Overview: TikTok is a popular social media app used by millions across the globe. It is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance and information shared to the app is required by Chinese law to be released to the government. TikTok features short videos of people dancing, lip-syncing, comedy, and story sharing. This app uses algorithms to custom curate a set of videos for each specific user based on previously liked videos, accounts followed, hashtags, time watched, and others. The data gathered for individuals is extensive and creates an addictive effect for the user. This app causes attention problems, addiction to stimuli, and can further traumatize sensitive individuals.

Attention Problems as a Result of TikTok

The short videos that TikTok has trains users to pay attention for about a minute and no longer. If the video is not interesting to the user, they simply scroll to the next one. This eliminates the search for and choice of content.

The app automatically programs the next videos for you to watch. This takes the active choice of content away from the user and has the user passively interact, making them unaware of time passing, and training their brain to stop thinking about the content as soon as they scroll away. This detracts from school-based learning where students are taught to integrate their knowledge into their daily lives and think beyond the original content.

With TikTok, if a video does not catch your attention in 10 seconds, people will scroll away to never think about it again.

How Does TikTok Cause Trauma?

This algorithmic system does not account for sensitive content per user. For example, people can publicly discuss their traumatic experiences such as sexual assault, eating disorders, self harm, and describe suicide attempts. This information can be shown on any individuals For You page regardless of age, gender, and other demographics. This means young teenagers are being shown videos of adults that promote dangerous habits like self harm without warning. The lack of choice removes consent and endangers people, especially teenagers, who are highly susceptible to internet trends.

Addiction to TikTok

The For You page on TikTok is a section that uses your collected data to promote videos that captivate your attention.

- no limit to the number of videos
- generates a constant stream designed to maintain your attention.
- Glues the user to their phone for hours at a time.

Appropriate amount of screentime per day is debatable but spending time mindlessly watching videos that do not actively educate you detract from other life experiences.

This chart shoes the age of all TikTok users. This emphasizes the skew towards the younger population.

References