

Do TikTok Short Videos Really Reduce the Attention Span of High School Students at Sarakham Pittayakhom School?

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Abstract.

This study investigated whether frequent exposure to TikTok short-form videos is associated with reduced attention span among high school students at Sarakham Pittayakhom School. The study used a quantitative survey design. A questionnaire was administered to 100 high school students to collect information about TikTok use, viewing habits, perceived concentration, and attention-related behaviors. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings indicated that TikTok was a common part of students' daily media use, with many respondents reporting regular exposure to short videos. Students also reported behaviors that may be related to rapid-content consumption, such as difficulty maintaining concentration on lengthy tasks, checking their phones while studying, and preferring short and quickly changing content. However, the results should be interpreted as evidence of an association rather than proof that TikTok directly causes a reduction in attention span. Overall, the study suggests that frequent consumption of short-form videos may be related to students' perceived attention habits, particularly when TikTok use becomes excessive or interrupts study activities. The findings highlight the importance of balanced digital-media use, self-regulation, and intentional study routines among high school students.

Keywords: TikTok, short-form videos, attention span, high school students, social media

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1. Introduction

Short-form video platforms have become one of the most prominent features of adolescent media life. Among them, TikTok has grown particularly quickly in popularity among secondary school students, offering an endless stream of videos that are typically shorter than one minute, algorithmically curated, and designed to be consumed in rapid succession (Montag, Yang, & Elhai, 2021). In Thailand, national surveys consistently place young people among the heaviest internet users, with daily online time concentrated in social media and video consumption (Electronic Transactions Development Agency [ETDA], 2022). For teachers and parents, this raises a practical question that is often asked but rarely examined systematically at the school level: does the habit of watching short, quickly changing videos relate to students' ability to concentrate on longer tasks such as reading, homework, and classroom learning?

The present study was initiated by a group of students at Sarakham Pittayakhom School, Maha Sarakham, Thailand, who observed that many of their peers spend substantial time watching short videos every day. This everyday observation motivated a systematic

investigation of whether frequent exposure to TikTok short-form videos is associated with reduced attention span among high school students at the school. Rather than assuming a causal effect, the study was framed as a question — do TikTok short videos really reduce the attention span of high school students? — and was designed to collect empirical evidence on students' viewing behaviour and their self-reported attention-related habits.

The study contributes a student-led, school-level perspective to a debate that has so far been dominated by studies of university students and adult users (Qin, Omar, & Musetti, 2022; Rosen, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013). By surveying students in their own school context, the study provides locally grounded evidence that can inform media-literacy guidance and study-habit interventions in Thai secondary education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Short-form video platforms and adolescent media use

TikTok differs from earlier social media in that its core experience is a personalised, continuously refreshed feed of very short videos. Montag et al. (2021) reviewed early empirical findings on TikTok use and noted that the platform's design — rapid content turnover, algorithmic personalisation, and low-effort consumption — creates strong incentives for prolonged and repeated use. Qin et al. (2022) found that the perceived quality of information and of the recommendation system contributes to habitual and, for some users, addiction-like patterns of short-form video use. National data from Thailand similarly indicate that video-based social media occupy a large share of adolescents' daily screen time (ETDA, 2022).

2.2 Attention, cognitive load, and media multitasking

Several strands of cognitive and media psychology explain why rapid-content consumption might relate to attention habits. The limited capacity model of mediated message processing holds that attentional resources are finite and that fast-paced, constantly changing messages compete for these resources (Lang, 2000). Cognitive load theory likewise suggests that frequent task switching imposes costs on working memory and learning (Sweller, 2011). Empirical work on media multitasking has found that heavy media multitaskers perform worse on tasks requiring sustained cognitive control (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009), that interrupted work is completed with more perceived stress and effort (Mark, Gudith, & Klocke, 2008), and that students who switch to social media while studying show shorter on-task periods (Rosen et al., 2013). Reviews of internet effects on cognition conclude that the online environment can encourage habits of shallow, rapidly shifting attention, while emphasising that causal evidence in adolescents remains limited (Firth et al., 2019; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Taken together, the literature motivates an association-focused, rather than causal, investigation at the school level.

3. Research Objectives

The study pursued three objectives: (1) to describe the TikTok use and viewing habits of high school students at Sarakham Pittayakhom School; (2) to describe students' perceived concentration and attention-related behaviours; and (3) to explore whether frequent exposure to TikTok short-form videos is associated with students' perceived attention span.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

The study employed a quantitative survey design. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on four areas: TikTok use, viewing habits, perceived concentration, and attention-related behaviours. A survey design was chosen because it allows systematic description of behaviour across a substantial number of students within the school and is feasible for a student research team to administer.

4.2 Participants

The participants were 100 high school students at Sarakham Pittayakhom School, Maha Sarakham, Thailand. Participation was voluntary, responses were collected anonymously, and the questionnaire was administered by the student research team under the school's student research programme.

4.3 Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of items covering (1) general TikTok use, including whether and how regularly students watch short videos; (2) viewing habits, such as when and in what situations short videos are watched; (3) perceived concentration, including students' own assessment of their ability to stay focused on lengthy tasks; and (4) attention-related behaviours, such as checking the phone while studying and preferences regarding content length and pacing.

4.4 Data analysis

The data were analysed with descriptive statistics — frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation — to describe patterns of TikTok use and attention-related behaviour across the sample. Because the design is cross-sectional and descriptive, the analysis was interpreted in terms of association rather than causation.

5. Results

The findings indicated that TikTok was a common part of students' daily media use. A large share of respondents reported regular exposure to short videos, confirming that short-form video consumption is a routine, everyday activity rather than an occasional one for high school students at the school.

With respect to attention-related behaviour, students reported patterns that may be related to rapid-content consumption. Three patterns were prominent in the responses and are summarised in Table 1: difficulty maintaining concentration on lengthy tasks, checking the phone while studying, and a preference for short and quickly changing content.

Table 1. Attention-related behaviour patterns reported by respondents

Behaviour pattern	Description as reported by students
Difficulty sustaining concentration	Students reported finding it hard to maintain concentration on lengthy tasks such as reading long texts or completing extended assignments.
Phone checking while studying	Students reported checking their phones during study sessions, interrupting on-task time.
Preference for short, fast content	Students reported preferring short and quickly changing content over longer material.

Source: questionnaire responses of 100 high school students, Sarakham Pittayakhom School.

Reported attention-related difficulties appeared particularly in connection with heavier use — that is, when TikTok use was described as excessive or as interrupting study activities. At the same time, the data are self-reported and cross-sectional; the results therefore constitute evidence of an association between frequent short-form video exposure and perceived attention habits, not proof that TikTok directly causes a reduction in attention span.

6. Discussion

The pattern observed at Sarakham Pittayakhom School is consistent with the international literature. The routine, daily character of TikTok use among the surveyed students mirrors findings on the platform's strong engagement mechanics (Montag et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2022) and Thai national statistics on adolescent internet use (ETDA, 2022). The co-occurrence of frequent short-video exposure with self-reported difficulty concentrating on lengthy tasks echoes the media-multitasking literature, in which heavy multitaskers show weaker sustained cognitive control (Ophir et al., 2009) and student on-task time is shortened by social media checking (Rosen et al., 2013). The students' reported preference for short, quickly changing content is what the limited capacity model would predict for media environments that reward rapid orienting responses (Lang, 2000), and the reported phone checking while studying reflects the interruption costs documented by Mark et al. (2008).

Importantly, the study's framing question — whether TikTok really reduces attention span — cannot be answered causally by a cross-sectional survey, and the findings were deliberately interpreted as an association. This caution is aligned with reviews concluding that the causal effects of online media on adolescent cognition remain an open question (Firth et al., 2019; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). What the data do support is a practical concern: when short-form video use becomes excessive or intrudes into study time, it accompanies attention habits that students themselves perceive as less conducive to learning.

7. Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. First, the sample was drawn from a single school, which limits generalisation to other contexts. Second, all measures were self-reported; perceived concentration may differ from objectively measured attention. Third, the cross-sectional design cannot separate the direction of the relationship — students with shorter attention spans may also be more drawn to short-form content. Future research could combine self-reports with behavioural or performance-based attention measures, follow students over time, and compare schools with different media-literacy practices.

8. Conclusion

TikTok short-form videos are a common part of daily media life for high school students at Sarakham Pittayakhom School, and frequent consumption of such videos is associated with students' perceived attention habits — particularly difficulty concentrating on lengthy tasks, phone checking while studying, and a preference for short, fast content. The evidence is associational, not causal, but it underlines the importance of balanced digital-media use, self-regulation, and intentional study routines among high school students. For schools, the findings support incorporating media-literacy and attention-management guidance into student development activities.

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