



A Phenomenological Analysis of Students' Digital Emotional Questions (EQ) in the Era of TikTok Dominance

Ayu Raudatul Jannah¹, Imaniyatul Fitriyah²

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Negeri Madura, Indonesia

Email: ayuraudatul@tutor.iainmadura.ac.id¹; imaniya@iainmadura.ac.id²

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the phenomenon of students' digital EQ in the era of TikTok dominance. This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of eight students who actively use TikTok. Participants were selected based on purposive sampling with the criteria of using TikTok for at least two hours a day for six months. Information was collected through unstructured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that six of the eight students had low digital EQ, which was evident in their poor self-awareness and self-regulation, which then impacted their learning motivation. In addition, several students also demonstrated low empathy and social skills when using TikTok. This confirms that students' digital EQ in the era of TikTok dominance has the potential to influence student development, both emotionally and socially.

Keywords: *EQ Digital, Students, TikTok.*

PRELIMINARY

The rapid development of communication and information technology has brought about new changes in the social lives of teenagers. Essentially, this is evident in how teenagers interact in everyday life (Daulay, et.al., 2022). In the current era of the digital revolution, various types of platforms have emerged that attract the attention of teenagers, one of the dominant ones being TikTok. TikTok is not just an application but has unique characteristics that make it closely integrated into teenagers' daily routines. The trends and content styles that are characteristic of TikTok have become a means for teenagers to express themselves, socialize, and obtain information. This is as according to Omar & Dequan (2020), TikTok is one of the most dominant platforms in the current digital era. Present as a mobile-based short video application, TikTok is filling cyberspace and becoming a global phenomenon that has entered life through its content that can be freely consumed, including by students.

During the developmental phase, adolescence is a crucial time when individuals are easily swayed by environmental influences. The desire for social recognition, coupled with hormonal and emotional changes, makes adolescents more sensitive to the development of social interactions, both in person and through digital media (Andriyani, 2020). This is what makes TikTok have a dual impact: on the one hand, TikTok is a platform that provides opportunities for teenagers to develop their creativity without limits and makes it easier for them to build social relationships by making new friends. This is as conveyed by Anisa et al. (2025) in their research, which states that the TikTok platform encourages active learning and constructive self-expression in students. This can be seen in how through TikTok students can explore new skills and interests and improve their interaction abilities.

However, on the other hand, the TikTok platform also faces emotional challenges for teenagers, such as pressure to appear perfect and the risk of cyberbullying, which can impact their mental health. Furthermore, excessive exposure to social media content, particularly the TikTok platform, raises questions about how exposure to TikTok affects students' digital emotional intelligence (digital EQ).

According to Bhardwaj et al. (2020), digital EQ is an individual's ability to understand, manage, and express their emotions effectively online. Digital EQ is crucial because student interactions are no longer limited to the real world but also the virtual world. Students no longer spend their time in the physical world but rather in digital spaces, where there are differences in ethics and norms in communication, emotional expression, and social consequences.

TikTok, with its unique characteristics, can impact students' digital EQ. Its algorithm, designed to adapt to user preferences, tends to favor content that aligns with their thinking. This can hinder their ability to discover new ideas and limit their opportunities to develop empathy, as their world is limited to the things they enjoy (Cinelli et al., 2021). The phenomenon of trends and challenges on the dominant TikTok platform is creating an environment where students often feel they have to adhere to certain standards where it's all just for the sake of popularity (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). The pressure of feeling the need to always be up to date with new trends can make students ignore ethics for the sake of viral appeal.

Furthermore, the social validation mechanism of likes, shares, and comments received from a post is not merely a number or indicator of interaction, but rather a measure of social acceptance. If students rely on external validation from online acceptance for their self-esteem, they will struggle to regulate their emotions. In light of the above, this study focuses on how students understand and manage their emotions amidst the dynamics of TikTok social media.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method so that it can explore and describe in more depth students' experiences regarding their digital emotional questions (digital EQ) in the current era of TikTok dominance. The research location is a high school in Pamekasan Regency and participants in the study were selected using purposive sampling with the following characteristics: 1) male or female students, 2) high school students aged 13-18 years, 3) using TikTok at least 2 hours every day for 6 months. The research data was obtained through unstructured interviews, then the data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis, namely data was collected, identified, and analyzed to further determine relevant themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following is a summary of interviews conducted with eight students regarding their digital EQ in the era of TikTok dominance. The following interviews were conducted to gain insight into students' digital EQ in the current era of TikTok dominance. As stated by Triono (2024), the components of digital EQ include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Table 1. Interview Summary Results

Source person	Digital EQ Components				
	Self-awareness	Self-Regulation	Motivation	Empathy	Social Skills
Student 1 (female, 13 years old)	TikTok can make you lose track of time, but it's hard to stop when you see influencer content.	Often delay studying or doing assignments when you are busy playing TikTok	Motivation to study continues to decline due to more focus on scrolling through content on TikTok.	Sometimes I still join in spreading embarrassing videos of my friends	Prefer to interact online, occasionally engaging in arguments in the comments section
Student 2 (female, 13 years old)	Aware of the impact of TikTok, but unable to resist	Feeling too lazy to do anything else after scrolling through	Feeling bored with school activities or after-school tutoring?	Sometimes I feel sorry when I see content that aims to reveal	I prefer interacting with friends on TikTok, because it's not just

	following the trends on TikTok, especially when invited by friends	TikTok for too long. Wanting to create viral content on TikTok, like dancing or videos with friends or a partner, but worried about being punished for breaking school rules.	Feeling more energized by watching new trends on TikTok	other people's shame, but sometimes I still like to follow my friends in making comments with harsh words.	limited to school friends, but I can meet new people from different cities.
Student 3 (male, 13 years old)	Having a high level of curiosity and not thinking about the impact of TikTok	It's hard to control the urge to scroll through content on TikTok.	Lacking enthusiasm in studies, but having a strong motivation to create trending content on TikTok to increase views and get lots of likes	Feeling uncomfortable when viewing content that insults other people	Having a lot of online acquaintances and tending to overshare about personal things
Student 4 (female, 14 years old)	Feeling the need to follow trends on TikTok and create similar content to get likes	Several times uploaded videos without wearing a hijab, even though she knew that it violated school regulations.	Lack of focus and feeling bored when having to study, but feeling excited when learning something that is trending on TikTok and creating similar content	Participate in providing negative comments on other people's posts that you don't like.	Often mocks other people by creating shameful content
Student 5 (female, 14 years old)	Must be perfect every time you create content on TikTok	Always want to follow the new trends on TikTok	Lessons at school are just a formality and I want to be more active on TikTok because I want to be a TikToker.	Have you ever had a group of friends give harsh comments on other people's posts that you didn't like?	Like uploading stories or videos about personal problems on TikTok because I feel that my friends on TikTok are more attentive
Student 6 (male, 14 years)	Not too concerned	Occasionally follow trends	There is a desire to	Making fun of other	Likes to upload videos or

old)	about the impact that can be caused by TikTok content	because of my girlfriend's invitation	learn, play TikTok because you see content made by your girlfriend and when you scroll through TikTok you feel lazy to study.	people by creating content or stories on TikTok	content that contains other people's shame and has been involved in mutual criticism in the comments column on TikTok
Student 7 (female, 15 years old)	Scrolling through TikTok is just a way to unwind when I'm tired of studying. I feel like I don't always have to follow TikTok trends.	Occasionally, she makes videos with friends to upload to TikTok. These videos aren't overly over-the-top, but rather choose trends that middle school students can still follow.	Learning remains the main goal, and TikTok is only a form of entertainment after studying.	Prefer not to see content that is aimed at denigrating other people	Less likely to communicate in the TikTok comments column, occasionally comments on friends' content, such as giving emoticons
Student 8 (female, 15 years old)	They don't like watching or creating useless content, even if it's trending on TikTok. The videos they watch are usually product reviews or cooking tutorials.	Use TikTok only after finishing studying at night until bedtime, approximately 2 hours.	TikTok is used without disrupting school priorities. Academic learning comes first.	Don't like seeing content or stories of friends who criticize each other on TikTok	Don't like writing in the TikTok comments column, let alone criticizing each other, when you feel there is a problem directly via private chat

Interviews yielded mixed results regarding their digital EQ in the era of TikTok's dominance. Students in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 reported poor self-awareness and self-regulation when using TikTok. This was evident in Student 1, who frequently lost track of time while using TikTok.

“I started using TikTok in 5th grade. Once I open the app, it's addictive, and I can lose track of time. I intended to just scroll for a bit, but it ended up being over two hours. It's hard to stop scrolling, especially when I see new content from influencers. Their content piques my curiosity. It's fun to watch, especially when it features funny dance moves.” (SW1/28/7/2025).

Student 2 is aware of the negative impacts of using TikTok, but the temptation to follow trends on TikTok is stronger.

“I realize that when I open the TikTok app, I lose track of time, and usually after watching content on TikTok, I wonder why my life isn't as perfect as those TikTok influencers. I really want to create trending content on TikTok,

especially with friends in my circle. Create dance videos using viral sounds or create content with my boyfriend like the viral videos. Unfortunately, at my school, there are rules that prohibit dating and uploading photos and videos of dancing, especially without wearing a hijab” (SW2/28/7/2025).

This is different from student 3 who does not care about the impact that can be caused by using TikTok.

“My parents wouldn't let me use my phone, saying it would distract me from school. But I wanted to be like my other friends, so I'd play with it in secret. Only when my parents weren't home, or when they were relaxing on the porch, or asleep, would I be free to play. I loved watching TikTok the most because it was fun watching my friends make videos on it. I also wanted to create content that was trending on TikTok. I was even called in by my guidance counselor because of my curiosity. There was content that was trending on TikTok, and it seemed cool when young people did that, so I got curious and made it and uploaded it to TikTok. Because of that content, I was reported to the guidance counselor, and it turned out I shouldn't have created content like that, because it's inappropriate for a student, especially as a Muslim. I didn't try to research it first before creating content; I was curious, I thought it was cool, so I made it anyway” (SW3/28/7/2025).

This is what was experienced by student 6 who did not really think about the impacts that could arise from using TikTok.

“If you ask me about the impact of playing TikTok, I don't know and haven't looked into it. Besides, I play TikTok because my girlfriend likes to upload videos on her TikTok. She also likes live videos, so I watch them. Occasionally, we make videos together, uploading videos with viral sounds. If she's asked to upload them, I just upload them” (SW6/29/7/2025).

Meanwhile, students in grades 4 and 5 seem to feel compelled to follow TikTok trends to gain views, and they must look perfect to garner likes on every piece of content they create. This suggests they have become reliant on external validation for their livelihood.

“I like playing TikTok because I feel like I can express my feelings freely. Every time there's a new trend, I feel like I have to be able to create similar content so I don't get left behind by my other friends. I don't feel burdened, I create content because I like it, I feel happy, like I'm famous every time a lot of people leave comments, especially if my seniors or guys from other schools watch my content. I create content to increase views and the better the content, usually more people like it, for example, making dance content or making videos with viral sounds. The problem is that most of the content on TikTok that goes viral is people who don't wear a hijab, although yes, there are also those who do. So if you're caught uploading a video without a hijab, you're immediately called to the guidance counselor's office, because at school there's a rule that you're not allowed to upload photos or videos without a hijab, even at home. Because I've received two warnings from the guidance counselor, I had to create a new TikTok account. I thought it was safe, but I still got caught, and in the end I received sanctions” (SW4/29/7/2025).

This is what student 5 said regarding the use of the TikTok platform.

“I admit, every time a new trend appears on TikTok, I'm compelled to create similar content. The more I watch influencers' content, the more I aspire to be like them. I've become lazy about studying and just want to focus on creating engaging content. I want to be famous like TikTokers” (SW5/29/7/2025).

On the other hand, student 7 has the view that TikTok is just a diversion that is used as a refresher and there is no need to follow trends.

“I spend most of my time studying. I study at school in the morning. I have tutoring sessions in the evening, every Monday and Wednesday. If I don't have tutoring sessions, I study independently at home. I can usually scroll through TikTok after studying, around 8 to 10, and then go to bed. I occasionally make videos with my classmates, similar to the content that's currently trending on TikTok, but the important thing is that the content isn't excessive and is still appropriate for school-age children. I also dislike content that's excessive and doesn't feel appropriate for school-age children” (SW7/29/7/2025).

Even student 8 demonstrated greater selectiveness and self-reflection. She was able to limit the content she consumed on TikTok.

“I usually watch TikTok just to watch cooking tutorials or content that reviews products, like food. So I don't really like watching content that involves dancing, as it seems pointless. I sometimes create content, usually for school activities like bazaars, I create promotional content, or for class meetings, I make videos with my classmates. Even then, it's limited because cell phones are not allowed at school, so I usually ask permission to bring my phone and leave it with the guidance counselor” (SW8/29/7/2025).

The phenomenon of a lack of digital self-awareness among students indicates that they have not fully recognized how the use of the TikTok platform affects their condition, both emotionally and mentally. Pappa et al. (2025), revealed that emotional stress in students can be triggered by high social expectations. When they are expected to be perfect and are unable to meet these demands, they will experience anxiety, frustration, and even depression. Ilat et al. (2023), added that mental health problems experienced by students are triggered by the demand to appear perfect on social media. The existence of social media platforms today seems to encourage users to project a perfect self-image. Teenage students are very easily influenced, where they end up constantly trying to show a perfect self, starting from editing photos or making videos with various filters just to get likes from others.

In addition, from the motivational aspect, it was found that students 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6's use of the TikTok platform hindered their learning motivation. This was indicated by the continuously decreasing learning motivation experienced by student 1 because he was more focused on scrolling through TikTok content than studying. Likewise, student 2, who felt bored when having to study at school or take tutoring, was more enthusiastic about seeing new content that was trending on TikTok. Students 3 and 4 felt less enthusiastic about following lessons and felt bored when having to study, but were very enthusiastic about learning and creating content that was trending on TikTok. Even student 5 thought that school was just a formality and was more enthusiastic about pursuing content creation on TikTok because he wanted to be a TikToker. In contrast, student 6 actually still had a desire to learn, it was just that the temptation to scroll through TikTok was too great and resulted in laziness to study. This shows that motivation in the academic field has been displaced by motivation in the digital field. This is as conveyed by Dunn & Zimmer (2020) regarding the concept of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. In this case, the TikTok platform acts as a stronger extrinsic motivator and can overcome students' intrinsic motivation to learn. Although this doesn't necessarily apply to students in grades 7 and 8. They have strong intrinsic motivation for academics, and TikTok doesn't easily influence them, as learning remains a top priority and TikTok is merely a form of entertainment that doesn't interfere with their learning priorities.

Furthermore, from the empathy and social skills aspects, there are indications that some students exhibit bad behavior, such as participating in spreading embarrassing videos of their friends, participating in making rude or negative comments on posts by people they don't like, creating embarrassing content or videos and uploading them to tease others. This is as stated by Qolbya et al. (2023) that students who have low digital empathy are shown by their behavior that does not think about the impact of their actions in cyberspace which could hurt others. They have positioned themselves as perpetrators of cyberbullying by spreading negative content or writing negative comments. They do not have good empathy for the emotional impact they cause.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that six of the eight students were found to have low digital EQ. This is demonstrated by several components. First, students have poor self-awareness and self-regulation when using TikTok. They are unable to manage the duration of their time on the platform. Furthermore, watching content on TikTok for too long also impacts them emotionally and mentally. Furthermore, excessive TikTok use results in decreased motivation to learn. Time that is usually used for academic-related activities, such as studying, doing assignments, and tutoring. Furthermore, this study also identified low empathy and social skills among some students when using the TikTok platform. They tend not to consider the impact of negative comments or content they create. This phenomenon indicates that students' digital EQ remains low in the era of TikTok's dominance, which impacts their emotional and social development.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018). Teen's Social Media Habits and Experiences. *PEW Research Center, November*, 1–20. <https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/11/28/teens-social-media-habits-and-experiences/>
- Andriyani, J. (2020). Peran Lingkungan Keluarga Dalam Mengatasi Kenakalan Remaja. *At-Taujih: Bimbingan Dan Konseling Islam*, 3(1), 86. <https://doi.org/10.22373/taujih.v3i1.7235>
- Anisa, Subroto, D. E., Anggun Mutia, Imas Purnamasari, & Tarsih Tarsih. (2025). Analisis Konten Tiktok Terhadap Motivasi Belajar Siswa Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Yudistira : Publikasi Riset Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Bahasa*, 3(3), 83–101. <https://doi.org/10.61132/yudistira.v3i3.1928>
- Bhardwaj, G., Singh, S. V., & Kumar, V. (2020). An empirical study of artificial intelligence and its impact on human resource functions. *Proceedings of International Conference on Computation, Automation and Knowledge Management, ICCAKM 2020, January*, 47–51. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICCAKM46823.2020.9051544>
- Cinelli, M., de Francisci Morales, G., Galeazzi, A., Quattrociochi, W., & Starnini, M. (2021). The echo chamber effect on social media. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 118(9). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023301118>
- Daulay, N., Assingkily, M. S., & Munthe, A. K. (2022). The relationship between gratitude and well-being: The moderating effect of religiosity on university freshmen during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psikohumaniora: Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi*, 7(1), 51-64. <https://doi.org/10.21580/pjpp.v7i1.11055>
- Dunn, J. C., & Zimmer, C. (2020). Self-determination theory. *Routledge Handbook of Adapted Physical Education*, 55(1), 296–312. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429052675-23>
- Ilat, I. P., Tapada, J., Durandt, C., & Koyongian, F. (2023). Dampak Penggunaan Media Sosial Bagi Kesehatan Mental Remaja. *Jurnal Ilmiah Wabana Pendidikan*, 9(10), 830–837. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10276920>
- Omar, B., & Dequan, W. (2020). Watch, share or create: The influence of personality traits and user motivation on TikTok mobile video usage. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies*, 14(4), 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.3991/IJIM.V14I04.12429>
- Pappa, S., Pratikto, H., & Aristawati, A. R. (2025). Leisure Boredom dan Kecenderungan Kecanduan Media Sosial Tik Tok pada Gen Z. *Psimphoni*, 5(2), 27. <https://doi.org/10.30595/psimphoni.v5i2.23620>
- Qolbya, A. G., Aleissya Sahira Siswandi, & Raissa Dwifandra Putri. (2023). Empati dan Cyberbullying pada Remaja Pengguna Media Sosial: Sebuah Kajian Literatur. *Flourishing Journal*, 3(9), 352–359. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um070v3i92023p352-359>
- Triono, F. (2024). Kecerdasan Emosional. In *Kecerdasan emosional*. CV. Eureka Media Aksara.