

TikTok and Mental Health Communication: Exploring Content and Public Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore communication styles and public engagement levels in mental health-related content on the TikTok platform. The growing openness in discussing mental health issues on social media reflects a shift in how society perceives and responds to topics once considered taboo. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research combines content analysis of popular TikTok videos tagged with #mentalhealth and an online survey to assess user perceptions and content representation. The findings reveal that most content employs a casual tone with emotional and motivational delivery. Visuals tend to be minimalistic but support a reflective narrative atmosphere, often accompanied by melancholic background music. Content creators include both professional psychologists and individuals sharing personal experiences. Public engagement is notably high, as indicated by significant numbers of likes, comments, and shares, with predominantly positive and empathetic responses. These results affirm that TikTok serves not only as a space for entertainment but also as an effective medium for mental health communication—provided it is supported by adequate media literacy to prevent misinformation. The study recommends fostering collaboration between mental health professionals and content creators to build a healthier and more educational digital ecosystem.

Keywords: mental health, TikTok, communication style, social media, media literacy, engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is no longer considered a taboo subject nowadays. The evolution of society and the growing accessibility of information particularly through social media have increased public awareness of the importance of mental health in daily life. Issues such as depression, anxiety, burnout, and even suicide are no

longer hidden but are being discussed openly by individuals, communities, and institutions. Social media has become both a space for expression and a medium for education, reinforcing the narrative that mental health is just as important as physical health. This phenomenon marks a global paradigm shift from viewing mental disorders as personal flaws or sources of shame to recognizing them

as legitimate public health concerns that must be urgently addressed. Global attention to this issue has increased, as seen in the integration of mental health into the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize that mental health is an inseparable component of human well-being and development.

According to *The Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development* (Patel et al., 2018) mental disorders have become a significant contributor to the global burden of disease in both high-income and low-income countries. The report states that a collective failure to respond to the mental health crisis not only results in a massive loss of human potential but also exacerbates human rights violations, particularly against those without legal protection or access to basic services. This reflects that mental health is not only a medical issue but also a social, economic, and human rights issue requiring a coordinated and inclusive global response.

The advancement of technology and open access to information particularly through social media has encouraged global society to care more and be more open about mental health issues. Today, social media plays a dual role: as a mirror of society's psychological dynamics and as a space for education and advocacy. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the fragility of global mental resilience. A global study by (Nochaiwong et al., 2021) found that nearly 30% of the world's population experienced depression, while more than 50% suffered from psychological distress during the pandemic.

Simultaneously, *The Lancet Commission* reaffirmed that mental illness remains an increasing global burden that has not been optimally addressed. This reinforces that mental health is a global issue that can no longer be ignored. In this modern context, media literacy becomes increasingly crucial as a tool to raise awareness, combat stigma, and promote the development of a psychologically healthier digital ecosystem.

The rise of social media as a source of information has changed how people understand and respond to mental health issues. These platforms have improved access to information, education, and personal experiences related to mental health topics that were once difficult to access. However, this ease of access does not always correlate with accurate understanding. Much of the circulating information lacks scientific basis and is often opinion-based. This is where media literacy becomes essential—the ability of individuals to critically filter, evaluate, and understand the digital information they consume. A study by (Emeralda et al., 2025) found that individuals with high levels of new media literacy tend to manage online information more wisely, improve self-acceptance, and feel a greater sense of belonging within their communities ultimately having a positive impact on their mental well-being.

The platform that stands out in this phenomenon is TikTok a social media platform owned by ByteDance that functions dually as an entertainment medium (Wulandari, Poppy, Mawaddah & Rasinta, 2025) which

now functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as a modern communication medium where various mental health topics are openly discussed. TikTok's short-form videos and personalized algorithms allow rapid and wide dissemination of content related to depression, anxiety, overthinking, and self-care. Once-taboo topics are now part of public discourse, accessible to anyone, anytime. However, the rapid flow of information also brings risks such as misinformation, glorification of mental disorders, and excessive dependence on external validation. In this context, media literacy is a critical element. The ability to filter accurate information, distinguish between educational and manipulative content, and critically understand the psychological impact of digital consumption is key to maintaining mental balance in the new media era.

Nevertheless, easy access to information does not automatically guarantee the public's comprehension. The abundance of subjective, unverified, or sensational content suggests a potential distortion and misinterpretation of mental health issues. Here, media literacy especially new media literacy becomes a vital tool for audiences to assess the validity, intent, and impact of the content they consume. Based on this background, important questions arise regarding how mental health issues are communicated through TikTok videos and how users receive and interpret this content. Amid the increasing consumption of social media-based information, it is important to understand how well users can comprehend, evaluate, and respond to widespread mental health content.

This understanding is crucial to ensure that platforms like TikTok serve not only as entertainment but also as reliable educational media that do not inflict psychological harm. Therefore, this study focuses on the communication styles and reception of mental health content on TikTok among young users.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media as a Space for Mental Health Discourse

The evolution of social media has created new channels of communication that serve not only to disseminate information but also to provide spaces for self-expression and the formation of public opinion. In the context of mental health, social media plays a significant role as a medium that allows users to share personal experiences, seek support, and build collective narratives around psychological well-being. According to (Hilal Bashir & Shabir Ahmad Bhat, 2017) social media has become an integral part of young people's lives who are also among the most vulnerable to mental health issues. While they highlight the potential negative impact of excessive social media exposure on psychological well-being, they also acknowledge its capacity to facilitate education and raise awareness of mental health concerns. This phenomenon underlines the importance of understanding how mental health content is communicated and received by audiences on digital platforms. A study by (Gkotsis et al., 2016) analyzed how language used on platforms such as Reddit reflects

psychological conditions. They discovered that mental health communities have distinct vocabularies and linguistic expressions, with negative sentiment often dominating discussions.

These findings are crucial in framing how mental health narratives are organically shaped by users and how such framing can be analyzed through a linguistic lens. Furthermore, (Naslund et al., 2016) argue that digital platforms offer a safe space for individuals experiencing stigma in real life to engage and receive social support. Social media thus serves not only as an information channel but also as a medium that fosters emotional solidarity and community building based on shared experiences. An article in the *International Journal of Indian Psychology* (Hilal Bashir & Shabir Ahmad Bhat, 2017) adds that social media provides users with “mental nutrition,” offering a platform for idea exchange, experience sharing, and emotional support, which can either strengthen or weaken psychological well-being, depending on the nature of the content and interactions.

Over the past decade, social media has transformed from a basic communication tool into a highly complex expressive arena where identity, emotion, and ideology are constructed and exchanged. Mental health issues have undergone a similar transformation, evolving from private concerns into public discourse that spreads virally across platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. Social media now functions not only as a mirror of users’ psychological states but also as an informal

“intervention agent,” bridging the individual with their wider community. (Aschbrenner et al., 2020) report that individuals with mental health conditions now use social media at rates comparable to the general population. Through these platforms, they access emotional support, share coping strategies, and experience a sense of social connection that is often inaccessible through traditional channels. This highlights the therapeutic potential of digital spaces, especially those with a strong community orientation. However, this phenomenon is paradoxical. Social media also fosters harmful behaviors such as social comparison, aesthetic pressure, and perfectionist expectations, which can lead to anxiety, stress, and depression particularly among adolescents and young adults (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). Dependence on digital validation, such as likes, comments, and online recognition, can diminish self-esteem and lead to psychological alienation.

A study by (Efendi et al., 2023) strengthens the position of social media as a platform for mental health communication. Their research shows that social media enables the dissemination of mental health narratives through educational content, personal stories, and collective motivation. Such content often attracts large audiences and, in some cases, helps individuals cope with depression and emotional distress. TikTok, as an audiovisual platform with personalized algorithms, allows mental health content to be presented in a narrative, emotional, and highly accessible format for the general public. TikTok's ability to shape mental health

discourse is rooted in its integration of visual expression, music, and emotionally charged captions. Features such as duet, stitch, and comment reply foster dialogic and community-based communication. This opens the door to exploring new communication styles: how users express emotions, how audiences respond, and how popular narratives form and spread virally. Research by (Putri et al., 2024) and (Harahap et al., 2022) found that teenagers and young adults are the most active groups in both consuming and producing mental health-related content. On one hand, their high curiosity drives them to learn more about mental conditions and coping mechanisms. On the other hand, exposure to harmful content such as pornography, cyberbullying, or pessimistic narratives can worsen their mental state especially in the absence of adequate digital and mental health literacy. To understand the dynamics of mental health content on TikTok, it is also important to consider users' abilities to access, evaluate, and produce digital information critically. New media literacy (Emeralda et al., 2025) encompasses skills such as interpreting social cues, understanding implicit narratives, and distinguishing between educational content and potentially harmful material. High levels of social media use among adolescents and young adults as noted by (Fatahya & Abidin, 2022) do not necessarily equate to a strong understanding of the content they consume. Therefore, communication patterns around mental health on TikTok cannot be separated from users' media literacy, which influences how they produce, interpret, and respond to circulating

narratives. Based on these insights, it can be concluded that TikTok, as an audiovisual social media platform, has opened up a new space for communicating mental health issues. The content shared is not only informative but also emotional and personal, making mental health communication more accessible and relatable to users' everyday experiences. This phenomenon indicates a shift in how society particularly younger generations engage with psychological issues: from a previously private matter to a more open and collective discourse.

3. METOHD

This study employs a qualitative approach with data collection conducted in two stages. According to John W. Creswell, qualitative research is a type of inquiry aimed at gaining a deep understanding of the messages or experiences encountered by individuals or groups facing specific social issues (Mawaddah, 2025). The first stage involves a descriptive qualitative content analysis by collecting and analyzing TikTok videos tagged with #mentalhealth, focusing specifically on those with the highest number of viewers. The researcher examines the communication styles used by content creators when discussing mental health concepts. This research analyzes the creators' communication styles such as patterns of communication, delivery style, video visualization, and audio usage the researcher evaluates the effectiveness of the content by measuring the number of views (exposure), the number of likes, and the most-liked

comments (engagement). In this stage, the researcher also analyzes selected comments that received the highest number of likes to gain further insight into audience response. The second stage of data collection involves conducting an online survey. This survey aims to assess how mental health content on the TikTok platform is perceived and represented by its users.

4. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The analysis began with conducted a focused query using the #mentalhealth hashtag on TikTok. Among the top-performing content, three videos stood out based on view count, namely from @borntoinspire (4.7 million views), @sundariindah (2.3 million views), and @mudahbergaul (1.3 million views)."



Image 1. Tiktok account @ borntoinspire

The first video, uploaded by the account @borntoinspire, addresses the emotional burden experienced by children who are subjected to high parental expectations. The presenter adopts a casual and personal style of speech, conveyed in a relaxed and approachable manner. The video setting shows two individuals engaged in a heart-to-heart conversation. The featured speaker is Th. Etvioka W.P., S.Psi., M.Psi., a licensed psychologist,

which adds professional credibility to the content. The emotional representation in this video is notably intense, as the speaker appears to express personal reflections or feelings, rather than delivering instructional or strictly educational messages. The visual elements include overlay text that supports the narrative, accompanied by a neutral-to-dark color tone that creates a serious and reflective mood. No informative graphics are used, as the delivery is primarily narrative and storytelling in nature. The accompanying audio is melancholic and somber, reinforcing the emotional tone. There are no loud sounds, fast beats, or uplifting music; instead, the soundtrack is contemplative and introspective. In terms of engagement, the video amassed 4.7 million views, over 556,000 likes, 6,691 comments, and was saved by more than 106,000 users. It was also shared with over 65,000 other TikTok users. One of the most liked comments, with more than 48,000 likes, reads: *"tantangan belajar parenting itu memaafkan orang tua sendiri"*, which received a flood of supportive responses and personal stories from users who had

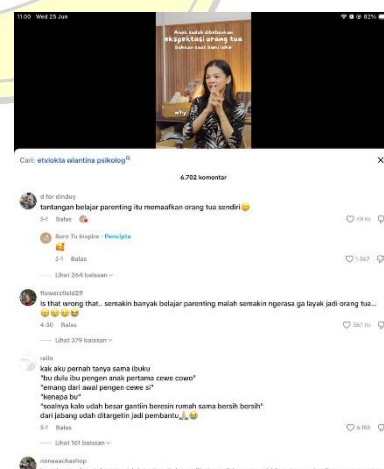


Image 2. Comment section from video 1

experienced similar struggles in forgiving their parents. Another top-liked comment, with over 36,000 likes, reads: *"Is that wrong that... semakin banyak belajar parenting malah semakin ngerasa ga layak jadi orang tua"*, which also received numerous empathetic replies, encouraging the commenter not to feel unworthy of becoming a parent.

The second video, posted by the account @sundariindah, has garnered approximately 2.3 million views.



Image 3. Tiktok account @sundariindah

The creator of this video is also a licensed psychology professional. The video is motivational in nature and aims to provide supportive messages to challenge and correct misconceptions and stigma surrounding mental health. The content seeks to raise awareness of the importance of mental well-being and the need for greater attention to mental health issues. The communication style employed in the video is casual and informal, characterized by the use of colloquial language commonly associated with younger audiences. The delivery mimics a personal conversation between the creator and the viewer, creating a sense of

closeness and accessibility. Visually, the video features text overlays in selected segments to emphasize key messages. These texts are presented in a simple design, synchronized with the narrative flow.

There are no infographics or voice-over narration; the visual focus remains on the footage and the facial expressions of the speaker. The video also incorporates visual effects such as slow motion, fade in/out transitions, and warm, neutral-toned lighting, all of which serve to enhance the emotional atmosphere. The background music used is melancholic and somber, reinforcing a reflective and emotional mood. The absence of fast-paced beats or uplifting tunes aligns with the soft and emotionally expressive tone of the narrator's voice, which supports the motivational intent of encouraging greater mental health awareness. In terms of reach and engagement, the video attracted 2.3 million views, with more than 165,000 likes and a total of 1,914 comments. One of the most liked comments received 4,214 likes and stated: *"sayangnya orang-orang terdekat justru yang membuat mental health kita sakit dan lelah"* (unfortunately, it is those closest to us who often harm our mental health and exhaust us).

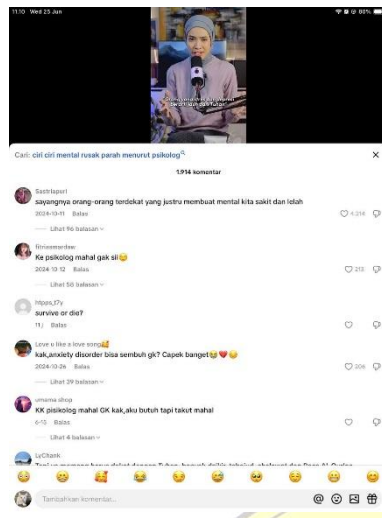


Image 4. Comment section from video 2

This comment received supportive responses from 92 other users. Interestingly, the second most liked comment, with 739 likes, echoed a similar sentiment while also offering a coping strategy: *“justru malah orang terdekat yang menghancurkan mentalku, aku tidak percaya siapapun, caraku mengatasi ini semua dengan meditasi agar lebih tenang”* (it is the people closest to me who destroyed my mental state; I trust no one anymore, and I cope through meditation to feel calmer), which was further responded to by 33 users. Consistent with these responses, the third most liked comment also reflected a similar view: *“justru orang terdekat yang menjadi penyebab sakit mental”* (it is those closest to us who cause our mental suffering).

The third video analyzed, which received approximately 1.3 million



Image 5. Tiktok account @mudahbergaul

views, focuses on the topic of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) posted by @mudahbergaul's Tiktok account. The content creator discusses the challenges of treating individuals diagnosed with NPD, emphasizing that such cases are particularly difficult to manage therapeutically.

The language used throughout the video is colloquial and accessible, avoiding technical or academic jargon. The creator deliberately employs familiar, everyday vocabulary to make the content more understandable for a general audience. The delivery style combines educational and emotional elements, aiming to create a personal connection with the viewers. The creator's tone is expressive yet calm, which fosters an atmosphere of introspection and reflection. Visually, the video utilizes overlay text that aligns with the spoken narrative, supported by a muted color palette that enhances the contemplative mood. The overall visual design is consistent

and intentionally subdued, reinforcing the video's reflective tone. The background music consists of slow-tempo instrumental pieces with a melancholic yet inspirational quality. The music functions as an emotional complement to the narrative rather than dominating it. There are no prominent sound effects; however, smooth audio transitions are used to maintain coherence between segments. In terms of engagement, the video garnered over 132,000 likes and received 2,104 comments. The top three comments received 7,517 likes, 5,163 likes, and 4,067 likes, respectively. The first top comment reads: *"jangan untuk ke psikolog, merasa bersalah saja tidak"* (they don't even feel guilty, let alone consider seeing a psychologist), which received 72 supportive replies from users who shared similar experiences and sentiments.

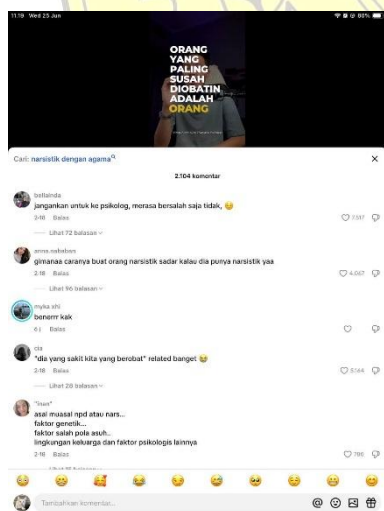


Image 6. Comment section from video 3

The second most-liked comment states: *"dia yang sakit kita yang berat"* related banget (they're the one who's ill, but we're the ones seeking treatment—so relatable),

which received 28 affirming responses. The third comment poses a reflective question: *"gimana caranya buat orang narsistik sadar kalau dia punya narsistik ya"* (how do you make a narcissist realize they're a narcissist?), which prompted 93 responses. Many of these replies emphasized that individuals with narcissistic traits are unlikely to change unless they develop self-awareness.

All three videos share a similar delivery style, characterized by the use of casual language and varied intonation to evoke an emotional tone. Interestingly, the comment sections exhibit a recurring pattern, with users consistently expressing support for the narratives presented by the content creators. In addition to analyzing the creators' communication styles in TikTok videos related to mental health, an online survey was conducted involving 30 TikTok users aged 18 to 24 years. The purpose of the survey was to explore how mental health content on TikTok reaches and influences users' trust in the information or knowledge presented in such videos. The results indicate that 74% of respondents reported regularly accessing mental health-related content on TikTok. Furthermore, 96% stated that they enjoy watching videos featuring personal experiences, emotional storytelling, or content focused on motivation and self-care. According to 60% of participants, mental health content on TikTok is perceived as helpful and informative in their daily lives. Additionally, 40% reported feeling less alone when others share their mental health experiences on the platform, and another 60%

expressed that the content felt highly relatable to their own personal experiences.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that mental health content on social media—particularly on the TikTok platform—has a significant impact on its users. The results indicate that mental health issues are communicated effectively and resonate deeply with followers. The use of casual, emotionally expressive, and empathetic language successfully captures the audience's attention, often prompting positive comments and responses that align with the narrative presented. Complementary aspect such as background music, lighting, and video settings further reinforce the emotional tone of the creator's message, contributing to the psychological engagement of viewers. This is evidenced by the substantial number of comments in which users express a personal connection with the content and affirm that the experiences shared in the videos validate their own feelings and struggles. The effectiveness of psychological content on TikTok is further supported by survey responses, in which the majority of participants reported a preference for mental health content delivered in a relaxed and conversational manner. Viewers particularly appreciated creators who conveyed messages in a relatable, motivational, and empathetic style similar to personal storytelling or emotional self-disclosure. This study also concludes that mental health-themed content on TikTok not only

serves an informative function but also fosters a sense of emotional solidarity among users. Many viewers reported feeling less alone, as the videos and accompanying comment sections reassured them that their experiences are shared by others. The content thus functions as a form of peer validation, enhancing users' emotional well-being by making them feel understood and connected.

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