In this context, Mark Poster highlights that the truth has become increasingly elusive due to the overwhelming number of sources and perspectives. News has multiplied into countless sources with additions, deletions, and alterations and each event is analyzed from countless angles.

As individuals navigate this sea of content, the truth may become fragmented or lost altogether (Hossam El-Din, 2010).

6-The Emotional Audience and the Prevalence of Superficial Content on TikTok

Through the life narratives, it became clear that many teenagers in the study are drawn to trivial and marginal news. This was explicitly expressed by Nour El-Hoda (Case 1), as we mentioned earlier. Several teenagers also indicated they follow live broadcasts, even those of lower quality. Salah El-Din (Case 2) shared in his narrative, *“Some influencers go viral (meaning they top the views), and to reduce their views, they switch to another influencer who is well-known and rising. They criticize him, make videos about his scandals, and engage in live rounds where they confront each other to reclaim attention. What’s the goal? Honestly, sometimes there isn’t one. We just follow their scandals to see who’s right and who’s wrong.”*

Similarly, Touria (Case 6) explained, *“I follow some influencers-whose names and content I won’t mention- who don’t have degrees, but they offer advice to girls. They call themselves ‘doctors in life.’”*

Many influencers focus on low-level, controversial entertainment topics such as scandals and trivial news to capture followers' attention and increase their view counts. This trend can influence teenagers, leading them to prioritize these subjects over more meaningful or educational content. This phenomenon is influenced by several factors, as we observed in teenagers: a desire for entertainment, an escape from daily pressures, and a need to belong to the digital community. Following influencers has become a part of digital culture, where teenagers seek to integrate with their peers and stay up to date with popular trends.

These influencers often weigh in on every topic religion, politics, science, sports, and entertainment. The current system has successfully embedded triviality into the digital culture, elevating many of these figures to celebrity status on social media platforms. This is evident in terms like “doctors in life,” as used by Touria (Case 6) In Dono’s theory, the function of triviality encourages the passive consumption of content, leading individuals to accept what’s trivial as inevitable and what’s abhorrent as necessary (Alan Dono, 2015).

Designing Teenagers' TikTok Pages and Accounts: Creativity vs. Imitation

In our interaction with the adolescents in the study, we encouraged them to share or describe their TikTok pages after opening the app. From this, we made some key observations about their accounts. The adolescents exhibited a dual tendency: on one hand, some engaged in creative self-expression, while others followed prevailing trends without adding personal touches. This inclination toward blind imitation seems to be influenced by peer pressure and the desire for digital social acceptance. The prevalence of trend-based content fosters behaviors centered on imitation, where conformity to popular content is often prioritized over individual creativity.

However, there were notable examples of creative self-expression. For instance, Chaima (Case9) account stood out for its unique approach—she combined her skills in coordinating music with narratives about healthy emotional and human relationships. Similarly, Nour Eddine (Case 4) page featured religious content in the form of video clips using artificial intelligence, showcasing a distinct expression of identity. These examples reflected the teenagers' ability to express themselves and convey their ideas in innovative ways, proving that creativity can still thrive on platforms like TikTok (Rekesh et al., 2024). Both accounts demonstrated Salah Eddine and Chaima’s control and unconventional effects to communicate messages about religious issues or psychological and emotional phenomena.

In contrast, the majority of pages we observed leaned heavily on imitation. Many teenagers simply replicated the design and style of influencers they admired, often copying videos, descriptions, and even popular hashtags like trending without adding anything unique. This approach highlighted their desire to conform to trends to gain visibility, rather than focusing on creativity or distinguishing themselves from the crowd. When asked, many explained that they felt compelled to follow trends to avoid being excluded or isolated from their peers. A group of teenagers, for example, showed us how they filmed popular challenges and dances with identical music, angles, and effects, clearly prioritizing trend participation over personal creativity.

Conclusion

After this study, it became clear that the trend culture on TikTok among Algerian teenagers, particularly in the city of Oran, represents a complex phenomenon where psychological, social, and cultural factors intertwine. The analysis of the life story narratives highlighted how deeply teenagers are influenced by trends, using them to strengthen their sense of belonging to the digital space. For many, TikTok has evolved into a platform where individual expression and collective behaviors merge, creating a collective mindset that shapes their actions, preferences, and tastes.

Moreover, TikTok trends appear to be more than just a source of entertainment; they serve as tools that shape teenagers' opinions and perspectives on events, raising concerns about the objectivity of the content. The growing influence of social media influencers as media intermediaries further complicates the situation, as they play a significant role in determining popular trends. While some purposeful and creative content does emerge, the emotional nature of the teenage audience and the prevalence of superficial or aimless content create a challenge for the production of more meaningful material.

This points to the urgent need to promote digital literacy among teenagers, encouraging them to engage with the platform more consciously and creatively. Fostering critical thinking skills will be essential for them to evaluate content and sources more effectively. To fully understand the implications of this phenomenon, further studies are required to explore its impact on identity formation and the evolving digital culture of the new generation.

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