

Measuring the Impacts of Social Media on Daily Life from Millennials to Generation Alpha

Domenico Tirendi¹, Lia Gargiulo²

¹DIARC, Department of Architecture, University of Naples "Federico II", Napoli, Italy

²Master's Degree Student, University of Naples "Federico II", Napoli, Italy

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ABSTRACT

The intensification and the progressive development and evolution of social media over the last decade have radically changed the way in which we live, interact with others, purchase and advertise products, and it even alters people's sense and vocabulary, making certain concepts and words popular, or better said, *viral*. Social media have the undeniable merit of breaking down barriers and distances, enabling immediate interaction between individuals who are physically far apart. Furthermore, social media are the most frequented virtual place in the world, considering that there are now 5 billion active users, approximately 60% of the global population, which according to official UN estimates, has recently surpassed 8 billion people. These impressive statistics were shared by Sky TG24, which published studies by monitoring companies Meltwater and the agency "We Are Social". Social media are no longer used solely to bring people closer or to provide futile entertainment. It is obvious that they are changing our habits, as they take up a significant portion of our time and are increasingly used by companies and business owners to advertise goods and services. Social media have also given rise to full-time jobs such as Social Media Managers, and the so-called "Influencers", "Instagrammers" and "Content creators", Bloggers, Copywriters, and it has also given birth to the social porn industry, which has optimized profits through self-made content. Of course, social media also present significant challenges, copyright violations of online content, privacy violations, identity theft, the spread of defamatory and violent comments on "feed, home" etc. With the awareness that there is no turning back, this study aims to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of using social media, and to investigate user preferences regarding the consumption of content shared online across various platforms, with particular attention to TikTok, which is currently the most used social media by young people. This study seeks to provide a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon, by examining data from the initial responses to a questionnaire shared online via the Google Form platform, especially through "bottom-up" responses regarding the preferences of a sample of young users aged from 11 to 30. Clearly, there is no claim to provide absolute results. Measuring the impacts that consider the improvement/implementation of services offered to digital content consumers allows to assess the relationship between creators and users through specially designed evaluations, such as Conjoint Analysis, which uses questionnaires administered to a random sample of users.

KEYWORDS: *Measuring social media impacts, TikTok, Instagram, questionnaires, Surveys, Stated preferences, lexicographic method.*

PREFACE

Social networks, known in English as *networking service* or *social networking site*, in Italy are commonly known just as *social*, and they refer to online services used for sharing contents, and managing social relationships. These social are accessible via browser or mobile apps, which enable the sharing of not only short

or long written texts, but also any multimedia files such as photos, music, videos, etc... These entertainment services are born as an experiment in the late 1990s¹ and

¹The first social network in history was the American site Six Degrees, launched in New York in 1997 by its founder, the lawyer Andrew Weinreich. This gate was created to connect like-minded people based on social class, age group, and on the concept of six

became extremely popular in the next decade. These services allow any interested user worldwide to register, create their profile, organize a contact list, and publish in full autonomy their updates and to access those of others, all for free. However, to change our lives was the young (at that time) Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg. In 2003, starting with the idea of creating an interactive photo album among university students, he developed, along with some friends, a site that gained widespread popularity. His project crossed the boundaries of Harvard, expanded to other universities, and eventually to high schools, allowing anyone from the age of thirteen to create an account.

It is with Zuckerberg that social media became the amazing medium we know today. They can be considered as extraordinary “weapons of mass distraction”, keeping us constantly in touch with friends and acquaintances, or also represent a significant “boost” for those selling products through e-commerce on their blogs, websites, or social pages. Through social affiliation, people who share the same interests – such as cinema, sports, music, gaming, modeling, food & wine, travel, crafts, design – are frequently offered goods and services that perfectly and subtly meet the hidden “demand” for these items, thanks to sophisticated algorithms and cookies. This happens without individuals having to leave their homes - that is why it is more comfortable - and directly from their sofas using just a smartphone. Additionally, social media allow to tear the barriers of the entry in e-commerce down, enabling anyone to sell products and services online. Through social media, everyone can give feedback and opinions on products, as well as give purchase advice to family members and acquaintances. This happens in a free and selfless manner, giving a contribution to the profits of business owners, companies, and multinationals. The concept itself of social media is centered on the opportunity to express and share opinions: this means that, for online companies, it has never been more important to pay attention to what customers are saying. Companies and brands are increasingly focusing on creating more direct communication channels by using business communities, which aim to create individualized content, deepening the knowledge of real needs and desires. The goal is to adopt a *data-driven* marketing approach. Social media are increasingly capturing the attention of both young people and adults, who find it much harder to follow traditional content like movies and live events, such as concerts or sport events, for extended periods without the “interference” of social media. Several companies are beginning to analyze this

degrees of separation (although, in reality, it was only possible to use three degrees, and thus access information about a friend of a friend of a friend). This project proved to be too ambitious and pioneering, leading to the site’s closure in 2001.

phenomenon, and we are certain that over time, during live events, they will increase “interactions” with the audience to ensure a higher and more lasting threshold of attention. Electronic media, such as radio and television, were originally conceived for collective consumption. Indeed, in the beginning, when not everyone could afford them, they often served as “bonds” that tied people together, gathering them in front of a sort of virtual fireplace. Before the arrival of the web and individual devices, radio and television represented a window to the world that reached even the most remote and isolated communities. Music too was often enjoyed together with others. And radios or record players, equipped with amplified outputs and batteries, could be taken anywhere. Often, between the 1970s and 1990s, people gathered at friends’ houses to show off their hi-fi systems and listen together to the latest vinyl records, cassette tapes, and later compact discs. The music needed real and tangible physical supports. However, 45 years have passed since July 1, 1979, when the Japanese company Sony launched a product that would change the way everyone listens to music: the Walkman. With this device, and the famous headphones attached to the player, we had, for the first time, a personal soundtrack while strolling or playing sports. The first version of this device, the TPS-L2, was launched by Sony’s founder Akio Morita with the addition of two headphone jacks, allowing two people to listen to music together. However, Morita feared that this device would make people “antisocial”. And so it was. In the next models, this feature was removed, and everyone ended up listening to music alone. Then, technology continued to produce devices for increasingly individualized content consumption: Apple’s iPod and the arrival of web-connected smart phones appeared in Italy between 1999 and 2001. These dates are more than symbolic, because they represent a clear generational divide where nothing could ever be the same again.

THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

Nowadays, social media are becoming an increasingly integral part of our lives, even if their influence is different for each person. In this sense, the generations most affected by their use are those born in the new millennium, also called *digital natives*, who have enjoyed unprecedented technological development. In particular, this study focuses on the use of social media by the last generations: the so-called *Gen Z*, which includes people born between 1995 and 2010, and *Gen Alpha*, which includes people born from 2010 and later. The aim is to analyze the behaviors of a group of people aged between 11 to 30 years old towards social media.

To obtain a smaller field of research, the focus has been placed on the social platform most used by these two generations: TikTok. It was launched in 2018 and it was the result of the merger of two social networks, used to

share short videos with music and effects. These are *Musical.ly*, created by Alex Zhu and Luyu Yang, and *Douyin*, created by Zhang Yiming. From that moment, TikTok has grown rapidly. Indeed, following the 2020 pandemic, which forced most of the world's population to stay at home and led people to spend increasingly large amounts of time on social media, TikTok experienced fast growth, and it has obtained a massively increase of its user base, reaching approximately 1.56 billion active monthly users globally. "Active users" refer to those who use the social platform, whether by posting videos, leaving comments and likes, or merely watching the content. For both groups, regardless of the type of use, it is possible to talk about "social media addiction", which is the absolute inability to do without it, even if it is just to open the application for a few seconds. This results in, as previously mentioned, a considerable change in the concentration and attention of individuals, especially the very young ones. This phenomenon is also associated with the overload of information we are exposed to daily through the web. In fact, whenever we open an internet page or a social media platform, we are flooded with countless pieces of data that we absorb passively, without effort. This is a cognitive bombardment that is unprecedented in history.

As early as 2008, a study carried out by the University of California (R.E. Bohn, J. Short, 2009) calculated that the average individual is exposed to 34 GB of content every day, which corresponds to a "deluge" of over one hundred thousand words. As the number of stimuli increases, our ability to pay attention decreases in an inversely proportional way. And it is precisely this that, perhaps, leads users to struggle to focus on anything else. The degree of attention determines – and improves – the quality of our real-life experiences. If we are "present", we are able to understand, learn, and remember better. By paying attention, we can appreciate reading a good book, feel emotions while watching a movie, a painting, a soccer match, or listening to music. Attention can help us to react appropriately and quickly to unexpected events, perform complex tasks, and even the quality of our interpersonal reactions benefits from it. A study conducted for Microsoft by Christopher Hooton, in 2025, states that the attention span for those who spend time online has been reduced by another third: whereas it used to be 12 seconds, we now stop paying attention after just eight seconds. We could consider a goldfish, which has an attention span of 9 seconds, so it has more endurance than ours. The question that arises spontaneously at this point is: if prolonged use of the web and social platforms leads to a decrease in concentration among individuals, how can TikTok manage to attract more and more people? And how does it manage to keep registered users engaged? What emerges from various studies, and specially from this one, is that what attracts and retains users' attention is the way videos are structured and edited. The

combination of songs, sounds, texts, images, and videos, along with post-production editing, plays a fundamental role in this respect. The study that deals with this kind of analysis is the *multimodality*, which will be used as the basis for the research. As regards the tool used for the analysis, a Google Form questionnaire was employed, and the responses will certainly help identify the most stimulating and functional factors of the videos published on the social platform.

THE STUDY

We conducted a data collection on how – and how much – TikTok is used, and we used a questionnaire created via Google Form and administered it to a random sample of 106 young people aged between 11 and 30 (Generation Z and Generation Alpha). The survey was conducted entirely online in June 2024 alone. It is focused on this narrow target because it is commonly known that people in this age group are the most likely to use social media and, in particular, TikTok. Moreover, in order to obtain reliable data – but certainly not absolute ones – the scope of the survey had to be narrowed down. The questionnaire consists of five sections featuring various questions organized in different formats. There are open-ended questions, allowing interviewed to provide more detailed and articulated answers, multiple-choice questions, enabling interviewed to choose one answer among many, and some questions using a qualitative and quantitative linear scale, requiring interviewed to base their preference on a topic using a measurement scale from 1 to 5. The first section of the questionnaire is dedicated to exploring the profile of the individuals, with questions being both open-ended and multiple-choice. Although the survey was designed to be anonymous, in some cases people chose to answer non-mandatory questions, providing sensitive information such as their name, surname, or personal email address. This first phase was used to acquire a general overview of the sample and record its socioeconomic characteristics (age, education, profession, and income) in order to correlate them with how those individuals use TikTok. The second section includes specific questions aimed at better understanding the use of social media, and specifically TikTok. In particular, the focus was on the time each person spends on the app, how users interact with others or how much they are influenced by what they see in the videos, and finally, whether they consider those who do not use TikTok to be "left out" from the world. Indeed, the last question is completely open-ended to allow respondents to express their thoughts on this matter. The third section, on the other hand, was dedicated to preferences regarding video editing.

Interviewed were therefore asked if they prefer short, medium, or long videos, videos with or without music, or videos composed of multiple short clips or with a single long clip. In this case, the questions were

multiple-choice. The fourth section featured linear scale questions, allowing individuals to indicate how often they watch certain types of videos (comedy, educational, make-up/hair-style, dance, viral challenges, cooking, reviews).

The preference scale ranges from 1, indicating the type of content the user does not watch, to 5, indicating the type of content the user watches most often and therefore likes the most. In the end, the fifth section follows the same format as the fourth, with linear scale questions allowing individuals to indicate the type of content creators they follow most on TikTok (celebrities, influencers, friends and family, experts in a specific field).

RESULTS

The results of the survey have demonstrated how much TikTok influences the lives of all young people. As TikTok is used daily, it is more essential than ever to understand the mechanism behind the creation of these contents, because it can give us a clear picture of the

type of generation that is emerging. The responses were generally in line with the expectations regarding the use of the platform. First of all, it should be noted that the survey was conducted among people aged from 11 to 30, but 67.92% of those who participated in the survey belong to the age group between 19 and 24 years old.

This data should be taken into consideration as we analyze the results. Another significant aspect is that interviewed largely reported being student workers. Yet, TikTok is used daily for a remarkably substantial average number of hours. This social platform seems to have become an integral part of everyone’s life, regardless of the importance of work commitments. Particularly interesting, though partly expected, was the data regarding the moment of day dedicated to using TikTok. The most dedicated moment of the day for TikTok was found to be in the evening, with 40.57% of preferences, followed by the afternoon with 19.81%, and finally the night with 17.92% of preferences (See Fig. 1).

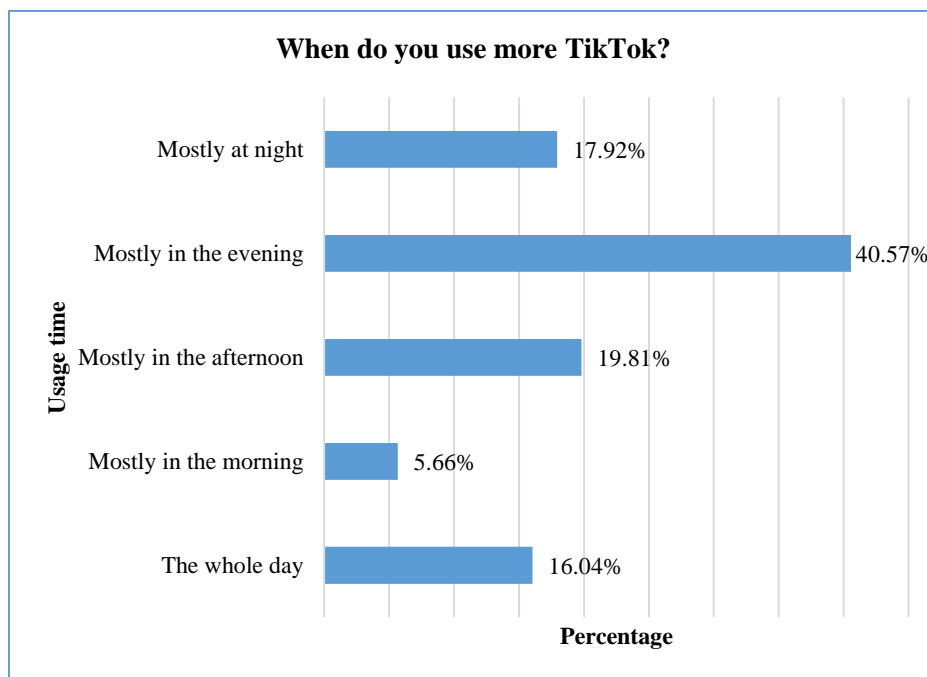


Fig. 1

On this last point, a higher percentage was expected, but it still represents a significant number, especially considering that the sample consists of students and workers who theoretically require a certain number of hours for sleep and energy recovery. The data regarding usage “at night” is essentially equivalent to “using it throughout the day”. This aspect is indicative of the challenges regarding time management in a generation that is “constantly connected”, where young people chat, watch videos on tablets and smart phones, stay glued to computer screens and consoles, and even interact and play for several consecutive hours. Another expected –

yet important – data to note is the motivation behind the use of TikTok, which is primarily for pure “entertainment” (See Fig. 2). This is further confirmed by the predominant type of videos watched on the platform, that are comedic and amusing videos, which garnered the highest percentage of interest from the sample. Shifting to a “more technical” aspect of posted videos, we can affirm that in this case as well, the results align with expectations. It is important to bear in mind that younger generations are impatient and prefer concise and immediate content. Indeed, 59.43% and 30.19% of interviewed stated a preference for short

videos, respectively with maximum lengths of 1 minute and 15 seconds (See Fig. 3). Moreover, 74.53% expressed a preference for edited videos, which involve cuts between clips. This preference aligns perfectly with what was previously stated, as edited videos with cuts help eliminate pauses and hesitations between sentences, making the videos more dynamic and less boring for the user who is watching them. The same reasoning applies to preferences between videos with music and/or text, or videos where there is only the creator speaking (in which background music is not important). The preference leaned heavily towards the latter type, with 76.42% favoring it. This preference is driven by the immediacy achieved when the creator speaks directly and gets straight to the point. However, the survey got some unexpected answers. Nowadays, TikTok is also

used for advertising products and services, with the option to purchase them through affiliate links without leaving the app. Despite the assumption that most people would make purchases through the social platform, in reality, 79.25% of interviewed answered negatively. However, what was truly surprising was the response to the question “Do you think that people who do not use TikTok are somehow “left off” from the world?”. To this question, most people answered “No”, accounting for 70% of individuals (See Fig. 4). Probably, the motivation behind this response lies in not wanting to admit, even to themselves, how much TikTok truly influences our lives. It would be like admitting that a social platform has total control over our daily choices.

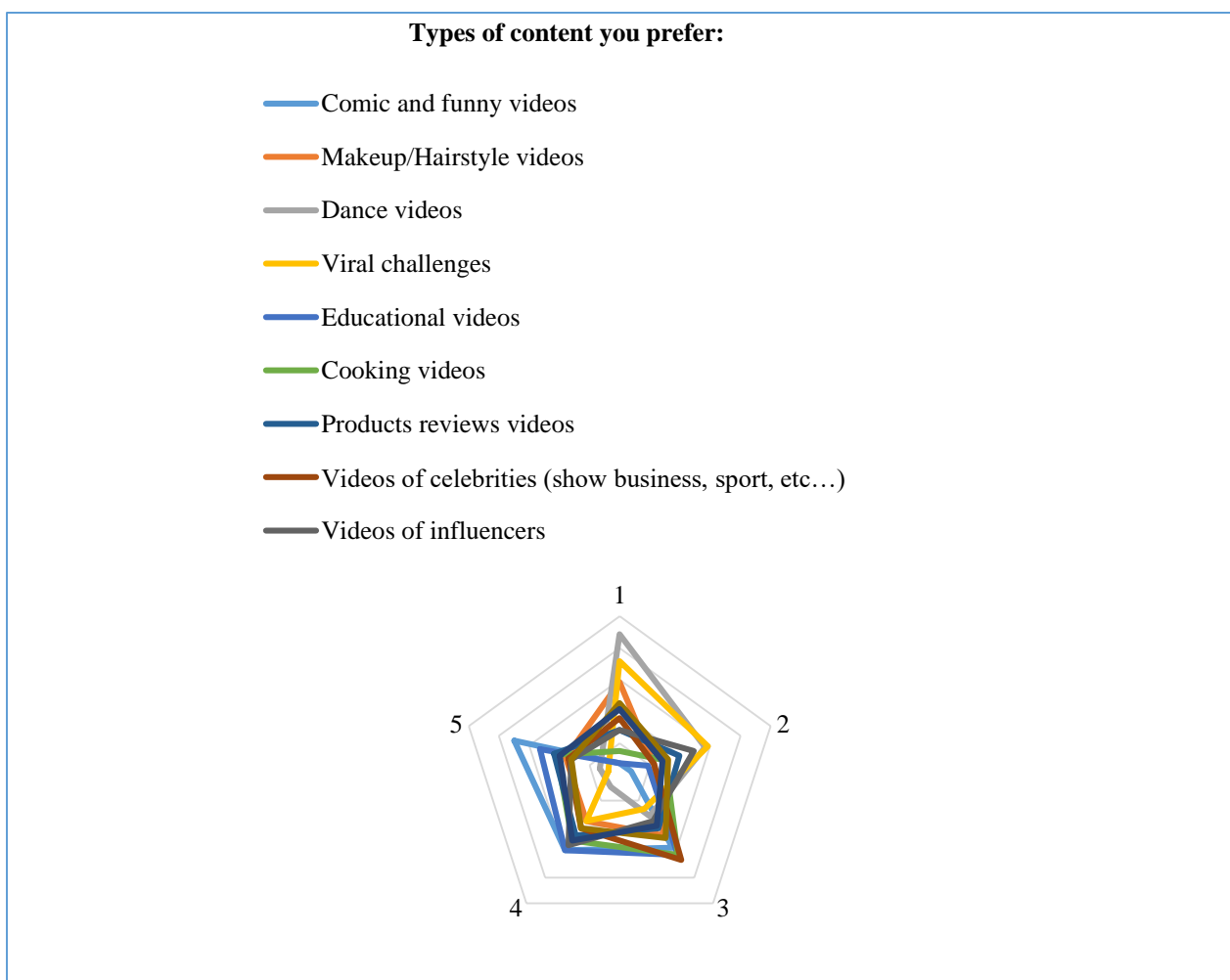


Fig. 2

However, what is truly interesting and worth noting is that for those who answered affirmatively (about 29.25%), there was also an option to explain the reason. The responses showed that everyone shares the same thought on this matter, namely that we now live in a context where if you don't use social media, TikTok in particular, you can't keep up with trends, fads, and current developments. TikTok helps to spread all of this virally, and not using it, or using it minimally, means

being “left out” and not understanding what most people are actually talking about at that precise moment. Another important aspect concerns the preferences of the sample regarding the contents of the videos on TikTok. Based on the questionnaire instructions, individuals could express their preferences using a scale ranging from 1 (least preferable) to 5 (extremely preferable). It has been used the Lexicographic Model (L. Fusco Girard, 1994), in order to determine a

prioritization ranking among the various preference options. This model relies on ordinal scale comparisons among the options most preferred by the sample. The preferred attribute from the application of this methodology is the one that most frequently “behaves well”, that is, achieves the “highest scores”. From Table “A”, which records the frequencies, we proceeded to the

subsequent Table “B”, which records the number of “first places” for each category in relation to the score obtained (1-5). This analysis led us to formulate Table “C”, which allowed us to relate the first places obtained for each score category, thereby giving us the ability to “weigh” the preference of one attribute over another.

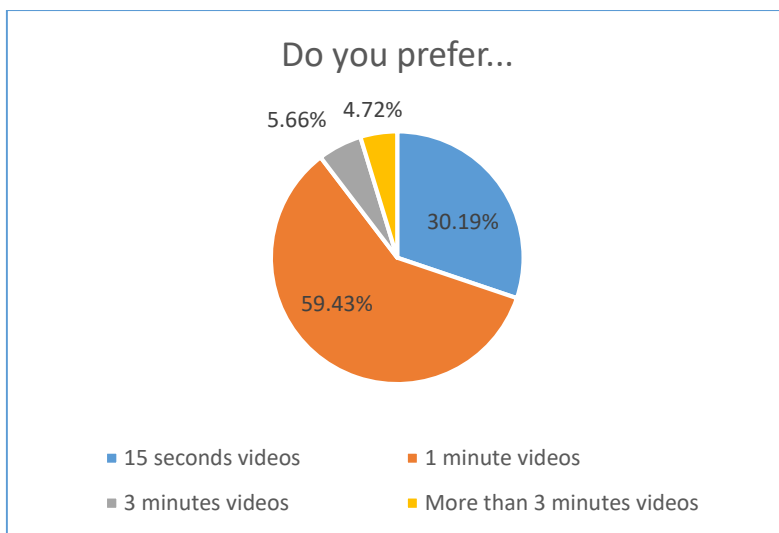


Fig.3

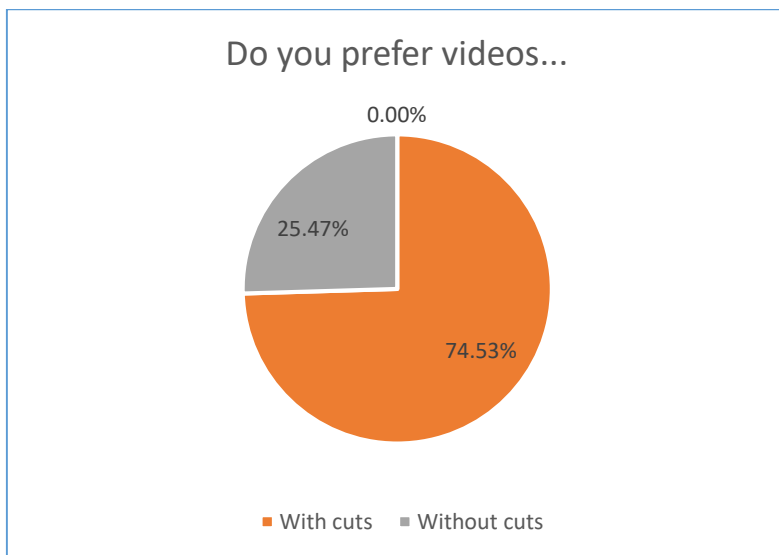


Fig.4

Table. A

Do you Prefer...	1	2	3	4	5
Comic and Funny Videos	4	4	30	31	37
Makeup/Hairstyle Videos	31	12	25	19	19
Dance Videos	47	30	17	5	7
Viral challenges	38	31	14	19	4
Educational Videos	4	10	33	31	28
Cooking Videos	8	16	33	27	22
Products Reviews Videos	15	21	22	205	23
Videos of Celebrities (show business, sport, etc...)	19	12	35	22	18
Videos of influencers	15	26	19	29	17
Videos of friends and relatives	24	17	26	22	17
Videos of experts in a specific field (mathematics, scientists, politicians, etc...)	22	15	21	27	21

Table. B

Type of Content	1P	2P	3P	4P	5P
Comic and Funny Videos	1	1	0	0	0
Makeup/Hairstyle Videos	0	0	0	0	0
Dance Videos	0	0	0	0	1
Viral challenges	0	0	0	1	0
Educational Videos	0	1	1	0	0
Cooking Videos	0	0	1	0	0
Products Reviews Videos	0	0	0	0	0
Videos of Celebrities (show business, sport, etc...)	0	0	0	0	0
Videos of influencers	0	0	0	0	0
Videos of friends and relatives	0	0	0	0	0
Videos of experts in a specific field (mathematics, scientists, politicians, etc...)	0	0	0	0	1

Table. C

Type of Content	Scores
Comic and Funny Videos	9
Educational Videos	5
Videos of experts in a specific field (mathematics, scientists, politicians, etc...)	5
Cooking Videos	3
Viral challenges	2
Dance Videos	1
Makeup/Hairstyle Videos	0
Videos of influencers	0
Videos of Celebrities (show business, sport, etc...)	0
Videos of friends and relatives	0
Products Reviews Videos	0

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this research was to analyze how much time *social media* occupy in our lives and how they can influence it. The analysis takes place in the context of a “fast-paced society”, which is constantly connected, impatient, in the seek of immediacy both in content and in the reception of messages. The year 2000 has generated a fleeting period and a deep divide with previous generations, who themselves have been victims of a temporal paradox that still leads them to imagine the 1980s and 1990s as if they were just twenty or ten years ago. The survey conducted via Google Forms was crucial in confirming some predictions, especially regarding the types of videos and the time spent on social media, despite the presence throughout the day of other commitments such as study and work. However, it was also very stimulating and surprising to receive unexpected data that led us to reflect on other aspects. Most interviewed stated that not using TikTok does not lead to social exclusion. This finding, as described earlier, was completely unexpected, although we can infer that the reason behind this response might be the unwillingness to admit how much social media actually influence us. Indeed, all social media platforms are built on networks of relationships, based on people’s ability and willingness to interact freely with others. People wish to communicate their thoughts online, perhaps even before doing it verbally with those around them. Social media, in fact, offer synchronous forms of communication that develop in realtime, providing

greater opportunities to meet people who may not be physically close to us but who may share similar interests and passions. For this reason, interpersonal relationships that begin online are often more solid than those formed “offline”. Furthermore, TikTok is also used to promote products and services. In addition to advertisements between videos and, recently, within the videos themselves, these are also shared through *content creators* and *influencers*, used to reach a wider audience.

Despite the questionnaire showing that not everyone makes purchases through the platform, there is a significant percentage (20.75%) who do, which should not be underestimated. In conclusion, considering the analysis conducted and the data attained, it can be asserted that social media, particularly TikTok, can indeed become tools to shape our lifestyle, how we perceive the world, and how we represent ourselves online. The market is also undergoing profound and paradoxical changes due to social media, as if a company not visible on TikTok “does not exist” even in reality. Being aware of these dynamics, it’s crucial to anticipate the audience’s preferences and what is currently trending, so that products or services can be offered in the right way. In light of this, the mere use of a social network can indeed become a genuine strategy to potentially change our lives. A future implementation of this research activity includes expanding the sample size and employing more sophisticated techniques for structuring the questionnaire and analyzing data. Conjoint Analysis is particularly suitable for evaluations

of this nature, where interviewed are asked to make choices (trade-off) between alternative features or scenarios. The processing of collected data allows researchers to calculate the relative importance of attributes across different levels of consumption.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable.

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