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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(3): 330-338

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.3.330
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Investigating Celebrityism Among TikTok Users as a Result of Media Reliance

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Abstract

This research aims to understand the phenomenon of celebrity in the use of TikTok as a media platform with a critical understanding of celebrity in the modern world. Celebrity has an impact on how people view themselves in the contemporary world. The authors conducted an in analysis with these TikTok users to understand their approach to celebrityism on social media and the effects they have implemented. According to the findings of this research, celebrity culture is a well-known media phenomenon that has an impact on the formation of the entire media system. The research method uses descriptive qualitative research by using a library research approach to investigate celebrityism on TikTok. The data is obtained by seeing videos critically on TikTok, observations, documentation, and combined, keeping in mind how celebrity presents on digital platforms, with concentrating on the TikTok users. The authors attempt to apply a social structural approach and operate within the theory of media dependency by Sandra Ball Rokeach and Melvin Defleur in order to explore, analyze, and comprehend this social practice. The results of this research contribute to understanding celebrityism and identifying the factors of social media reliance among TikTok users who make content create and share content on the social media platform TikTok, which highlights the social system, media system, and personality system.

Keywords: celebrityism, media dependency, media reliance, social media, TikTok.

1. Introduction

TikTok's rapid growth has revolutionized the world of online celebrity, giving rise to a new generation of highly visible and influential "TikTok celebrities." This condition, referred to as "celebrityism," is largely a consequence of users' widespread dependence on media, as they increasingly use platforms like TikTok for social contact, entertainment, and information. This dependence, if left untreated, without critical media literacy, can lead to uncritical consumption, distorted perceptions of reality, and vulnerability to manipulative content, despite offering a space for creative expression and community building. Therefore, understanding and applying media literacy instruction is crucial to analyzing the challenges associated with TikTok celebrity (Sitanggang et al., 2024).

TikTok's algorithmic content creation system, combined with its emphasis on high-quality, engaging content, has the potential to create a world where "influencers" can be quickly selected. Consumers who then consume optimized, often aspirational content have the potential to forge increasingly strong parasocial bonds with these figures, as well as bonds between actual connections and constructed individuals (Kurtin et al., 2018; Rubin, McHugh, 1987). This extreme reliance on media can skew public opinion about trains, product advertisements, and even the ideologies espoused by selected individuals, based on their personal beliefs or preferences. Without

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the ability to determine the validity of the material, users may struggle to distinguish between posts and accounts that are presented practically and created for impact or business purposes.

Therefore, media literacy education is seen as an indispensable educational tool. As a means of analyzing, evaluating, producing, and interacting with all forms of communication (Aufderheide, 1997), media literacy provides users with the cognitive tools necessary to build informed mechanisms. By integrating media literacy, consumers can learn to critically analyze selected realities, identify sponsored content, understand the economic motivations within influencer networks, and harness the potential of algorithmic manipulation (Livingstone, 2004). For example, educational research would encourage TikTok users to answer the following questions: "Who created this content and why?" "What values, lifestyles, and landscapes are included in the content?" and "How might different people perceive this message?"

Furthermore, media literacy education helps users understand the negative impacts of their actions. Reflection on the number of songs available on TikTok, emotional responses to certain content, and the potential for harm to body image and self-esteem (Sargent, Berson, 2007; Shukr et al., 2023) is also promoted. By analyzing media impacts, users can build safer platforms and critically evaluate the content they and selected participants interact with. This suggests that users are aware of the reality of the constructed internet lifestyle, that whatever they see is always the best version, and that they are more cautious and receptive to platforms like TikTok.

Due to the increasing media dependency, the celebrity trend that is popular among TikTok users highlights the importance of integrating media literacy. We can create a generation of brave, resilient, intelligent, and conscious citizens by introducing users to critical thinking skills to evaluate, deconstruct, and understand the complexities of celebrity online (Sarwar et al., 2025). This is not about highlighting offensive content; it's about learning more about media and the role of people within it, and ultimately creating healthier and more dignified content using platforms like TikTok.

In addition to various kinds of widely used social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., TikTok is also a social media that can compete with the number of users. The existence of social media makes it easier for many people to access information that is old, new, or information that is being discussed a lot. In addition, social media has also become a tool for learning and teaching because of its function to share knowledge and communicate virtually (Hosen et al., 2021). The TikTok app in 2020 developed rapidly and became a new culture in Indonesia. Although the application has already been there since 2016 but lately the application is much loved by people of different ages. Social media such as TikTok has a video posting feature that makes it easy for fellow users to find information without having to read it, like reading news. Users of TikTok become addicted to scrolling for hours because it is so simple to learn things by just watching short videos. In actuality, TikTok is indeed a platform that provides 15-second entertainment-focused video streaming (Basch et al., 2020).

All the various information and entertainment can be found on TikTok. It can be known as a short video application that contains any genre, such as food, love, education, arts, etc. Also presents services engagingly and entertainingly (Barta et al., 2023). The search feature could search for videos according to what users want to watch, similar to other social media such as Instagram and YouTube. However, this application still has several differences, in that it always shows viral videos on the TikTok homepage.

With the increasing number of users who are addicted to the TikTok application, various users appear who create certain content or are known as social media influencers or TikTok celebrities who marketers use to promote multiple products, services, and ideas so that they are shown as brand ambassadors (Roy et al., 2021). With the existence of TikTok, celebrity makes other TikTok users follow suit to be a part of them. The fast factor in spreading information from the TikTok application through FYP (For You Page) allows users to gain a lot of followers quickly. From the large number of followers, users are quite famous like celebrities who often get various offers to advertise multiple products to increase their income.

Of the many platforms available to serve advertisements, such as broadcast, print, or on the internet, advertisements on the internet or online have increased dramatically so that ads are paid more attention (Kim, Moon, 2020). The number of TikTok celebrities that exist, so many people join in to become TikTok celebrities, is the impact of dependence on TikTok as a social media. This has resulted in the increasingly widespread use of TikTok, which is easily accessible to all ages. Easy access to TikTok for all social circles brings out new celebrities with all the work and skills they show.

Due to the success of the TikTok platform in influencing its users, many other social media applications are competing to follow the TikTok concept as a short-duration vertical video presenter, such as Instagram with its 'Instagram Reels' or YouTube with its 'Shorts' for users for enjoying the videos while presenting or promoting content user-generated like a TikTok celebrity. Even though it has the same concept, using TikTok doesn't need to install other applications like Instagram Reels, where, when you want to use it, users have to install the Instagram application (Menon, 2022)

Celebritism is a term that is still rare in the study of communication and culture today (Sadapotto et al., 2021). Though it's still unusual, it might be a research subject because studies on topics related to celebritism are still uncommon. It can be seen as a valid argument in favor of conducting a study on celebritism. This phenomenon could be an intriguing investigation into modern celebrity culture on social media. Celebrity culture is a well-known media phenomenon that has an impact on the formation of the entire media system.

Whether we like it or not, celebrity culture is a part of our lives and has even invaded some areas. It influences the way we think, act, and behave. It impacts and is affected by entire populations, not just die-hard admirers (Driessens, 2013). Self-promotion on social media also contributes to the creation of celebrity images. Their popularity stems from their collaborative way of life, not from their professional activities. The expansion of mass media as a very intensive process of spreading the globalization of communication and world culture is the major cause of this case study. So that it can be used as both the object and the subject of research on new social media platforms. As a result, it is uncommon for the topic of celebritism to be expressly investigated in connection with TikTok as a new social media platform.

TikTok rewards brief, humorous films that are shared on users' for you pages (Soto-Vásquez, 2022). In actuality, TikTok is a little video that can be found on the foreign version of the Chinese social media platform Douyin. TikTok was launched in September 2016 by Beijing in the company ByteDance for the Chinese domestic market (Abidin, 2020). Since its launch, TikTok has been one of the most visited sites on the internet, and it's known as a short video platform. Videos on TikTok range from 15 s (default length) to 5 min (extended length) with music or sound effects (Yang, 2022). In 2017, TikTok, which is accessible in 150 countries, had more than 2 billion downloads and 800 million monthly active users worldwide (Yachao, 2021).

TikTok allows people to create, share, and consume short-video content (Schellewald, 2021). It has a significant social impact since users are able to freely express their perspectives by using the app as a sharing platform. The content of virality is also an important factor in the success of one's lifestyle. The fundamental idea behind TikTok is that it encourages displays and remakes through a social component, where each video that is made has the potential to make others dependent on it. While TikTok's features will be carefully addressed in the part that follows, researchers want to emphasize that a number of variables have combined to make this app a free area for a variety of people.

Although celebrity information is not the primary reason users visit TikTok, TikTok is used by users to exchange and seek lifestyle-related details, with information available to help users stay informed and promote themselves. As a result, TikTok has teamed up with public lifestyle experts to create an information center that provides users with engaging content. TikTok offers a wide range of ways to share content, including creativity, video challenges, lip sync, songs, dancing, singing, and others. Everyone may make engaging films and have the chance to reshare them with others by using a variety of effects straight through the TikTok program (Sasmita, Achmadi, 2022).

People's celebritism strategies on the TikTok platform include using hashtags (#) as a sign that has the intention of a point, discussion, or event, in order to make the thing you create an interesting trend that other users can see and find relevant information (Sasmita, Achmadi, 2022). Keep an eye out for the following trends: TikTok's celebrity strategy is based on videos that describe a trending topic. Influencers and celebrities must be able to find the right moment for things that will catch the attention of many other TikTok users in order to meet this condition. Frequently post a video that may be interrupted by advertising. This strategy is carried out by regularly uploading/posting videos so that more people see or visit our account video.

2. Materials and methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative research method using a library research approach, such as articles or journals, to investigate celebritism on TikTok. The data is gathered by

seeing the video critically with additional data such as documents and others, keeping in mind how the celebrity presents itself on digital platforms, and concentrating on the TikTok users. The data collection was obtained by seeing videos on TikTok, observations, documentation, and categorizing them. The authors attempt to apply a social structural approach and operate within the theory of media dependency by Sandra Ball Rokeach and Melvin Defleur in order to explore, analyze, and comprehend this social practice more deeply, which highlights the social system, media system, and personality system for investigating social media reliance.

The media dependency emphasizes the society, media, audience, and effects to understand the meaning of social practices and to represent an in-depth analysis of social media effects, including a reciprocal relationship on the larger social system, mass media, and society (Ball-Rokeach, DeFleur, 1975). The media of reliance then comprehends social structure within social media to investigate celebrityism in video content on TikTok. This research discussion begins with society, then moves on to the media, audience, and effects as an interconnected component in media dependency theory. This theory reveals an integral relationship between the audience, the media, and the wider social system (Rafiq, 2012).

3. Discussion

By applying the theory of media dependency, this research investigates how celebrity culture affects interpersonal relationships and self-esteem, which is social media contact defined as a two-way interaction between communities and TikTok users or between society and their consumers' behavior. Celebrity has an impact on how people view themselves in the contemporary world. It is possible to see how celebrity culture has influenced contemporary media and how people view themselves in society. In other words, using media effectively to promote advertising or products and services is crucial for building a company's sustainable image (Zhao et al., 2022).

In relation to that, we have observed media reliance on TikTok demonstrates how the monitoring apps created to assist "the quantification of self," as well as highlights that the market and surveillance values are ingrained for self-branding in the digital environment. These norms and values, held by designers and programmers who are situated in terms of space, race, and gender, offer guidance on what constitutes suitable or positive social media use (MacAulay, 2015). The primary source for this study is presented as statements from TikTok vloggers, hashtag findings, and trending topics. The answer's explanation will analyze the current trending subject to determine how Indonesians use TikTok.

Further, TikTok was created as a result of diverse social constructionist perspectives, which implies that it was established through the interpretation of social interactions among users and viewers who were fascinated by the TikTok platform. The reason TikTok is becoming more and more popular is that anyone may create content on this entertainment platform, regardless of class, position, or popularity; all it takes is the ability to express ideas creatively. While TikTok is an avenue for (momentary) popularity (Petrovic, 2022). Consequently, TikTok admirers are growing as a result of its simple, useful, and distinctive qualities. These issues may lead TikTok users to become more dependent on the media.

Investigating the celebrityism of media reliance on TikTok, discussing the celebrityism phenomenon falls into three categories: social system, media system, and personality system.

Social System: Celebrityism as a Media Reliance on TikTok

The presence of technology and the internet has resulted in the emergence of a new definition of celebrity, which is a product of the media. The ability to share content that draws a large audience has made it possible for anyone to become famous. However, anyone can now become a celebrity by sharing public-interesting content. Since the TikTok boom in 2019, it might be remembered as the year that adults scrambled to understand what "TikTok" was and why millions of teenagers were so obsessed with it (Kaye et al., 2021). All generations have flocked to create interesting content presented in short-form videos. Some share content about well-known brand products such as bags, makeup, or skincare, and there are also online celebrities (celebgrams/celebrity Endorser Instagram) who are famous for uploading content about their luxury lives, traveling abroad, and other topics. This phenomenon is known as the practice of micro-celebrity.

Micro-celebrity is a mindset and a set of behaviors that draw attention through peeks into the private lives of its practitioners and a sense of authenticity that makes their storytelling and branding both approachable and personal (Khamis, Welling, 2017). In response to this, TikTok users who were

broadcasting their lives over the internet use still videos, images, vlogging, and their strategies to market themselves to their online audience as a complete brand package through media reliance.

Media reliance is a related concept to this. In the case of TikTok, what kind of internet celebrity look-alike, and what does it have to do with vloggers as content creators who express their ideas on a digital platform? As is well known, there are certain parallels and distinctions between TikTok and YouTube. Both applications provide space for content creators, such as uploading video content or promoting a product. Teen users engage in micro-celebrity and influencer behavior that thrives and evolves outside of TikTok in order to maintain some brand coherence and maintain a steady flow of attention to their existing digital media by extrapolating, contextualizing, and updating these influencer visibility and logic practices (Abidin, 2020).

On previous social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube, a constant online presence or personality, or building an online brand that people would remember and want, was the basis for sustained and long-lasting fame. Because of the close communication they have, their followers are able to follow, like, and share these influencers, follow their updates on a regular basis, be influenced by the sponsored interior messages they share, and take some curiosity in understanding their private life, both online and offline. Most of the time, the content producers are motivated by a desire for fame (Ang, 2011). This basically means that TikTok users and people who want to become internet celebrities don't always carefully maintain one coherent persona or style, but instead actively and quickly adapt from the most well-liked viral trends and practices on TikTok to try different styles around the world, including trending topics, hashtags, and filters. Therefore, social media is abused as a forum for celebrities rather than being used for videos that are educational or useful.

Media System: TikTok Videos Gain Popularity through Viewer Engagement

Popularity and virality are now frequently determined by how well individuals, especially teenagers, post on platforms like TikTok, where the definitions of these terms have shifted. Users may "like," "share," and comment on TikTok videos after they are posted, which helps the platform's recommendation algorithm distribute them ("How TikTok Recommends Videos #ForYou," 2020) (Hautea et al., 2021). This explanation shows that the majority of users want to have unique postings that receive "engagement" in the form of views, comments, and shares because TikTok users are motivated by the desire to be famous. Their videos can be shown on the For You Page (FYP) on your TikTok platform.

The For You Page (FYP) TikTok homepage is designed like a video feed generated and driven by the TikTok algorithm. This algorithm-based design allows users with a low number of followers to find audiences quickly. It's easy to attract audiences for users. Also, the emergence of interesting videos makes TikTok seem unproductive to users because it is addictive, where the amount of time spent on TikTok is more than what is expected (Falgoust et al., 2022).

The easy design of TikTok's algorithm coming to FYP makes getting "viral" easy. Because it's so easy, TikTok users who get a large number of views are motivated by the possibility of becoming famous so that they can take advantage of the number of views and followers they have obtained in a short time (Falgoust et al., 2022).

Eventually, influencers frequently utilize hashtags like the ones mentioned above to drive a large number of TikTok users to their videos, causing them to become popular. The (#) symbol, or hashtags, are becoming more and more popular among social media users (Rauschnabel et al., 2019). It suggests that users perceive hashtags as driving virality. However, this tendency has brought about the rise of celebrity behavior due to the effects of social media dependency.

Celebritism in TikTok, which was created by an account owner @siscakohl, is one of the objects studied in this study. Sisca Kohl's account with 12.8 million followers is an Indonesian celebrity known for her TikTok content, which she has uploaded since 2020. Sisca took the public by storm with content showing her consuming unique and expensive foods, such as adding gold and caviar to the food, and others. This, of course, shocked the public with the uniqueness of her content. One video she uploaded about catfish pecel ice cream received a lot of attention, with 20 million views, 973.1K likes, and 83.2K comments. Sisca's videos are frequently the videos of choice that appear in FYP (For You Page), which means the most popular uploaded video on TikTok that is included in the homepage of other TikTok users.

Sisca Kohl has become one of the content creators who are increasingly well-known and continue to spark discussion due to the uniqueness of the videos she uploads via her TikTok account. This is evidence of TikTok media, which has a large influence on a person's fame through the TikTok application, and is an illustration of social media dependence by a large audience, both

in terms of audience and content creators, who are increasingly moved to present unique content even beyond reason for the sake of social fame. Sisca Kohl's content makes the audience more interested in the uniqueness of the food produced for the next content. This is undoubtedly one of the major triggers for social media reliance in both children and adults. Something that many people thought was unique and unthinkable before it was successfully presented through Sisca Kohl's TikTok content and became the beginning of her public fame.

Another TikTok account, @adelinemargaret, is one of the famous accounts that has a tremendous impact on TikTok viewers. An account with the name Adeline Margaret has followers totaling 6.2 M, with the total number of likes she has for all the videos she uploads amounting to 195.2M. TikTok account Adeline Margaret often posts videos showing the wealth she has and consuming items or food at a very fantastic price. The influence given in Adeline Margaret's video on viewers' interest can be seen through her content, consuming expensive and unique items that make the public curious about what Adeline will present every time. It also shows the media dependence experienced by Adeline Margaret on everything she does and consumes. Adeline Margaret always shows her consumption activities to the public through a video. She uploads it through the TikTok application, which shows the dependence she has on media and celebrities who happened to her after many of her TikTok videos went viral among social audiences.

It is evident from the two TikTok accounts above that more people are inspired to develop their creativity and create unique content for TikTok. Some people are even more motivated to make odd and unusual uploads for the audience in order to catch their attention and garner a lot of attention, and are famous since the uploads may become popular and a trend in the media. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for people's dependency on social media, particularly the TikTok application, which is highly used by the general public.

Personality System: Online Consumer

Audiences as online consumers through TikTok often see content presented by influencers, so influencers continue to display the same content so that it becomes personal branding, which is a unique personal identity for developing brand relationships with certain target markets (Shafiee et al., 2020). Influencers take advantage of what they have to make videos consistently through the TikTok algorithm, the number of views, and the number of followers which these become interactions that support the appearance of their posted content which in turn may boost the numbers of 'likes', 'forwards', and 'share' (Scherr, Wang, 2021).

One of the TikTok content creators named Sisca Kohl often makes videos about large quantities of food and luxurious food at fantastic prices. With video content like that, it makes a characteristic that is different from other influencers who both create content with food. From the characteristics of her content, she gets a lot of endorsements from various food businesses. This also makes her audience consistently like her content because of the uniqueness of the videos presented on her TikTok account.

TikTok is a well-known social media platform; therefore, brands begin using it for business. The TikTok algorithm is then utilized to provide recommendations for videos based on the audience (Indrawati et al., 2022). Audiences who usually view videos frequently and it is more likely they see the same content on the platform if they enjoy the TikTok video (Indrawati et al., 2022). Thus, increasing the number of users on TikTok helps and makes it easier for businesses to find their target users. This is also supported by audience loyalty as online consumers who consistently like influencers' content.

Interesting examples of comments by audiences can be seen in the TikTok account @siscakohl, which shares their thoughts and something that cannot relate to people who are not as rich as the influencer. Viewers and followers write various comments, which have been translated into English as follows:

@muneleo: just buy one, I'm still thinking about it

@daisysun_04: why not "today I bought the factory"

@hendraoktavia: 1 caviar could build my kitchen

@jopnnnn: 2 cans of caviar, it's my allowance for a year sis

@madakatasa: no, we can't try it

The comments above show different points of view of TikTok audiences, yet mostly thinking about why to buy that much food, and it's better to buy the same type of food but at a more affordable price.

In this case, the relationship between the influencer who conveys the content and the audience who commented above shows the TikTok platform as a media reliance that influences its users.

4. Results

Findings of this study suggest that the media dependency of the TikTok platform falls into three categories: social system, media system, and personality system. First, the result of "*Social System: Celebrityism as a media reliance on TikTok*" indicates that the availability of technology and the internet has led to the birth of a new definition of fame, in which a celebrity is a product of the media. The capacity to publish content that has a large audience has made it feasible for anyone to become famous. Indeed, people of all ages have hurried to create fascinating content for short-form videos. For instance, hashtags appeared that became popular topics on TikTok to find out how people use TikTok. The TikTok hashtags that users frequently use are shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. The most hashtag searches on TikTok

No.	Hashtag	Views
1.	#fyp	31548.6 B
2.	#viral	11535.2 B
3.	#trending	2731.4 B
4.	#trend	1481.8 B
6.	#challenge	252.7 B

By utilizing the mentioned hashtags, they might share a variety of fascinating contents which can immediately attract to TikTok users, such as popular brand products; bags, makeup, or skincare, and those who share content about online celebrities (celebgrams/celebrity endorser Instagram) who are famous for releasing content about their luxury lives, travel overseas, and other subjects. TikTok users, on the other hand, were sharing their lives on the internet through still videos, images, vlogging, and their strategies to market themselves to their online audience as a complete brand package through media dependency.

As a result, instead of being used for instructional or beneficial information, social media is being used to become famous as well as a celebrity. Second, the result of "*Media System: TikTok Videos Gain Popularity Through Viewer Engagement*" reveals that on sites like TikTok, where the definitions of these terms have changed, people's popularity and virality are now commonly judged by how well, especially teens, they post. To put it simply, instead of maintaining a single consistent personality or style, TikTok users and those aspiring to be internet celebrities actively and quickly adapt from the most popular viral trends and practices on TikTok to try different styles all over the world, including trending topics, hashtags, and filters.

However, influencers who use TikTok often employ hashtags like those listed above to attract a lot of TikTok users to their videos, making them popular, regarding @SiscaKohl and @AdelineMargareth, two well-known TikTok content creators. They publish a lot of videos demonstrating their wealth and consumption of goods purchased at incredibly high prices. Third, "*Personality System: Online Consumer*" shows that through TikTok, the audiences and the creators are online consumers. Audiences frequently view content offered by influencers. As a result, influencers continue to share the same content, building personal branding—a distinctive personal identity—that helps them build relationships with specific target markets. The TikTok algorithm, the number of views, and the number of followers enable influencers to take advantage of their resources and produce films often. These interactions encourage the appearance of their posted material and may increase the number of "likes," "forwards," and "shares."

5. Conclusion

Various social media applications frequently have an impact in the form of the most popular media reliance on the TikTok application. TikTok is currently popular among a wide range of people. It can be a medium for people competing to have personal branding through videos uploaded containing works, jokes, and even unique things that someone does. Some people became famous and as public figures through the TikTok application. That fame is coming from their branding through the TikTok application with an account that has thousands of followers and uploads that can be counted regularly every day. That thing caused someone to become the focus of the public in their uploads.

The study concludes that social media, particularly the TikTok application, has had a huge dependence impact on its users. In short, the TikTok application has a significant impact as a medium for personal branding on social media, as well as several effects that show the media's reliance on TikTok.

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