

**THE INFLUENCE OF TIKTOK ON NEWS CONSUMPTION OF YOUNG
PEOPLE: A CASE STUDY OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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M23B90/023

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA AND
COMMUNICATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN JOURNALISM, MEDIA AND
COMMUNICATION OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

April, 2026



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

DECLARATION

I, Tumusiime Aryane Ninsiima, declare that this research study is my own effort and this paper has not been submitted anywhere else in fulfillment of a degree award.

Signature:  Date: 29/04/2026

TUMUSIIME ARYANE NINSIIMA

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APPROVAL

APPROVAL

The study meets all academic criteria and is therefore eligible for approval. I grant my permission for its submission to the Uganda Christian University Board.

Signature: *Rad.* Date: *29.04.2026*

Ms. Rachel Nassuna

Supervisor

DEDICATION

To my parents, for all the support and prayers that went into making this research possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank you to my research supervisor, Ms. Rachel Nassuna, for her guidance and persistent effort in shaping a proper research project.

Great thanks to my lecturers who went beyond the classroom to instill us with practical skills that enabled me to execute this project.

My friends and colleagues who encouraged me to aim for the best.

ABSTRACT

Since the 2020 lockdown due to COVID-19, Tiktok has become the number one social media platform and changed the purpose of social media. Apps like Facebook that prioritised conversations with 'friends', Instagram that depended on one posting photos for their followers, and YouTube that prided itself in having long form videos have had to adopt the vertical, high tempo 60 second clips.

Due to people around the world being locked up at home, they resorted to the app (launched in 2016) to dance to new and old music. It has now advanced to more than just dance trends. People now use it for story times, tutorials on various things, fashion, travel, and even news consumption. It has even become a career path due to the rise of 'influencers' who get paid by companies. However, the introduction of payment has led to the high rise of fake news, misinformation, sensationalism and propaganda which all affect journalism.

This study uses open ended survey questions to find out whether students of Uganda Christian University use TikTok as a news source, how they interpret the news they get, and if they are not misled by fake news. It also seeks to find out whether journalism and communication students understand that social media apps such as TikTok are taking over from old media and if they are being taught to adopt to new media.

For the recommendations, it should be emphasized to current journalism and communication students that social media as a method of disseminating news should be embraced and that by them using it, they can be part of the solution to combat fake news.

Key words of the study: Tiktok, news consumption, fake news, Uganda Christian University

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter represents the overview of the research study. It dives into the background of the study and the research problem. It is followed by the purpose of the study and the specific measurable objectives.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Social media in recent years has become the primary source of news for young people. Among these platforms is Tiktok which emerged as a dominant app not only for entertainment. In Uganda and most parts of Africa, young people have turned to Tiktok to stay informed on matters such as politics, current events, and social issues. Though this has come with increased risk of misinformation, low attention spans, and the role of journalism in changing times.

In 2024, Tiktok was identified as one of the fastest rising platforms for news engagement especially among young users (Reuters' Institute, 2024). It was also established that Gen Z adults particularly those aged between 18 to 24 spend an average of 77 minutes on Tiktok each day. By April 2025, there were 5.31 billion social media users worldwide which is 64.7% of the global population with Tiktok ranking as the fifth most used (Journalism Funders Forum, 2025).

Media outlets worldwide are increasingly turning to Tiktok to get younger audiences interested in news (Heins, 2023). Across Europe, many news executives have been looking for ways to make their outlets more interesting to younger audiences with many examples of them successfully turning to Tiktok (Journalism Funders Forum, 2025).

In Uganda, many media houses have embraced Tiktok not just as an advertising platform but as a medium of disseminating short form news content to attract the interests of younger audiences. An example of this is Next Media and Nation Media that upload short clips of news stories that aired on the traditional news platforms.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Traditional news media such as television, radio, and newspapers have been losing their younger audiences to social media platforms such as Tiktok as a source of their information yet such platforms do not necessarily prioritise credibility of information. Viral content is highly pushed to people's For You Pages with a risk of misinformation being overlooked.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To understand how Tiktok has influenced the way young audiences consume, interpret and trust news content.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 MAIN OBJECTIVE

To examine the influence of TikTok on how young audiences consume and engage with news.

1.3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- I. To explore why young audiences prefer TikTok as a source of news.
- II. To analyze the credibility and accuracy of news information shared on TikTok.
- III. To investigate how TikTok's format and algorithm shape young people's perception of current affairs.
- IV. To assess the implications of this trend for traditional journalism and professional newsrooms.
- V. To highlight how journalists and media educators can adapt to these changes.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- I. What motivates young people to consume news via TikTok?
- II. How do TikTok's features (e.g., short videos, influencers, trends) affect the way news is understood and shared?
- III. What role does misinformation or fake news play on TikTok?
- IV. How do traditional journalists respond to the migration of young audiences to TikTok?

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focused on two key variables which are Tiktok as the independent variable and news consumption of young people as the dependent variable.

The research study took place at Uganda Christian University, Mukono Campus.

The research was done in the 2025 academic year over the period of two months where information was collected and put together in a documentary.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The documentary study was done to shed light on the growing relationship between youth and digital news ecosystems.

It was done to help journalists, educators, and policymakers find ways to make ethical journalism more appealing to younger audiences.

The documentary aims to inspire young journalists to explore innovative storytelling on social media platforms.

To contribute to discussions on information integrity on social media.

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Tiktok: Viral social media platform that was launched in 2016 but gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fake news: Information that is false. Can be spread accidentally (misinformation), deliberately (disinformation) or with malicious intent (malinformation).

Fact checking: The act of cross checking whether information one has come across is factual.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an analysis of existing literature from articles concerning the growing influence of Tiktok as a news source for young people and how this affects information credibility and traditional media houses. The articles also played a crucial role in shaping the questions that were asked in the interviews and the voice over of the documentary.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study used the 2024 Reuters Institute Digital News Report as the core framework. According to Reuters Institute 2024, Tiktok was identified as one of the fastest growing platforms for news engagement, particularly among young audiences. It also stated that news consumption on both X and Facebook had gone down making Tiktok the more popular source of information making it vital to conduct the study on it.

The Journalism Funders Forum wrote an article on the opportunities and pitfalls of using Tiktok for news which became a vital part of the research since it highlighted both the positives and negatives of the platform. Some of the recurring negatives were the ease of spreading misinformation and the dangers of the Tiktok algorithm which chooses what type of content people come across on their For You Pages.

2.2 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature provides a strong case for the negative influence of Tiktok on news consumption habits of young people but it also shows that if a person is media literate, they can use the app to get proper factual information in a timely and quick manner. It also highlights that media houses that want to gain younger audiences have to meet them where they are which can also combat the spread of misinformation (Heins, 2023).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives a brief look into the research methods that were used to execute the documentary including the approach, information collection methods, and target population.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach was employed for the documentary and open-ended questions were prioritised for the interviews as news consumption habits vary from person to person and are subjective. The study aimed at understanding how the students were influenced by Tiktok which required a qualitative approach.

3.2 INFORMATION COLLECTION METHODS

- I. Interviews
- II. Vox pops
- III. Visuals
- IV. Archival material

3.3 TARGET POPULATION

The study was done on the undergraduate students of Uganda Christian University that were enrolled in the 2025 academic year since they are more likely to use Tiktok as a news source.

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since it was an audio-visual documentary, factors such as participants not wanting to physically appear in the documentary, copyrighted material, had to be considered. Recordings were done in a strategic way whereby students that had not consented would not appear. Shooting locations were specific e.g Uganda Christian University (free for students to use campus grounds for learning activities) and Media Challenge Initiative that has a warning for all

individuals that do not want to be filmed. Copyrighted Tiktok material was used under fair use guidelines for educational purposes.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four discusses and interprets the research findings from the interviews and material while keeping in mind that some information could be subjective.

4.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This study reached out to 20 students from different years and courses of which 5 allowed to be recorded and one preferred to do an audio interview. The rest preferred to fill in a written questionnaire. One media specialist who also lectures at Uganda Christian University was interviewed. A social media journalist and online newsroom editor were also interviewed in the documentary.

4.2 STUDENTS USE OF TIKTOK

It was identified that about 80% of students use Tiktok for general activities such as entertainment, posting themselves and of these, only half of them use it as a news source. This is because some of them find it less boring to watch a 30 second news clip than to watch a full bulletin. Those that come across news on Tiktok do so through their For You Pages and very rarely actively search for it. However, the journalism students that were interviewed stated that they search for particular creators and media houses to stay informed since it is a course requirement and to avoid sensationalized news. The 20% that do not use Tiktok at all still get their news from traditional media such as radio and newspapers.

4.3 STUDENTS UNDERSTANDING OF FAKE NEWS AND FACT CHECKING

The findings show that most students that come across news on Tiktok go the extra mile to fact check it unless it has been uploaded by a credible account. However, they also show that these students can not directly tell if a clip is real or not due to the use of Artificial Intelligence. Some

even stated that they prefer not to believe anything even when it could be true. However, the findings show that students are aware of the possibility of fake news.

4.4 TIKTOK AS A NEWS SOURCE

The study came to a conclusion that while Tiktok comes with risks such as subjective reporting, sensationalism, citizen journalism, fake news, biased reporting when used as a medium for disseminating and getting news, it has also greatly benefited journalism and should be implemented by media houses. The benefits out way the risks especially if steps such as providing media literacy to the public are taken. The presence of credible journalists and media houses on such social media platforms provides news seekers with credible sources which can help to combat the false news that could be spread. Tiktok and other platforms have also eased journalism in that it can be used as an information source, disseminating is easier and cheaper, allowed real time reporting, allowed for the feedback from the audience and also has been used as a way to advertise to audiences to go look for the long form content done by the media house or journalist.

4.5 CONCLUSION

While Tiktok has influenced the attention spans of young audiences, it has also enabled them to stay updated with current affairs since it is difficult for some students of Uganda Christian University to access news through traditional means. The university though provides newspapers, some students find it difficult and time consuming to go through them to be informed. Tiktok when used properly can be great for news consumption. Most Uganda Christian University students are media literate and are able to access factual news.

CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that media companies and journalists should join these platforms such as Tiktok to balance the availability of false news with their ethical and credible reporting. New media should also be emphasized to journalism and communication students as something they should use to practice since it cannot be avoided in their careers.

5.1 AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Future research could be done on the impact of Tiktok as a news source for university students. This will assess the good or bad Tiktok has caused to the students.

One could also look at the influence of other social media platforms as news sources for university students.

The influence of Tiktok as a news source on traditional media is also a field that can be studied.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. For Students & Young Audiences (TikTok Users)

- How often do you come across news or current events content?
- Before TikTok, where did you get your news? How has that changed?
- Do you actively search for news on TikTok, or do you mostly stumble upon it?
- Tell me about a recent news story you first learned about on TikTok. What made it stick with you?
- Do you fact check the information you find on TikTok?
- What is it about the TikTok format that makes news feel different?
- How do you decide if a news story or creator on TikTok is credible?
- Have you ever been misled by a news story on TikTok? What happened, and how did it affect your trust?
- Do you feel like the comments section helps you understand different perspectives, or does it usually reinforce one view?
- Has seeing news on TikTok ever motivated you to learn more about a topic elsewhere, or to take an action?

B. For TikTok Creators

- How would you describe your role as a content creator?
- How do you turn a news story into a 60-90 second video? What do you prioritize? What do you have to leave out?
- How do you balance being engaging and using trends/sounds with maintaining seriousness for heavy topics?
- What is your fact-checking and sourcing process? How do you show your sources to your audience in a limited format?
- What are the biggest challenges of communicating serious news in this format? (e.g., oversimplification, comment moderation, misinformation)

C. For Journalists & Editors (from Traditional and Digital News Outlets)

- How do you decide which stories are a good fit for TikTok versus your website or broadcast?
- Have you had to create new roles or train reporters specifically for TikTok content creation?
- What are the biggest ethical concerns your newsroom discusses regarding TikTok?
- How do you maintain your publication's journalistic standards (accuracy, fairness) in a format that rewards speed and subjectivity?

- How do you combat the spread of misinformation on the platform, both from your own account and in the wider ecosystem?
- How has TikTok changed the speed of the news cycle? Have you felt pressure to report on stories because they are trending on TikTok?
- Do you see TikTok as a gateway that brings younger audiences back to your more in-depth reporting?

D. For Journalism Students

- Are your professors and courses discussing TikTok and other short-form video platforms as serious news tools?
- What skills are you learning that you think are most essential for being a journalist in the age of TikTok?
- Do you feel pressure to build a personal brand as a journalist on TikTok before you even enter the industry?
- What, in your opinion, are the most common mistakes traditional news outlets make when they try to use TikTok?

E. For Media Experts & Academics

- What are the long-term implications of a generation primarily consuming news through an algorithm-driven, entertainment-first platform?
- How does TikTok compare to previous disruptions in news media, like the rise of cable news or blogs?
- What does the shift to TikTok mean for the health of our public discourse and democratic processes?
- What potential regulatory or ethical frameworks might be needed for news on these platforms?
- What is the single biggest piece of advice you would give to young people, journalists, and news organizations about navigating this new landscape?