

# TikTok's Impact on Attention Spans



## White Paper

This paper examines how the overuse of short-form video platforms like TikTok can shorten attention spans of young adults.

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# Survey Intro

## The Research Question and Preliminary Results

In the Fall 2024, one of our Market Research student groups conducted research on the hypothesis that short-form videos has shortened the attention span of Gen Z. Their goal was to ask questions about how respondents used the platform TikTok, and whether their use, or overuse, of the platform impacted their ability to focus on tasks for extended periods of time.

### Demographics

They collected 207 survey responses. 91% of respondents were 18 to 22 years old. 64% of their respondents were female, and 52% of their respondents have an undergraduate level education.

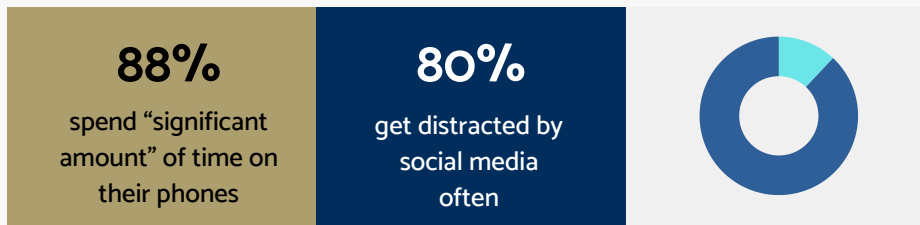
### Preliminary Results

The survey results showed that most participants spend a “significant amount” of time on their phone and admitted to getting distracted by social media often. The survey results were contradictory in terms of the level of impact that TikTok had on respondents daily lives. However, it did present us with areas for further research including the themes of attention span, academic procrastination, and social media addiction.



# Attention Spans

Our student researchers set out to determine whether the use, and overuse, of short-form video formats, particularly on platforms like TikTok have negatively impacted the attention spans of US college students. While their results specifically related to TikTok usage were mixed, their results on social media and smartphone use align with other current research.



However, this data only paints a partial picture of Gen Z's overuse of TikTok. Short form videos first originated in 2014 and TikTok has potentially had the biggest impact on attention spans. Researchers argue this is because TikTok has the most advanced algorithm system, meaning it can recommend content that is more accurate and personalized in order to keep users on the platform.

**80% of TikTok users**

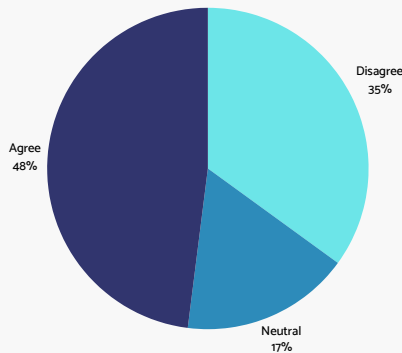
are between 18-34 years old

**8 seconds**

average attention span of Gen Z

Research conducted by Microsoft in 2015 found that the average attention span for Gen Z is 8 seconds, making it 4 seconds less than Millennials. More recent research also claims that increased smartphone use has led to young people facing high rates of constant distraction and reduced focus. Asif and Kazi argue that "when we are constantly bombarded with short, attention-grabbing videos, it becomes more difficult to focus on tasks that require sustained attention such as reading or learning."

# Academic Procrastination



Our survey results did show that overuse of TikTok could correlate to higher levels of academic procrastination. Though our researchers did not specifically ask about academic performance, they found that close to half our participants felt that TikTok impacted their ability to focus and keep to a designated routine. Through supplemental research, we found two recent studies (from [2023](#) and [2024](#)) that examined the effect of short-form video consumption on academic procrastination.

These studies found that short-form video apps are distinctly related to increased academic procrastination because of their design. They are designed to continue playing related video content before manually stopping - keeping the users watching and engaged for a longer period of time. [Xie et al's study found that](#) overusing the form can "foster a short-term oriented mindset, which seeks immediate pleasure and satisfaction." This is in contrast to academic performance that typically demands long-term effort and dedication. Short-form videos [can make it hard for students to control their attention](#) because the videos contain more visual and emotional stimuli than their homework - easily facilitating and contributing to academic procrastination.

48% of students

agree that TikTok affects their ability to focus for extended periods of time

55% of students

agree that TikTok prevents them from going to sleep at designated time



# Social Media Addiction

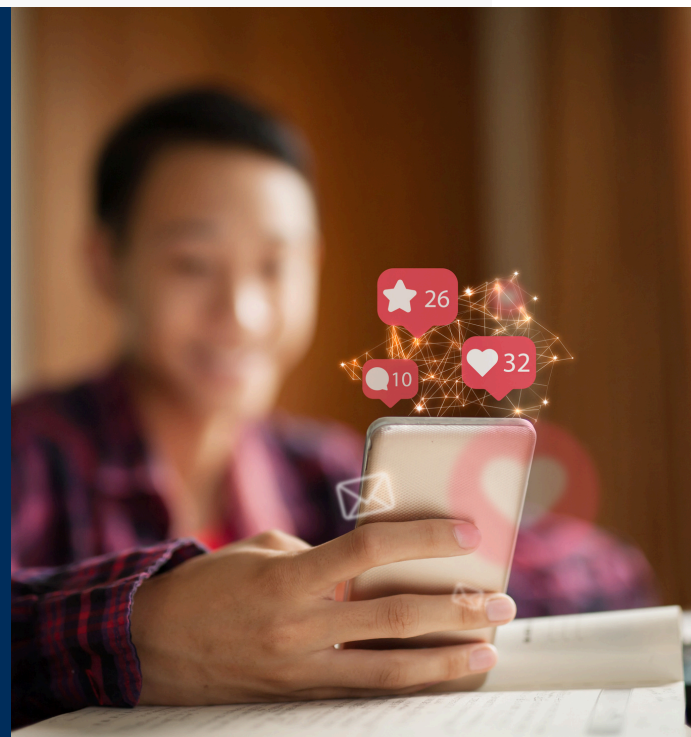
“  
With the complexity of addiction behavior, scholars general acknowledge a closed-loop relationship between TikTok addiction and algorithm optimization. Users seem to be caught in an entertainment spiral. Qin et al, 2022  
”

Our student researchers did not specifically ask about addiction to TikTok or other social media platforms as it did not fit within the limitations of their survey. However, in conducting supplementary research into the topic, we found that several scholars were already having conversations about the concept of TikTok addiction. Several recent studies have further explored the relationship between TikTok and social media addiction.

Qin et al’s [study on addiction behavior on TikTok](#) argued that the platform’s more advanced algorithm technology was more intelligent than previous platforms. They [found that these advancements](#) contributed to users’ flow experience (prolonged time on app) and addiction behavior.



Similarly, [Yan et al’s study](#) argued that there is a big gap in our understanding of “the potential addictive tendencies associated with excessive consumption of these mobile short-form videos and their potential impact on cognitive functions.” Both of these recent studies argue that prolonged consumption of short-form videos, especially on TikTok, may increase the possibility of social media addiction.



# Findings

What does this mean about our understanding of young people's consumption of short-form videos on TikTok?

Here is what we've learned:

- Our survey data showed that Gen Z students are aware that they spend a lot of time of their phones and that they can be easily distracted from completing other tasks.
- Our research also showed that students who use the TikTok app are likely to admit that the app impacts their ability to focus and complete tasks.
- We also explored the further implications of TikTok overuse on academic procrastination and social media addiction.

# Applications

What does it all mean?

Every research project tells a story, and here's how this story can help you better understand this rising generation in the workforce:

- Shortened attention spans and an inability to focus on in-depth tasks will impact how Gen Z workers perform in the workplace.
- Leaders and managers need to understand how this generation has been taught to consume information and complete assigned tasks. Short-form videos have changed the way Gen Z see and interact with the world.
- It may be incumbent upon employers to adapt their means of communication and their expectations for workplace behavior.

# How can we help?

This White Paper only scratched the surface of our understanding of Gen Z and how they impact multigenerational workplaces.

If we can help you or your organization reach a fuller understanding of generations, please reach out via the contact information below, or scan the QR code to book a call with us or learn more about the trainings we offer!



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BOOK A CALL



Our Trainings