



BACHELOR THESIS

**Scrolling through Emotions: An Exploration  
of TikTok Content and its Effects on  
Self-Compassion and Mood in Young Adults**

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## Abstract

TikTok has become a popular social media platform among young adults, with more than 1 billion users worldwide. While TikTok is associated with fun and entertaining content, there is also a growing concern that some content can have negative effects on wellbeing. Mood and self-compassion show strong positive links to wellbeing, which is why the aim of this study was to investigate the different types of content that young adults between the ages 18-25 come across on TikTok and how it affects their mood and self-compassion. Despite the app's popularity, there have been barely any studies on TikTok, and the only studies that have been performed were quantitative.. This study wants to fill a gap by qualitatively exploring the effects of TikTok content on wellbeing. This was done by means of a diary study. After going through a screening questionnaire which included questions about their demographics and TikTok use, 22 participants completed daily diary entries for 5 days. The diary study asked open questions regarding the type of content they engaged with, and their mood and self-compassion levels. The answers were analysed with thematic analysis, using a data-driven codebook. Results showed that content in the „Entertainment“ category mostly showed positive results, while content in the „Current Affairs and Societal Matters“ category affected participants more negatively. Regarding self-compassion, the research showed that there have been positive links to common humanity and self-kindness, two of the elements of self-compassion. Around half of the videos did not have an effect on self-compassion though. The findings suggest that there are definitely links between certain TikTok content and their effects on mood and self-compassion. These insights can be used for further research on this topic with bigger sample sizes and different target groups. Furthermore, more awareness around the topic of self-compassion can be created and its importance in regards to TikTok use.

*Keywords: adolescence, TikTok, self-compassion, mood, wellbeing*

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, social media has significantly increased in popularity, especially among young adults. It has become a prominent aspect of their daily lives, shaping the way they interact with others (Keyte et al., 2020) and consume information. Young adults between the ages 16-25 spend an average of 5 hours and 49 minutes each day on social media (Georgiev & Defensor, 2023). In 2021, TikTok stood out as one of the most popular social media platforms, with a user base of more than one billion people worldwide (TikTok, 2021). TikTok's popularity is particularly strong among young adults with 38.5% of the user base being under the age of 25. (Statista, 2022)

On TikTok users can share and watch short videos on basically any topic. While the app is associated with fun and entertaining content, there is also a growing concern that TikTok can have negative effects on wellbeing. Numerous studies suggest that social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are linked to depression, anxiety, and other negative impacts on wellbeing (Riehm et al., 2019; Twenge & Campbell, 2019). Other studies on the other hand have found mixed effects or even positive effects regarding social media use (Liu et al., 2019; Elmquist & McLaughlin, 2017). Even though TikTok has turned into such a popular app, there has been barely any research done on its effects on wellbeing, especially no studies that dive deeper into the contents of TikTok. Most of the studies that have been performed on TikTok are looking at it in a quantitative way and only consider factors like screen time (e.g. Twenge & Campbell, 2019).

Wellbeing can be defined by many factors such as mood and self-compassion. Both mood and self-compassion have a strong positive link to wellbeing as found through previous research (Huppert, 2009; Neff, 2023). Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the different types of content that young adults between the ages 18-25 come across on TikTok and how it affects their mood and self-compassion. This study wants to dive deeper into how young adults perceive the different content they engage with and draw conclusions on how it affects their wellbeing. This raised the following research question:

**Research Question:** *What are the types of content young adults come across on TikTok and how does this content affect their self-compassion and mood?*

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This research focused on adolescents and their relationship with social media, with a special focus on TikTok. Therefore, in the following section, the concepts of adolescents, social media, and wellbeing, as well as two of the indicators of wellbeing, self-compassion and mood, will be outlined. This section focuses on these key concepts and their relationships with each other, which will eventually give a better overview over the theories that this research is based on and help formulate subquestions.

### **2.1. Adolescents and Social Media**

Adolescence is an important phase in human development, where individuals transition from childhood to adulthood, experiencing a period of many changes that shape who they become. As defined by Sawyer et al. (2018), the age of adolescents typically ranges from age 10 to 25. This period can be further divided in three developmental phases, which are early adolescence from age 10 to 14, middle adolescence from age 15 to 17, and late adolescence from age 18 to 25. All of these phases are characterised by unique needs, experiences and challenges. One important process, which happens during late adolescence, is the formation of intimate relationships and meaningful connections, which can happen both romantically and socially (Furman et al., 1999). In this context, the role of social media cannot be overseen, as today's young adults are the first generation to have grown up with social media and building connections happens online more frequently. Social networks, virtual communities, or online dating platforms have become an integral part of adolescents' lives, shaping the way they develop and maintain their friendships (Keyte et al., 2020).

More than 84% of young adults between 18 and 29 are using social media (Auxier & Anderson, 2021), with the percentage of the younger half of this age group being even higher. A significant majority of these young people engage with these platforms regularly, spending an average of 5 hours and 49 minutes each day on social media for the 16-24 age group (Georgiev & Defensor, 2023). Adolescents use social media to stay connected with friends, make plans, meet new people and get to know them better, and to present themselves to others (Shapiro & Margolin, 2013). This shows how deeply integrated these platforms are in adolescents' lives. Granic and colleagues (2020) argue that young adults are living in a hybrid reality, where psychological and social functioning is dependent on their online activities.

Therefore, it is not possible to look at identity development of young adults without also looking at their social media use.

In the past years, TikTok has emerged as one of the most popular social media platforms, with a user base of more than one billion users in 2021 (TikTok, 2021). 55% of 18-24 year olds say that they use TikTok (Auxier & Anderson, 2021) and according to Statista (2023) this age group also makes up the biggest user group of the platform, with 21% being female and 17.5% being male. Adolescents mostly use TikTok for entertainment, with comedy and musical performances having emerged as the most popular content categories for both male and female users. However, there are also differences between both genders, as comedy videos tend to be more popular among male users, while DIY and beauty content on the other hand is more popular among female users. (Shutsko, 2020).

Social media platforms like TikTok play a highly influential role in the identity development of young adults. Since the popularity of these platforms is growing, it is important to understand how adolescents, especially between 18 and 25, are affected by their social media use.

## **2.2. Social Media and Wellbeing**

Young adults between the ages 18 and 25 are the most vulnerable group compared to all other adult age groups when it comes to mental illnesses. The American National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2023) reports that young people between the ages 18 and 25 have an incidence of mental illnesses at 25.8%, compared to 22.2% for ages 26 to 49, and 13.8% for ages 50 and up. There are several risk factors like peer pressure, family conflicts or academic difficulties that contribute to this vulnerability, but according to previous research, social media also plays a role. Research by Riehm et al. (2019) indicates that adolescents who use social media for more than three hours daily have a much higher risk of developing mental health issues. Several other studies have linked social media platforms to depression, anxiety, and other negative effects on wellbeing. According to them, these negative effects are caused by excessive screen time, or social comparison. (e.g. Twenge & Campbell, 2019)

However, there have also been several studies that found mixed effects or even positive effects of social media use. Elmquist and McLaughlin (2017) say that even though there are potential harms like triggers, cyberbullying or trolling, social media also offers

benefits, that include self-expression, a sense of community and connectivity. Beyens et al. (2020) argue that the effects of social media use are different for each person, but that there is a small overall positive effect, when someone uses social media actively. Verduyn et al. (2017) found that only when someone passively uses social media that social comparisons and envy are evoked, which can negatively affect the person's wellbeing. On the other hand, being a more active user actually stimulates feelings of being socially connected (Verduyn et al., 2017). Therefore, actively engaging on social media had a positive relationship on subjective wellbeing. Liu et al. (2019) add to that, that social media use for entertainment or interactions with others contributes to a higher wellbeing, compared to browsing content, a passive activity, which was linked with lower wellbeing. A study by Kyparissiadis & Diamantaki (2022) has found that TikTok is being used more and more for mental health communication, where creators share personal stories and about anxiety and stress. As other studies found that active participation on social media can increase wellbeing, this raises the following subquestions:

**SQ 1:** *How does active engagement with the TikTok content they consume affect adolescents' wellbeing?*

**SQ 2:** *Does engagement with health-related content positively affect young adults' wellbeing?*

There are both positive and negative associations with social media use on wellbeing. Therefore it is interesting to see how this exactly applies to TikTok content, because although TikTok has a massive user base and turned into a highly popular app, not much research has been done on TikTok specifically. Most studies only relate to social media use in general, and all studies that have been done on TikTok applied the uses and gratifications theory to give insights into user motives (Montag et al., 2021). Therefore, more research on TikTok content and its effects on wellbeing is needed.

### **2.3. Indicators of Wellbeing: Self-Compassion and Mood**

When we talk about wellbeing, it is important to define the difference between sustainable and psychological wellbeing. Huppert (2009) defines sustainable wellbeing as being able to function effectively, even when experiencing painful emotions like grief or



failure. This includes being able to have control over one's life, having goals and a sense of purpose, and being able to have positive relationships. Psychological wellbeing, on the other hand, includes also feeling good (Huppert, 2009). Two indicators of psychological wellbeing are mood and self-compassion. Mood relates to a temporary state of emotions such as feeling happy, or feeling sad. Feelings like happiness, satisfaction, engagement, interest, and affection all indicate psychological wellbeing (Huppert, 2009). Negative emotions are a normal part of life, but if it is not possible to manage these negative emotions and they become very long-lasting, this damages psychological wellbeing greatly. Therefore, understanding one's mood can provide insights into one's overall wellbeing.

Self-compassion is another important indicator of wellbeing. As described by Neff (2023), self-compassion can be defined as being supportive and understanding towards oneself when experiencing pain and suffering. Neff's (2023) theoretical model includes six elements, three of which are focused on increasing certain aspects. These are treating oneself with kindness (Self-kindness), recognising that pain is a shared human experience (Common humanity), and being mindful towards one's own negative feelings so that they will not get avoided or suppressed (Mindfulness). On the opposite of that, the aspects that should be decreased, are criticising one's own flaws (Self-judgement), thinking that pain is unique to the individual (Isolation), and being overly attached to one's thoughts and feelings (Over-identification). This research focuses on the elements self-kindness and common humanity, and their counter elements self-judgement and isolation. Those were chosen because they were perceived as the elements with the highest relevance in regards to social media use.

Self-compassion is very positively linked with wellbeing, among adolescents and adults (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Bluth et al. (2015) found that individuals with a high self-compassion also showed a greater emotional wellbeing, and they also have lower levels of depression and anxiety (Marsh et al., 2017). Recent research even showed that content which promotes self-compassion, either on TikTok (Seekis & Kennedy, 2023) or on Instagram (Slater et al., 2017), leads to higher self-compassion and a reduced negative mood. Keyte et al. (2020) say that self-compassion is one element that could help developing a healthy relationship to social media. Therefore, it is very important to find out which kind of other

contents can positively influence self-compassion, as it is evident that self-compassion is positively linked to wellbeing.

This study focused on young adults between the ages 18 and 25 as their group is not only one of the most frequent social media users, but they are also the most vulnerable group to develop mental health issues. This study wants to reveal which kinds of content have positive effects on wellbeing and which ones have negative effects. TikTok was chosen because it is one of the most popular social media platforms right now but there have been very little studies about it yet. Self-compassion and mood are important indicators of wellbeing, therefore the study examines these two factors.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Research Design and Procedure**

This study used a diary study approach to explore the effects of different content on TikTok on young adults' self-compassion and mood. The diary study was chosen for this research because it enables the collection of detailed and frequent information about experiences in the daily lives of the participants (Bolger et al., 2003). In a short period of time (Ohly et al., 2010) it is possible to capture real-world expressions (Chun, 2016) and gain deeper insights into participant's behaviour and intentions. By gathering data from the same group of participants multiple times, researchers can get a better understanding of patterns or changes that emerge over time.

First, a screening questionnaire was sent out to find participants that met the requirements (see chapter „Participants“) for the diary study. In this questionnaire, participants were asked about their demographics but it also served to gain a deeper understanding about their TikTok use behaviour. This included questions about the frequency of TikTok use, motivations, what types of content they consume or post, and the activities that they perform on the platform.

After the screening questionnaire, participants that met the requirements were invited to take part in the diary study. They received an email two days before the start of the diary study, explaining the procedures of the data collection days. Furthermore, they were reminded that their participation is voluntarily and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were asked to complete daily diary entries over a span of five consecutive days.

For every day of the data collection, they received an email at around 9am, including a link to the questionnaire and a personal respondent ID that helped the researcher link the different responses to the ID while keeping the data of the participants private.

In the questionnaires, they were asked to provide the researcher with a TikTok video that caught their interest or influenced them on that day. The video they provided was expected to evoke some kind of emotion or trigger a reaction in them. In addition to sharing the video, participants were encouraged to answer open questions regarding the type of content they engaged with, how they felt after watching the video and if their mood had changed. Furthermore, they were presented with a series of statements to evaluate if and how their provided video influenced their self-compassion.

In case the participants had not filled out the questionnaire, a reminder email was sent out in the afternoon. Additionally, two more days of data collection were offered, in case a person did not have the time to use TikTok or fill in the questionnaire on one day. On the last data collection day, the respondents received an extended questionnaire in which they had the opportunity to give feedback about the study itself and if something has changed regarding the content they consume or their level of self-compassion during the days of data collection.

This study is unique because it is the first study that focuses on a qualitative analysis of consumed content on TikTok. Unlike previous studies, which have only used a quantitative approach to assess the influence of social media on wellbeing (Valkenburg, 2022), focusing mostly on screen time (e.g. Coyne et al., 2020; Twenge & Campbell, 2019), this study takes a more comprehensive approach. It is digging deeper into the impact of the consumed content on wellbeing, specifically mood and self-compassion with the goal to make new findings. Since there are barely any studies on TikTok, despite its growing popularity, this highlights the significance of this research even more. This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences of the University of Twente (request number: 230836).

### **3.2. Sampling Method**

To gather participants for the screening questionnaire, two non-probability methods were used. The first method was convenience sampling, where participants that were convenient to the researcher were acquired. (Galloway, 2005). The study was shared through

social media platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram and people in the closer environment of the researcher were approached. This excluded people who knew about the details of the study to avoid any bias. The other method that was used was snowball sampling, a method of non-probability sampling (Parker et al., 2019) where participants were asked to share the study in their networks and suggest new people who might be able to participate in the research.

### **3.3. Participants**

The screening questionnaire functioned as a tool to gather participants for the main part of the research, the diary study. To qualify for the participation in the diary study, there were certain criteria that the participants needed to meet:

1. As this study was aimed at young adults, the age range of eligible participants was 18-25.
2. Participants needed to have good English proficiency levels in reading and writing to be able to understand the contents of the study and provide answers that can be analysed.
3. Participants needed to be frequent TikTok users, meaning that they use it at least a few times a week.
4. Participants needed to own and be able to use a smartphone, tablet or computer to fill out the questionnaires online and to use TikTok.
5. Participants had to be willing to provide their email address so they could be contacted with the information about the diary study

Of the 88 participants who filled out the screening questionnaire, 28 met the requirements to participate in this study. In total, 22 of these participants provided valid responses during the diary study. To be considered as a valid response, participants must have completed at least four out of the five surveys that were sent out for the diary study. Six participants either left the study early or missed more than one survey, therefore their responses were considered as invalid. Out of the valid responses, there were 19 participants that filled in all five surveys and three that completed four surveys. Therefore, there were 107 surveys that could be analysed.

All participants of the diary study were within the age range of 18 to 25 years, as pre-determined in the screening questionnaire. The youngest participant was 19, while the oldest was 25. On average, the participants' age was 23 years ( $M = 22.59$ ;  $SD = 1.71$ ). In total, there

were 13 participants (59%) who identified themselves as female and 9 (41%) who identified themselves as male. The majority of participants was from Germany, a total of 15 (68%). One participant (4.5%) was from the Netherlands and five participants (23%) were from other countries, namely Romania, Egypt, Mexico, the United States, and China. One participant (4.5%) did not disclose their nationality.

In terms of education, half of the participants (50%) held a bachelor's degree and 10 participants' (45.5%) highest completed educational level was secondary education. One participant (4.5%) had a master's degree. Regarding employment status, 19 participants (86%) were full-time students and three of them (14%) were employed either full-time or part-time. All information about the participant's demographics can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Demographics of Participants**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Age</b>	22.59	1.71	19	25
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>		
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	13	59%		
Male	9	41%		
<b>Nationality</b>				
German	15	68%		
Dutch	1	4.5%		
Other	5	23%		
Unknown	1	4.5%		
<b>Education</b>				
Secondary	10	45.5%		
Bachelors	11	50%		
Masters	1	4.5%		

<b>Employment</b>		
Student	19	86%
Employed	3	14%

### 3.4. Measures and Instruments

The study consisted of two parts, a screening questionnaire and a diary study. The screening questionnaire gave more insights into the demographics and general TikTok usage, while the diary study provided more in-depth information with open questions, such as what types of content the participant watched and how it influenced their mood and self-compassion.

#### 3.4.1. Screening questionnaire

To be able to assess the TikTok usage of each participant, the participants were asked a total of six questions. These were about the frequency of usage („How many days per week do you usually use TikTok?“ and „How much time per day do you usually spend on TikTok?“), what types of content they consume, if they post content themselves, which content they post, and their reasons for using TikTok. To assess what types of content they consume most often, they were given answer options based on a study from 2020 that identified the most popular content categories on TikTok. The answer options were „Entertainment“, „Dance“, „Pranks“, „Fitness/Sports“, „Home Renovation/DIY“, „Beauty/Skincare“, „Fashion“, „Recipes/Cooking“, „Lifhacks/Advice/etc.“, „Pets“, and „Outdoors/Travel“ (Mediakix, 2020). The same answer options were used for the question about which types of content they post most often. For the question that asked about the participants' reasons for using TikTok („Why do you use TikTok?“), the most popular reasons were taken from another study in 2020, which included the reasons „Entertainment“, „Creative expression“, „Discovering trends“, „Connecting with others“, „Learning and education“, „Inspiration and new ideas“, „Following celebrities/influencer“, „Keeping up with news/trends“, „Escaping reality“, „Filling up spare time“, „Sharing videos of what I am doing“, and „Getting famous“ (Ahmed, 2020). The complete screening questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

### 3.4.2. Diary study

The main task each day was to provide the researcher with a TikTok video that influenced them or caught their interest. Based on the provided video, the participants answered questions regarding their mood („How did you feel after you saw this video?“ and „Did you experience a change in mood after seeing the video?“) and were given statements about their self-compassion, which they had to agree or disagree on. Furthermore, they were asked why they chose the video, what they thought of after watching it, how big the impact of the video was (1 = no impact; 10 = high impact), how they got exposed to it and the activities they performed on TikTok after watching the video.

The self-compassion statements for the survey were based on the State Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SSCS-S) established by Neff et al. (2021). To ensure their suitability, they were adapted to fit to the context of the study. The scale is initially made out of six items, that represent the different dimensions of self-compassion, which include „Self-kindness“, „Common Humanity“, and „Mindfulness“, and their counter parts „Self-judgement“, „Isolation“, and „Over-identification“. However, for this study the items „Mindfulness“ and „Over-identification“ were taken out, because they were considered as less relevant for the context of the study. To measure self-compassion, four statements were established based on the remaining dimensions: „After seeing this video, I am trying to be kind towards myself.“ (Self-kindness), „After seeing this video, I am judgemental about my own flaws and inadequacies.“ (Self-judgement), „After seeing this video, I am remembering that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.“ (Common Humanity), and „After seeing this video, I feel like I am struggling more than others right now.“ (Isolation). Each participant was then asked to elaborate on why they agree or disagree with each statement.

On the last day of data collection, the participants received four additional questions to evaluate on the study. They were asked about what they thought about the study in general, if the study had an influence on their view about the TikTok content they consume, how they perceive their own self-compassion, and if they got more conscious about their self-compassion. The complete questionnaire for the diary study can be found in Appendix B.

### **3.4.3. Pre-test**

Both the screening questionnaire and diary study were pre-tested, to make sure that all of the questions are understandable and clear. This was done to ensure that elaborate and appropriate answers could be given. Each of the surveys were tested with two participants that were invited to fill in the questionnaire and then provide written or oral feedback. The feedback included if they understood all of the questions and how the flow of the questionnaire was. Based on their feedback, a few changes were made in both the screening questionnaire and the diary study survey. In the screening questionnaire, a skip logic was added to the question „How many days per week do you usually use TikTok?“. If participants indicated that they „never“ use TikTok, then the other questions were not presented to them anymore. For the diary study survey it was requested to be able to return to previous questions, which was supposed to improve the feel and flow of the study. Additionally, for the question „What activities did you perform after seeing this video?“, the answer option „none“ was added. Lastly, for the self-compassion statements, the task changed from „Please try to explain if you agree or disagree in a few sentences“ to „Please try to explain why you agree or disagree in a few sentences.“, to get more elaborate answers on the statements.

## **3.5. Data Analysis**

### **3.5.1. Analysis of the screening questionnaire**

For the screening questionnaire, the demographics and the TikTok use of the participants was analysed. This was done in an Excel file after exporting the participants' data from Qualtrics. Before analysis, the data set was cleaned by taking out irrelevant information, like how much time it took the participants to fill in the survey. Additionally, all of the participants that did not participate in the diary study were taken out of the dataset. After that, their personal information (email address) was replaced with the participants' unique respondent IDs. For all of the collected data the frequencies and percentages were calculated. For the ages of the participants, the mean, range and standard deviation were calculated as well.



### 3.5.2. Analysis of the diary study

The 107 diary entries were analysed using thematic analysis, which is a method for analysing qualitative data by identifying patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, the analysis started with the researcher familiarising themselves with the data. This included reading through the answers of the participants and watching the provided videos, to get an overview over the data and to take notes on noticeable patterns. To get a better overview, the data was exported from Qualtrics into Excel. There, the data was divided into separate Excel sheets for each participant, resulting in 22 Excel sheets.

In the second phase, the first codes were generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on components from the survey, previously identified sub-codes from the screening questionnaire (for the code „Content Category“) and answers from the participants, an initial codebook could be created. The final codebook consists of nine main codes and 47 sub-codes (see Table 2). The main-codes are divided in „Content Category“, „Video Sentiment“, „Video Selection Motive“, „Emotion“, „Mood change“, „Activities“, „Exposure“, „Self-Compassion“, and „Study Impact“. The complete codebook with definitions and examples can be found in Appendix C.

In the next phase, overarching themes were found for the codes, where the codes were reviewed and patterns were identified. Then, the themes were reviewed and refined, to ensure that they are able to explain the data well. Finally, the identified themes were named, to give them a clear distinction. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) The themes are presented with quotes from the participants in the „Results“ chapter.

**Table 2****Codebook - Codes and Subcodes**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>
<b>1. Content Category</b>	1.1. Entertainment
	○ Comedy
	○ Celebrities/Influencers
	○ Music/Concerts
	○ Books/Movies/Series
	○ Pets/Animals
	○ Sports
	1.2. Lifestyle
	○ Beauty/Skincare
	○ Home Renovation/DIY
	○ Fashion
	○ Food/Recipes/Cooking
	○ Outdoors/Travel
	○ Relationships
	1.3. Health and Wellness
	○ Fitness
○ Physical and Mental Health	
○ Psychology	
○ Neurodivergency	
1.4. Current Affairs and Societal Matters	
○ Politics	
○ News	
○ LGBTQ+	
○ Women's rights/Feminism	
○ Science/Technology	
○ (True) Crime	
<b>2. Video Sentiment</b>	2.1. Positive
	2.2. Neutral
	2.3. Negative
	2.4. Ambiguous

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>
<b>3. Video Selection Motive</b>	3.1. Personal Relevance/Relatability
	3.2. Inspired
	3.3. Triggered
	3.4. Motivated
	3.5. Entertained
<b>4. Emotion</b>	4.1. Positive
	○ Happy
	○ Calm/Relaxed
	○ Inspired
	○ Nostalgic
	○ Surprised
	○ Motivated/Excited
	○ Impressed
	○ Compassionate
	○ Empowered
	○ Entertained/Amused
	4.2. Neutral
	○ Indifferent
	4.3. Negative
	○ Sad
	○ Angry
	○ Annoyed
	○ Scared
	○ Melancholic
	○ Disgusted
	○ Sentimental/Emotional
○ Shocked	
○ Exhausted	
○ Uncomfortable	
<b>5. Mood Change</b>	5.1. More positive
	5.2. More negative
	5.3. Same as before
	5.4. Short impact

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>
<b>6. Activities</b>	6.1. Like
	6.2. Comment
	6.3. Save
	6.4. Share
<b>7. Exposure</b>	7.1. Followed
	7.2. „For You“
	7.3. „Discover“
	7.4. Sent by a friend
<b>8. Self-Compassion</b>	8.1. Self-Kindness (Positive)
	8.2. Self-Judgement (Negative)
	8.3. Common Humanity (Positive)
	8.4. Isolation (Negative)
<b>9. Study impact</b>	9.1. Positive
	9.2. Negative
	9.3. No impact

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 TikTok Use**

In the screening questionnaire participants were asked about their TikTok use. One of the questions was how often they use TikTok. Three participants stated that they use TikTok a few times a week, 10 participants (45%) use it almost daily, and nine participants (41%) are on the app daily. Regarding time spent on TikTok, the majority (59%) spends less than an hour per day on the platform. Furthermore, they were asked why they use TikTok. The most common reasons were for entertainment (95%), to fill up spare time (77%), to get inspiration and new ideas (55%), to escape reality (55%) and to discover trends (50%). Regarding the content they consume, the most popular content categories were ‚Entertainment‘ (82%), ‚Recipes/Cooking‘ (64%), ‚Fashion‘ (50%), ‚Fitness/Sports‘ (45%), and ‚Outdoors/Travel‘ (36%).

Not many participants post content themselves, as 16 participants (73%) stated that they never post on TikTok, five participants (23%) less than once a month and only one participant said that they post daily (4%). Out of the six participants that post content

themselves, the most posted categories are ‚Pets/Animals‘ (50%) and ‚Fashion‘ (33%). The tables with all the data regarding the participants’ TikTok use can be found in Appendix D.

## 4.2 Content Categories

When going through the 107 TikTok’s from the diary study, there were more than 20 content categories found that the videos could be divided in. For a better overview, these categories were summarised to four main categories.

### 4.3.1. Entertainment

This category includes all videos, that mainly had an entertaining factor. This includes the content categories ‚Comedy‘, ‚Celebrities/Influencers‘, ‚Music/Concerts‘, ‚Books/Movies/Series‘, ‚Pets/Animals‘, and ‚(Professional) Sports‘. In total, 55 (51%) videos were in the entertainment category, making this the biggest category. Most of the videos in this category could be sorted to the sub-category ‚Comedy‘. Participants 2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 19, 22, 24, 26, and 27 were the ones mainly providing videos of this category, making them also the biggest amount of participants. Participant 2 for example said: „I only use TikTok for entertainment.“ Most of the videos in the category had a more positive effect on the participants. Many participants said that the videos made them laugh and they felt good afterwards. Motives for choosing videos in his category varied. Some people chose the videos because it had a personal relevance to them, for example when it was about their favourite sports team, a new song by a band they liked, or a comedy video that made fun of something they could relate to. Other reasons because they simply felt entertained or amused by the video. There were only a little amount of videos that had a negative effect on the participants. Participant 24 for example provided a video of a conflict between a book author and blogger. She said: „I felt conflicted. Usually book content just distracts me, helps me to relax and makes me happy, but it shocked me a bit to see the reaction of an author towards a good review and towards other people that voiced their opinion.“ Another example for a negative effect in this category was when participant 5’s favourite sports team lost a game. He said that the effect was only very short though.

Entertainment was the biggest category with mostly positive effects. If there were negative effects, there were oftentimes very short.

### 4.3.2. Lifestyle

The second most used category were lifestyle-related videos, which comprised these sub-categories: ‚Beauty/Skincare‘, ‚Home Renovation/DIY‘, ‚Fashion‘, ‚Food/Recipes/Cooking‘, and ‚Outdoors/Travel‘. 31 (29%) videos could be sorted to this category. Participants 3, 4, 9, 10, 12, 16, 18, 21, and 23 provided at least two videos on lifestyle topics. Also in this category the impact of the videos was more positively, but there were also many videos that had a neutral impact. The motives for choosing these videos, were also very different, the most common ones being personal relevance, feeling inspired or being motivated. One thing that was mentioned here quite a lot was the intention to replicate something or to buy something. For example, participant 18 provided three videos where her reasons for choosing them were: ‚I want to have these shorts‘, ‚I am looking for new hairstyles that I can try with my hair‘, and ‚I wanna buy new shoes‘. Participant 10 felt more inspired by food videos, where she added ‚I feel motivated to try the cooking method‘. In general, a lot of videos regarding cooking and recipes were shared with the impact of it being mostly positive or neutral and the intention to try the recipe. This category mostly comprised videos that include hobbies of the participants. Participant 1 for example said: ‚I love crochet and I love crochet content.‘ She added: ‚I was happy and kinda relieved to see something lighthearted between a lot of serious videos on my FYP.‘ Participant 23 stated: ‚I am jealous because I can’t afford cars like these, but also inspired to see what kind of cars there are.‘

The effects of lifestyle content were mostly positive or neutral. Participants often felt the urge to purchase something or to try a recipe they have seen.

### 4.3.3. Health and Wellbeing

In this category, all videos regarding ‚Fitness‘, ‚Physical and Mental Health‘, ‚Psychology‘, and ‚Neurodivergency‘ are included. Only 4 (4%) videos that the participants sent, were in the health and wellbeing category, but there were still some results for this category. The videos mostly had a neutral effect on the participants. Also, all of the videos were chosen because of relatability and personal relevance, as they either experienced something similar themselves or because they felt compassion towards affected individuals. Participant 13 for example stated that he had the same illness and he could relate to the content: ‚Seeing his ‚don’t give up‘ video spoke to me‘ Additionally he said: ‚[It] motivated

to keep fighting.“ Participant 11 „felt understood by the video and could relate to it“. Participant 9 showed compassion towards affected individuals: „I felt bad for people experiencing situations like this.“

Instead of feeling triggered by content with sensitive topics like health and wellbeing, participants rather felt understood.

#### **4.3.4. Current Affairs and Societal Matters**

The last categories includes everything that matters on a societal level. This includes the categories ‚Politics‘, ‚News‘, ‚LGBTQ+‘, ‚Women’s rights/Feminism‘, ‚Science/Technology‘ and ‚(True) Crime‘. 16 (15%) videos were sorted to this category. Participants 1 and 20 mainly provided the most videos of this category, as it was also a personal interest of theirs. Videos in this category had the most negative effects out of all other videos, but there were also some positive effects. Mostly these positive effects were found for videos that also had an entertaining factor to them. Participant 9 shared a video of someone sharing the news and current affairs in a humorous way. She said „In the end I was smiling because they showed pictures of animals but before that I was feeling frustrated“. Other topics in this category had a more negative impact though. Participant 1 shared: „I was angry about the fact that that party ruled our country for 16 years and that people actually fall for their disgusting populism again.“ Participant 20 only shared videos that dealt with current affairs and societal matters. She chose the videos because she mostly felt triggered by them. One video that dealt with mass-shootings in the US and anti-LGBTQ+ laws in the US affected her so much that she „started crying about a minute into the video“. Another video made her feel „scared and like I’d just been punched and the wind had been taken out of my lungs.“

The effect of the video in this category depended on the type of video it was. If it was a more humorous approach like talking about the news in a satirical way or interesting facts about science, the videos affected the participants more positively. Videos that had more of an educational approach and discussed current political decisions or crime, affected the participants more negatively.

### 4.3. TikTok Content and Mood

Out of the 107 videos, there were 58 videos that influenced the participants positively, 26 that had a neutral impact, and 23 videos that affected them negatively. None of the participants provided videos that only influenced them positively or negatively, except for participant 8 and 21 who only provided videos that influenced them positively. The impact of the videos on the participants has been relatively high. On average, the impact of videos, which was measured on a scale from 1 (low impact) to 10 (high impact), with a positive influence had an impact of 6.36 and videos with a negative influence had an impact of 6.57. The videos with a neutral influence had a lower impact of 4.46.

TikTok's that evoked positive emotions were mostly contents that the participants could relate to or that they felt entertained or inspired by. Participant 21 for example shared a video of a baby doing a photoshoot in costumes, stating: „My heart felt very warmed and I almost shed a tear but not because I was sad but more because it was so wholesome.“ Participant 27 shared: „I love dancing cats. This is just completely my humour and wanted to share it immediately.“ Videos from the entertainment and lifestyle category mostly affected participants positively.

TikTok's that were seen more negatively were mainly contents, the participant did not agree with. This could mostly be seen with controversial topics that affect society. One interesting example was a video that was supposed to be funny but the participant (7) did not agree with the content, which was hiring a tiny person for entertainment. He said: „I got angry because [of] the disrespect.“ Furthermore, he stated: „Some people make jokes about people [who] don't deserve it.“ Videos from the current affairs and societal matters category mostly affected participants negatively.

TikTok's that had a neutral effect on participants were mostly contents that participants could relate to or were entertained by, but they just did not affect their mood. Participant 4 for example shared a video in which a person made a joke about being a student, to which she shared: „It was funny but it also made me sad because it was harsh and true.“ Videos from the lifestyle and health and wellbeing category mostly had a neutral effect on participants.



#### 4.4 Activities and Exposure

There were different activities (see Table 3) the participants engaged in after watching the videos. This included liking, commenting, saving, sharing or reposting the video. The activity performed most often was liking the video, which was done 88 times (82%). The most performed activities after that were saving the video (32), sharing it with a friend (27), reposting (7), and lastly commenting (4). Every participant liked at least one of the videos they had provided, meaning there was no participant that did not engage in any activity. Nevertheless, there were more active and more passive users. Nine participants liked all videos they provided (participants 1, 4, 9, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26, and 27). All of them performed at least one other activity, which was mostly saving (17) or sharing the video (10). There were only two participants who did not participate in any activities other than liking (participant 2 and 5). One notable mention is participant 22, who was the only one that commented on videos (4). There were also only three participants that reposted videos (participant 7, 20, and 27). On average, each participant performed seven activities ( $M = 7.18$ ;  $SD = 2.59$ ) for all five videos, with the lowest amount of engagement of 1 (participant 5) and the highest amount of 12 (participant 27).

Additionally to their activities, the participants were asked how they came across the video (see Table 4). The majority of participants found the videos on their 'For You' page (74%), meaning that their provided videos were recommendations from TikTok based on their interests. 9% of videos were found because the participant followed the creator. Participant 24 stated, that she purposely looked up the topic for one of the videos she provided. The other videos were found through the 'Discover' page (10%), because they were sent to them by a friend (5%), or it was an advertisement (1%).

There were no correlations found between active TikTok use and experiencing more positive effects, or passive use and and experiencing more negative effects.

**Table 3****Performed Activities**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Like	88	82 %
Comment	4	4 %
Save	32	30 %
Share	27	25 %
Repost	7	7 %

**Table 4****Exposure**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Followed	10	9 %
„For You“	79	74 %
„Discover“	11	10 %
Advertisement	1	1 %
Sent by a friend	5	5 %
Looked it up	1	1 %

**4.5. TikTok Content and Self-Compassion****4.6.1. Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgement**

When looking at the effects of TikTok content on self-kindness, 50 videos evoked self-kindness, while 19 videos rather promoted self-judgement. 47 videos had no effect on either self-kindness or self-judgement.

There were no specific contents that resulted in being more kind towards themselves. Also a clear difference could be seen between different participants. Some participants never had any effects, while others did have effects. Participant 21 realised that „I should also do more things for myself to make myself feel better and more like myself“

Participant 19 was aware of his flaws but appreciates them more. He said „The video shows you don't need to be perfect, just yourself.“ It became apparent that a lot of times when there were no effects on self-kindness that participants try to be kind to themselves regardless of the video. Many participants said: „I always try to be kind to myself, no matter the videos I see.“ (Participant 8) Therefore, the effects of specific TikTok content on self-kindness is not very clear.

#### **4.6.2. Common Humanity vs. Isolation**

65 videos of the 107 videos had a positive effect on common humanity and only 6 videos resulted in participants feeling more isolated. 41 videos had no effect on either common humanity or isolation.

What became apparent is that participants felt more common humanity on videos that they could relate to. Also for videos that influenced them negatively, instead of feeling more isolated by them, they were aware that other people felt the same way as they did. Participant 19 said for example: „For many people having high standards for themselves and their relationship is a large reason why they're unhappy.“ Another comment was by participant 4: „It made me think about all the students going through the same stressful time as me“

Videos that had no effect on common humanity or self-compassion were mostly argued with: „I do not usually think about this and the video did not change that“ (Participant 8) All in all, it was apparent that there were positive effects on common humanity and barely any videos made participants feel more isolated.

#### **4.7. Participants' Evaluations**

After having participated in the diary study, 19 out of 22 participants evaluated their experience. In general, taking part in the study was perceived positively. Participant 21 stated: „I really liked this study, because it actually made me think about why I like certain TikTok videos and what they mean to me.“ Participants were in general more mindful about the content they are consuming, like participant 19: „I am trying to ask myself for what purpose I am watching this particular video.“ This also led them to make decisions about their TikTok

usage in general. Participant 11 said: „It was an interesting task to pick out one particular video and have some detailed thoughts about it, instead of just mindlessly scrolling through my timeline. If I continue this line of thought, I might spend less time on the platform.“ Participant 16 expressed: „It made me feel like [...] I don't actually gain much from TikTok.“

In regards to in what ways the study has influenced their perception of self-compassion, the answers were mixed. Some participants could not relate that much to the self-compassion statements, because the content they were watching did not have an effect on their self-compassion. „It was hard to find TikTok's that really have a strong impact on me, as most TikTok's only cover funny or superficial content“ (participant 26). Participant 27 emphasised on the hard-to-grasp nature of the self-compassion process: „Being more mindful in all this media mess is important. However, I did not agree that most content is actively shaping my self compassion. That is much rather a silent process that is underlying and hard to grasp.“ Other participants, like participant 20, recognised the importance of self-kindness: „[...] although I make it a habit of delving into being more self-aware of what's going on both internally and externally, working on being self-aware but also kind to yourself is important“ (participant 20). Additionally, participant 20 summarised her experience nicely: „This study in a roundabout way showed me that self-love doesn't just need to be an after thought and instead can be a great preventative measure in preparation for things I know will be hard, to help soften the blow. It can also be used as a framework in positive situations to be able to identify and remember in lesser times the pride and self-accomplishment felt.“

The participants' evaluations showed that this study helped them to be more aware and mindful about the content they are consuming on TikTok. Even though, some participants could not relate their TikTok consumption to self-compassion, most people stated the importance of self-compassion and want to be more conscious about it in the future.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Main Findings**

The objective of this study was to find out what kind of content adolescents come across on TikTok and how it influences their mood and self-compassion.

The main findings included that the TikTok content that individuals engaged with in this study mostly had a positive impact on them regarding their mood. There were certain content categories that had more positive effects on the participants than others.

Entertainment, the category which was also the most popular one, showed the most positive effects on participants, while content that deals with current affairs and societal matters had the most negative effects on the participants' mood. The research also found that content outside their own community and bubble could influence mood negatively in the participants. For example, viewing entertainment videos that are supposed to be funny but support a different belief system or political videos from an opposing party could trigger negative emotional responses among the participants. This suggests that getting exposed to content that challenges what they believe in can cause discomfort, which potentially leads to a temporary negative mood.

Additionally, it was found out that even if there were negative effects, usually they did not last that long. Participants usually changed their mood quickly when scrolling to the next video, which shows how quickly information is consumed on this platform. This makes users experience a variety of moods in a short period of time, but that also implies that the impact of particular videos tend to be temporary.

Regarding the sub-question whether active TikTok use influences participants positively, there have been no correlations found. For the other sub-question which asked „ *Does engagement with health-related content positively affect young adults' wellbeing?* “, there has been enough content to draw conclusions on that. The results have shown though that health-related content mainly had a neutral effect on participants.

Regarding the effects on self-compassion, many participants had positive effects on common humanity, one of the elements of self-compassion. The videos the participants shared often portrayed relatable struggles, challenges or experiences that were shared by a broader community. Instead of feeling triggered or isolated by this, many participants actually felt a feeling of belonging and therefore were in a more positive mood because they did not feel alone with what they were struggling with. Self-kindness was also very common though. Many participants stated they are trying to be kind towards themselves. Oftentimes this happened regardless of the video they were watching, which is why no real conclusions can be made about this. Effects on self-compassion were not seen on all videos. Around half of the videos did not influence the participants' self-compassion. One positive thing that can be noted though, is that there were barely any effects on self-judgement and isolation, which means that the participants' self-compassion was not negatively influenced.

## **5.2. Strengths**

One of the main strengths of this study is that it is one of the first that dives deeper into the consumed content on TikTok, instead of just looking at TikTok use in general. Previous studies have mainly studied the effect of screen time on wellbeing and not analysed the specific content young adults engage with. This study clearly has an advantage over those studies, as the diary entries allowed for deeper insights into the experiences, emotions and thought processes of the participants, providing the academic field with a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between TikTok content and wellbeing.

Another important strength is that participants got more aware of their TikTok consumption. In the study, participants were encouraged to reflect more on their self-compassion and how it is affected by the content they were watching, which made a lot of participants more mindful about what they consume. This awareness resulted in them making more conscious decisions about what they want to consume and how often they want to use TikTok. This could potentially help them after the study to experience less negative effects or knowing how to reduce them when spending time on the app.

## **5.3. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

As any other study, this study also showed some limitations and could improve in some areas, which provides a base for recommendations for future research. One of the limitations was the complexity of the diary study. The questions of the study might have been too long and complex for some of the participants. Some respondents provided very brief answers, despite the instructions to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings. One of the reasons for that could be a limited English proficiency of some participants, which may have affected their ability to express their experiences accurately. A recommendation for future research is to simplify the survey design by making the questions as simple as possible and reducing the length of the survey, for more engagement. Another option could be to offer translated versions of the study. In this study, there were many German participants, so a German translation would have been suitable.

Another limitation is that the findings of this study cannot be generalised due to the small sample size of 22 participants. Additionally, the participants were collected through

convenience and snowball sampling, making most participants part of the network of the researcher, and a big proportion of the sample were German. Therefore, applying these results to other populations or cultural contexts should be done with caution. For future research it is advised to conduct a study with a larger and more diverse sample size of at least 200 participants, to be able to generalise the results. Furthermore, since the data collection period was only 5 days, it is recommended to extend the duration of the diary study, as this would allow for clearer patterns, fluctuations, and changes in participants' experiences and wellbeing.

Since TikTok is growing in popularity and not many studies have been done on it, it is recommended that further research should be done. Future research could for example consider a younger target group, as there are many users on the app that are younger than 18. Vogels et al. (2022) found that 67% of 13-17 year old teenagers use TikTok, with 16% of them even using it constantly. As individuals in this age group go through different developmental needs, it is important to study how their TikTok use affects their wellbeing.

Another recommendation is to take into account the pre-existing level of self-compassion, which has not been addressed in this study. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to explore self-compassion as a moderator, instead of looking at it as an outcome variable. Previous research found that high levels of self-compassion may be able to limit negative effects (depression or anxiety) of stressful experiences (Phillips & Wisniewski, 2021; Lathren et al., 2019), which is why this should be explored with TikTok content.

This study provided a first exploration of TikTok content in regards to wellbeing and self-compassion. By addressing these recommendations, future research can hopefully contribute to an even better understanding of how TikTok specifically has impact on adolescents' wellbeing, which will allow to create strategies to promote healthy social media use.

## **5.4. Implications**

Based on the study findings, several implications can be made. On a personal level, individuals could have more regular check-ins with themselves where they think more consciously about their self-compassion and how the content they are watching relates to it, as the study has shown that reflecting on one's content consumption can help building self-

compassion which improves overall wellbeing. On a broader level, self-compassion trainings can be offered, perhaps even in schools, where more awareness around the importance of self-compassion is taught. There, it could also be taught how to deal with TikTok content that does not align with one's interests or which makes them feel bad. One option how to deal with this would be to report negative content or indicate that they are 'not interested' in watching similar content, which teaches the algorithm to show less content like this. These interventions can help individuals, and especially adolescents, how to navigate negative content and promote a healthy usage of the app. These can also be done in form of campaigns, potentially even together with content creators or influencers, where they share positive messages and encourage healthy content consumption. They could share practical tips and information around self-compassion.

One last implication is directed to TikTok itself. TikTok could include interventions in the app where they regularly ask for feedback regarding the content that is consumed by the individual. There the individual can indicate which content makes them feel bad and this could help TikTok limit this kind of content.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, different TikTok content can have different effects on wellbeing of young adults. The findings revealed that TikTok content mainly resulted in a positive impact on participants's mood, with entertainment videos generating the most positive effects. However, there is also content that tended to have negative effects on participants' mood, which included content challenging their beliefs. Nevertheless, the impacts of specific videos were often temporary. In terms of self-compassion, participants experienced positive effects on common humanity, and self-kindness was also often expressed, even though not all of the videos had an influence on self-compassion. Notably, were the minimal effects on self-judgement and isolation though. This study was one of the first ones to focus on specific TikTok content and the use of diary studies enabled to get deeper insights into the participants's experiences. Participants were also encouraged to be more mindful regarding more research should be done, considering younger age groups and also exploring how self-compassion can be a moderator of wellbeing instead of an outcome variable. The implications suggest for individual and educational interventions to promote self-compassion and more



mindful content consumption. These recommendations and implications help to create a better understanding regarding TikTok's impact on adolescents' wellbeing, with this study being a first exploration into the topic.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Screening Questionnaire

## Bachelor Thesis - Screening Questionnaire

### Start of Block: Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

Welcome to my bachelor thesis study „**Scrolling through Emotions: An Exploration of TikTok Content and its Effects on Self-Compassion and Mood in Young Adults**“.

This study is conducted by **Lina Schneuing**, Communication Science student from the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente.

The aim of my study is to explore the impact of TikTok content on mood and self-compassion. This will be done by means of a **diary study**. This is an **initial questionnaire** to see if you meet the **requirements** to participate in this diary study. If you do, I will ask you for your email address to be able to contact you to continue with the diary study.

If you choose to provide your email address, it will only be used to link your responses to a unique ID that will be assigned to you as a respondent. This helps me to connect your responses to the different questionnaires that you will complete during the study.

Your personal data will be handled with care and kept confidential throughout the study. After the study is complete, your personal data will be deleted immediately. All collected data will be used exclusively for my bachelor thesis. This means that the data will not be shared with anyone else and will be used anonymously to protect your privacy.

Participation in this study is completely voluntarily, so you can at any point during the study decide to withdraw from participation.

This first questionnaire will take you approximately **5 minutes** to complete. There are no right or wrong answers.

If you have any further questions about this study, either now or in the future, please contact me: **[l.schneuing@student.utwente.nl](mailto:l.schneuing@student.utwente.nl)**

Thank you so much in advance for taking your time and participating in my study!

If you click on the arrow on the right corner below, you agree:

- to have read the information
- that your participation in the study is voluntarily
- you are at least 18 years old
- that you are aware that you can withdraw from the study at any time

**End of Block: Informed Consent**

**Start of Block: Demographics**

**Gender** What gender do you identify with?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Other: (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say (5)

**Age** What is your age? (in numbers)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Nationality** What is your nationality?

- German (1)
- Dutch (2)
- Other: (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say (4)

**Education** What is your highest completed level of education?

- Primary education (1)
- Secondary education (2)
- Bachelor's degree (3)
- Master's degree (4)
- Other: (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say (6)

**Employment** What is your current employment status?

- Student (1)
- Employed (full-time or part-time) (2)



- Unemployed (3)
- Self-employed (4)
- Other: (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say (6)

### End of Block: Demographics

### Start of Block: TikTok Use Criterium

**Frequency** How many days per week do you usually use TikTok?

- Never (1)
- Less than once a week (2)
- Once a week (3)
- A few times a week (4)
- Almost daily (5)
- Daily (6)

*Skip To: End of Survey If How many days per week do you usually use TikTok? = Never*

### End of Block: TikTok Use Criterium

### Start of Block: TikTok Use

**Time** How much time per day do you usually spend on TikTok?

- Less than 30 minutes (1)
- Between 30 minutes and 1 hour (2)
- Between 1 hour and 2 hours (3)
- Between 2 hours and 3 hours (4)
- Between 3 hours and 4 hours (5)
- More than 4 hours (6)

**Content** What is the type of content that you **consume** most often on TikTok? (multiple answers possible)

- Entertainment (1)
- Dance (2)
- Pranks (3)
- Fitness/Sports (4)
- Home Renovation/DIY (5)
- Beauty/Skincare (6)
- Fashion (7)

- Recipes/Cooking (8)
- Lifehacks/Advice/etc. (9)
- Pets (10)
- Outdoors/Travel (11)
- Other: (12) \_\_\_\_\_

**Post Frequency** How often do you post content yourself on TikTok?

- Never (1)
- Less than once a month (2)
- Once a month (3)
- A few times a month (4)
- Once a week (5)
- Multiple times a week (6)
- Daily (7)

**Post Content** What is the type of content that you **post** most often? (multiple answers possible)

- Entertainment (1)
- Dance (2)
- Pranks (3)
- Fitness/Sports (4)
- Home Renovation/DIY (5)
- Beauty/Skincare (6)
- Fashion (7)
- Recipes/Cooking (8)
- Lifehacks/Advice/etc. (9)
- Pets (10)
- Outdoors/Travel (11)
- Other: (12) \_\_\_\_\_

**Why TikTok** Why do you use TikTok? (multiple answers possible)

- Entertainment (1)
- Creative expression (2)
- Discovering trends (3)
- Connecting with others (4)

- Learning and education (5)
- Inspiration and new ideas (6)
- Following celebrities/influencers (7)
- Keeping up with news/trends (8)
- Escaping reality (9)
- Filling up spare time (10)
- Sharing videos of what I am doing (11)
- Getting famous (12)
- Other: (13) \_\_\_\_\_

**End of Block: TikTok Use**

**Start of Block: Diary Study Invitation**

**Email Address** If you would like to participate in my diary study, please indicate your email address here:

I will contact you with this email **[l.schneuing@student.utwente.nl](mailto:l.schneuing@student.utwente.nl)** if you meet the requirements to participate in the study.

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**End of Block: Diary Study Invitation**

## Appendix B

### Diary Study

### Bachelor Thesis - Diary Study Last Day

#### Start of Block: Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

Welcome to my bachelor thesis study „**Scrolling through Emotions: An Exploration of TikTok Content and its Effects on Self-Compassion and Mood in Young Adults**“.

We reached the last day of the diary study, therefore I want to emphasize how thankful I am that you helped me out by participating! :)

At the end of this survey, you will get some evaluation questions where I ask you for honest feedback.

Before we start, I would like to remind you of some important aspects:

- please try to fill in this survey before **9pm CET**
- please make sure that the TikTok video you share with me is from a **public** profile and that the **link** is working
- in case of any unclarity, please check the information email that I sent to you or contact me: **[l.schneuing@student.utwente.nl](mailto:l.schneuing@student.utwente.nl)**
- your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason

The survey will take you approximately **10-15 minutes** to complete. There are no right or wrong answers.

Thank you so much in advance!

Lina :)

#### End of Block: Informed Consent

#### Start of Block: Respondent

**Respondent ID** What is your respondent ID?

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**Date** What is the current date? (dd/mm/yyyy)

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**End of Block: Respondent**

**Start of Block: File upload**

File upload Please provide me with the link of a TikTok video that influenced you or caught your interest **today**.

In case you encounter any problems, you can contact me: l.schneuing@student.utwente.nl

---

**End of Block: File upload**

**Start of Block: Questions Mood**

**Description** Now, you are going to be presented with a few open questions regarding the TikTok video you just uploaded. Please try to explain yourself in a few sentences.

**Why This Video** Why did this video influence you or catch your interest? Please elaborate on this.

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**Mood After** How did you feel **after** you saw this video? Please elaborate on this.

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**Mood Change** Did you experience a change in mood **after** seeing the video? Please elaborate on this.

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**Thoughts** After seeing this video, what did it make you **think of**? Please elaborate on this.

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End of Block: Questions Mood

Start of Block: Influence

**Influence** In what way did this video influence you?

- Positively (1)
- Neutral (2)
- Negatively (3)

**Impact** How big was the impact?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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0 = no impact; 10 = very high impact	
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End of Block: Influence

Start of Block: Active/Passive

**Activities** What activities did you perform after seeing this video? (multiple answers possible)

- None (9)

- I liked the video (1)
- I commented on the video (2)
- I shared the video (3)
- I saved the video (4)
- I reposted the video (5)
- I duetted the video (6)
- Other: (7) \_\_\_\_\_

**Exposure** How did you come across this video?

- I follow the account (1)
- It was on my 'For You' page (2)
- It was on my 'Discover' page (3)
- It was an advertisement (4)
- Other: (5) \_\_\_\_\_

End of Block: Active/Passive

Start of Block: Questions Self-Compassion

**Description** In the next section, you will be presented with a few statements regarding your self-compassion after seeing this video. Please try to explain **why** you agree or disagree **in a few sentences**.

**Self-kindness** After seeing this video, I am trying to be kind towards myself.

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**Self-judgement** After seeing this video, I am judgemental about my own flaws and inadequacies.

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**Common Humanity** After seeing this video, I am remembering that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.

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**Isolation** After seeing this video, I feel like I am struggling more than others right now.

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End of Block: Questions Self-Compassion

Start of Block: Evaluation

**Description** As today is the last day of the diary study, I would like to ask you for an honest evaluation of the study.

**Eval Study** What did you think of this study? Please elaborate on this.

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**Eval Content** Did this study change your view about the TikTok content you consume? Please elaborate on this.

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**Eval Self-Compassion** How has this study influenced your perception of self-compassion in relation to yourself? Please elaborate on this.

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**Eval Consciousness** Did this study help you to get more conscious about your self-compassion? Please elaborate on this.

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**End of Block: Evaluation**

## **Appendix C**

### **Codebook**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>1. Content Category</b>	1.1. Entertainment	Refers to the content category of the provided TikTok video	The video shows a girl doing a ,Get ready with me‘
	○ Comedy		
	○ Celebrities/ Influencers		
	○ Music/Concerts		
	○ Books/Movies/Series		
	○ Pets/Animals		
	○ Sports		
	1.2. Lifestyle		
	○ Beauty/Skincare		
	○ Home Renovation/ DIY		
	○ Fashion		
	○ Food/Recipes/ Cooking		
	○ Outdoors/Travel		
	○ Relationships		
1.3. Health and Wellness			
○ Fitness			
○ Physical and Mental Health			
○ Psychology			
○ Neurodivergency			
1.4. Current Affairs and Societal Matters			
○ Politics			
○ News			
○ LGBTQ+			
○ Women’s rights/ Feminism			
○ Science/Technology			
○ (True) Crime			
<b>2. Video Sentiment</b>	2.1. Positive	Refers to the sentiment that is portrayed in the video	The video shows someone being upset about a political decision
	2.2. Neutral		
	2.3. Negative		
	2.4. Ambiguous		

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>			
<b>3. Video Selection Motive</b>	3.1. Personal Relevance/Relatability	Refers to the reasons/motives for choosing the video	"The video caught my attention due to personal relatability"			
	3.2. Inspired					
	3.3. Triggered					
	3.4. Motivated					
	3.5. Entertained					
<b>4. Emotion</b>	4.1. Positive	Refers to the emotions the video evoked	„I felt amused and surprised by the unexpected turn.“ „I feel scared and really concerned about the world right now.“			
	○ Happy					
	○ Calm/Relaxed					
	○ Inspired					
	○ Nostalgic					
	○ Surprised					
	○ Motivated/Excited					
	○ Impressed					
	○ Compassionate					
	○ Empowered					
	○ Entertained/Amused					
	4.2. Neutral					
	○ Indifferent					
	4.3. Negative					
	○ Sad					
	○ Angry					
	○ Annoyed					
	○ Scared					
	○ Melancholic					
	○ Disgusted					
	○ Sentimental/Emotional					
	○ Shocked					
	○ Exhausted					
	○ Uncomfortable					
	<b>5. Mood Change</b>			5.1. More positive	Refers to how the mood has changed after watching the video	„I'm so much happier than before“
				5.2. More negative		
				5.3. Same as before		
5.4. Short impact						

<b>Code</b>	<b>Subcode</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>6. Activities</b>	6.1. Like	Refers to the activities that were performed after watching the video	„I liked the video“
	6.2. Comment		
	6.3. Save		
	6.4. Share		
<b>7. Exposure</b>	7.1. Followed	Refers to how the participant came across the video	„It was on my ‚For You‘ page“
	7.2. „For You“		
	7.3. „Discover“		
	7.4. Sent by a friend		
<b>8. Self-Compassion</b>	8.1. Self-Kindness (Positive)	Refers to the impact of the video on the elements of self-compassion	„It made me think about all the students going through the same stressful time as me“
	8.2. Self-Judgement (Negative)		
	8.3. Common Humanity (Positive)		
	8.4. Isolation (Negative)		
<b>9. Study impact</b>	9.1. Positive	Refers to the impact of the study on the participant	„I liked it a lot, it made me reflect on my TikTok usage more“
	9.2. Negative		
	9.3. No impact		
<b>9. Self-Compassion</b>	9.1. Self-Kindness (Positive)	Refers to the impact of the video on the elements of self-compassion	„It made me think about all the students going through the same stressful time as me“
	9.2. Self-Judgement (Negative)		
	9.3. Common Humanity (Positive)		
	9.4. Isolation (Negative)		
	9.5. No impact (Self-Kindness/Judgement)		
	9.6. No impact (Common Humanity/Isolation)		
<b>10. Study impact</b>	10.1. Positive	Refers to the impact of the study on the participant	„I liked it a lot, it made me reflect on my TikTok usage more“
	10.2. Negative		
	10.3. No impact		

## Appendix D

**Table 5**

**Frequency of TikTok use**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A few times a week	3	14 %
Almost daily	10	45 %
Daily	9	41 %

**Table 6**

**Time spent on TikTok**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 30 minutes	5	23 %
Between 30 minutes and 1	8	36 %
Between 1 hour and 2 hours	4	18 %
Between 2 hours and 3 hours	3	14 %
Between 3 hours and 4 hours	2	9 %

**Table 7**

**Reasons for TikTok use**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Entertainment	21	95 %
Filling up spare time	17	77 %
Escaping reality	12	55 %
Inspiration and new ideas	12	55 %
Discovering trends	11	50 %
Learning and education	9	41 %
Keeping up with news/trends	8	36 %

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Connecting with others	6	27 %
Creative expression	6	27 %
Following celebrities/ influencers	6	27 %
Other	1	5 %

**Table 8****Most consumed content**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Entertainment	18	82 %
Recipes/Cooking	14	64 %
Fashion	11	50 %
Fitness/Sports	10	45 %
Outdoors/Travel	8	36 %
Home Renovation/DIY	7	32 %
Pets	7	32 %
Beauty/Skincare	6	27 %
Lifhacks/Advice/etc.	6	27 %
Dance	3	14 %
Pranks	1	5 %
Other	7	32 %

**Table 9****Posting frequency**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Never	16	73 %
Less than once a month	5	23 %
Daily	1	4 %

**Table 10****Most posted content**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Pets	3	50 %
Fashion	2	33 %
Beauty/Skincare	1	17 %
Entertainment	1	17 %
Outdoors/Travel	1	17 %
Recipes/Cooking	1	17 %
Other	2	33 %