

## Applying Uses and Gratifications Theory to TikTok: A systematic literature review of users' motivations

Jelena Krstić, Ivana Domazet

**Abstract:** This paper provides a systematic review of the existing literature that utilizes Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to explain users' motivations for using the TikTok platform. The aim of the paper is to identify and classify the main motives that drive user engagement on this social network, as well as to provide an insight into the research trends, geographical distribution of studies on this topic and the methodological approaches that have been applied in the relevant literature. An analysis of selected scientific papers led to the identification of ten dominant clusters of user gratifications: cognitive, affective, social/relationship, self-expression/self-identity, relaxation, recognition and fame, escapism, hedonistic, trendiness/novelty and agency and interactivity. This overview contributes to a deeper understanding of user behavior on TikTok and provides a basis for future research in this area. Finally, the paper points out the gaps in the existing literature and suggests guidelines for future theoretical and empirical research.

**Keywords:** *Uses and Gratifications Theory, TikTok, user motivation, social media*

**JEL Classification:** D83, L82

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media are increasingly being used as dynamic channels for digital marketing, offering brands a unique platform to communicate and engage with target audiences through creative and interactive content (Lazić, Domazet & Vukmirović, 2022; Kostić-Stanković, Štavljanin & Krstić, 2024). TikTok represents a social media of growing popularity worldwide. Today, it occupies a significant market share when it comes to short video content, a form which is considered highly attractive nowadays (Shao, Zhao, Lyu & Chen, 2023). There are over 1.5 billion monthly active users of this social media worldwide, whereas its penetration among internet users aged 16–64 reached around 21% globally, with higher rates in Asia and North America (DataReportal, 2024). TikTok (known as Douyin in China) represents one of the most successful and fast growing Chinese social media platforms globally (Jung, Kim, Lee, Min & Sung, 2025). Since its launch in 2016, the app has gained massive popularity, especially among younger audiences, who use it to watch and create videos (Montag, Yang & Elhai, 2021). It is characterized by highly dynamic content based on short videos and powerful push algorithms (Zhu, Jiang, Lei, Wang & Zhang, 2024; Dong & Xie, 2024), as well as absence of timestamps and a hidden phone clock (Wang & Scherr, 2021). Due to such endless stream of offered content, it provides a sense of greater connectedness and higher user engagement rates in comparison to other types of social media (Ortiz, De Los M. Santos Corrada, Lopez, Dones & Lugo, 2023). Although originally intended for the younger population, this social media is also characterized by its speed proliferation across various demographics because it effectively meets people's needs for instant entertainment and momentary distractions in the rapidly moving world (Wang, Li, Liu & Habes, 2024). With its rising attractiveness for different groups of users, it has also become an emerging social media platform for corporate and brand communication (Cuesta-Valiño, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez & Durán-Álamo, 2022; Chaihanchai & Anantachart, 2024).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) represents a communication approach that focuses on understanding why users consume certain media and how they use it to satisfy their needs. Unlike traditional theories that view the audience as a passive recipient of media messages, UGT emphasizes the active role of users in choosing media content. Users approach media with specific expectations and goals, such as information seeking, entertainment, social interaction, identification or escape from everyday problems. In the contemporary research environment, this theory has proven also relevant in the context of digital and social media, where users have a wide range of choices and a high level of control over the content they share and consume. Thus, it has been widely applied as a framework for understanding factors which motivate users to select, use and engage with certain social media (Vukmirović, Kostić-Stanković & Domazet, 2020; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022; Abbasi, Ayaz, Kanwal, Albashrawi & Khair, 2023; Alhabash, Smischney, Suneja, Nimmagadda & White, 2024; Trang, Thang, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). However, whereas there is a significant body of UGT-based research on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, such research is still scarce when it comes to TikTok, since it is considered to be a relatively new communication platform (Montag et al., 2021; Shao et al., 2023; Chen, Ma & Sharma, 2024; Dong & Xie, 2024). In accordance with that, aiming to contribute the existing literature in this field, we conducted a systematic literature review to explore the current state of the research based on applied UGT to explore user motives for using TikTok. On the basis of this objective, the following research questions are addressed in this paper:

*RQ1: What is the trend in terms of increasing the scope of research in this area?*

*RQ2: In which countries were the studies mainly conducted so far and what were the most commonly applied research methods?*

*RQ3: What are the most common categories of gratifications associated with TikTok use in the existing literature?*

## 2. UGT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Even though originally introduced in the early 1940s, as a reaction to traditional mass media communication research (Xiao, Li & Zhang, 2023), the Uses and Gratifications Theory was formally set as the specific theoretical framework by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973). During the 1970s and 1980s, UGT has

gained academic attention and recognition as the major media research theory in the United States (Jin, Chen & Shi, 2024). As stated by Kyei-Gyamfi (2024), this concept “focuses on comprehending the motivations behind individuals’ media usage, the underlying requirements that drive their usage, and the gratifications they derive from such usage”. It highlights the role of media in fulfilling users’ diverse needs and desires, which stem from their social context and act as the driving force behind media consumption (Xiao et al., 2023; Domazet & Marjanović, 2024).

The five basic assumptions that underline UGT are: (1) audience is goal-oriented in the way they choose and engage with media; (2) media use and selection arise from users’ desire to satisfy their individual needs; (3) as media fulfill users’ needs, they compete with other sources that offer similar gratification; (4) media users, aware of their own interests and motives, form expectations about how well different media will satisfy their needs; and (5) media users continually evaluate the quality of media content based on how effectively their needs are met, and these assessments direct future choices and usage (Katz et al., 1973). On the basis of these assumptions, UGT can be effectively used as a comprehensive research framework to investigate motivations and behavioural patterns of media users (Xiao et al., 2023).

In recent times, UGT perspective has been employed to forecast specific behaviors stemming from users’ motivations for using various social media platforms (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Qin, 2020; Cleofas, Albao & Dayrit, 2022; Lazić, Vukmirović & Domazet 2023; Krstić & Zuber, 2024). Xu, Ryan, Prybutok and Wen (2012) discovered that users’ utilitarian (rational and goal-oriented) gratifications, hedonic (pleasure-oriented) gratifications and the social presence were positive predictors of the usage of social networking sites. Using the UGT, Whiting and Williams (2013) examined the various ways users benefit from social media and came up to ten specific social media-related uses and gratifications: social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, communicative utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others. Ku, Chu and Tseng (2013) compared gratifications from using different media, and found out relationship maintenance, information seeking, amusement, and style to be general gratifications related to all media, whereas sociability gratification was specific gratification related to using instant social networking sites. By starting from the point that people use specific media content hoping to

have some needs gratified, Ezumah (2013) identified main reasons for using social media network sites: keeping in touch with family and friends, sharing photos, and entertainment. A survey result obtained by Alhabash, Chiang and Huang (2014) indicated that entertainment, information sharing, self-documentation, socialization, escapism, self-expression, and medium appeal were found to be significant predictors of social media usage. Chan (2014) used three theories, among which UGT, to investigate the ability of individuals to urge social, political, and organizational change and found out that gratifications acted as a moderator between users' identification with social group and willingness to participate in collective action on social media. Aiming to investigate the specific gratifications derived from using microblogs and chatting platforms, Gan and Wang (2015) indicated that users obtained three types of gratifications from both types of platforms: content gratification, social gratification, and hedonic gratification. Content gratification pertains to meeting information expectations and includes factors such as seeking and sharing information. Social gratification involves meeting social expectations and includes factors like social interaction and networking. Hedonic gratification relates to meeting hedonic expectations and encompasses factors such as entertainment and leisure.

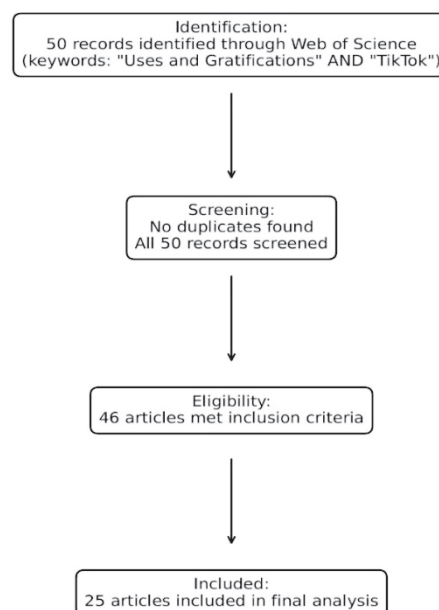
Malik, Dhir and Nieminen (2016) applied UGT in their study and pointed out several gratifications (affection, attention seeking, disclosure, information sharing, habit, and social influence) for sharing photos on social sites. By conducting a survey in four countries, Ifinedo (2016) found out that UGT constructs such as self-discovery, entertainment value, social enhancement, and the need to maintain interpersonal connectivity through the construct of behavioral intentions, had positive influence on widespread adoption of social networking sites by users. The study conducted by Quinn (2016) identified the following uses and gratifications, brought by experiences with social media: affect (expressing care, concern or encouragement), companionship (reducing sense of loneliness), voyeur (finding information about others), information sharing, habitual use to pass time, entertainment, communication and keeping in touch with others, professional use for career advancement, and escape from everyday concerns. Kamboj (2020) found out that information seeking, incentive and brand likeability were gratifications which strongly affected user participation, which furthermore affected their trust in brand, commitment and recommendations in social media brand communities. Qin (2020)

explored the effects of specific motives for using social media on consumers' interactions with brands in digital context and demonstrated that consumer intentions towards content consumption and contribution could be encouraged by information-seeking and self-identity.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted by applying PRISMA (abbreviated from Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), a methodological framework intended to standardize reporting in systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses. It represents one of the widely used frameworks for conducting systematic literature reviews (Krstić, 2025). Its application ensures transparency and consistency in the presentation of the process of identification, selection, analysis and inclusion of relevant scientific sources. As proposed by PRISMA framework, this research followed particular stages of the research process, from the initial literature search, through the elimination of irrelevant papers, to the final selection of studies to be analyzed (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Methodological framework used in the analysis



Source: Authors' own research

**Table 1:** A final set of articles used for the analysis (in ascending chronological order)

Author(s) and year	Country	Sample	Research approach	Users' motivations/Gratifications
Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz (2020)	Denmark	n = 159 pupils	Survey	Cognitive, Affective, Relationship Maintenance/Building, Communication, Self-Expression, Fame/Recognition, Identity-Creation
Vaterlaus & Winter (2021)	USA	n = 247 users and non-users	Survey	Realism, Coolness, Agency-enhancement, Community building, Bandwagon, Interactivity, Browsing/Variety seeking, Play/fun
Scherr & Wang (2021)	China	n = 1051 adults	Survey	Socially rewarding self-presentation, Trendiness, Escapist addiction, Novelty
Duarte & Dias (2021)	Portugal	n = 263 teenagers	Online survey	Self-promotion, Expansion/ Dynamization of online community
Dias & Duarte (2022)	Portugal	n = 347 teenagers	Online survey	Social interaction/Belonging, Hedonism, Self-expression, Escapism, Learning, Information, Entertainment, Escapism, Peeking
Falgoust, Winterlind, Moon, Parker, Zinzow & Madathil (2022)	USA	n = 32 students	Interview-based survey	Entertainment, Convenience and utility for widespread communication, Increasing social interaction, Finding social support, Seeking and sharing information, Escaping from everyday life
Xiao et al. (2023)	China	n = 1000 videos and 3 mil. reviews	Big data analysis	Performance expectancy, Entertainment, Tie strength, Sales approach
Mao (2022)	China	n = 583 users	Online survey	Informative seeking and learning (Cognitive motivation); Perceived enjoyment (Affective motivation); Recognition by peers (Personal integrative motivation); Companionship, Shared emotional connection (Social integrative); Escape, Distraction, Relaxation (Tension release)
Gu, Gao & Li (2022)	China	n = 384 young and adult users	Online survey	Socially rewarding self-presentation, Trendiness, Escapist addiction, Novelty
Deng, Vargas-Bianchi & Mensa (2023)	USA, Spain and Chile	n = 556 all countries	Online survey	Archiving, Self-expression, Escapism, Information seeking, Socializing and Entertainment
Roberts & David (2023)	USA	n = 225 adults	Survey	Focused attention, Curiosity, Enjoyment, Telepresence, Time distortion
Abbasi et al. (2023)	Middle East	n = 258	Survey	Fantasy, Escapism, Enjoyment, Role projection, Sensory, Arousal, Emotional involvement
Shao et al. (2023)	China	n = 362 adolescent users	Online and offline survey	Self-Expression, Entertainment, Information seeking, Communication, Passing time
Wang & Oh (2023)	China	n = 234 consumers	Survey	Content gratification (Information sharing), Utilitarian gratification (Cost saving and information seeking), Social gratification (Social presence), Hedonic gratification (Passing time, Enjoyment, Escapism)



Author(s) and year	Country	Sample	Research approach	Users' motivations/Gratifications
Miranda, Trigo, Rodrigues & Duarte (2023)	Portugal	n = 644 self-selected users	Online survey	Escapism, Social interaction
Chaihanchancha & Anantachart (2024)	Thailand	n = 442 adult users	Online survey	Perceived value, User engagement, Positive emotions
Garcia (2024)	Philippines	n = 597 students	Survey	Entertainment, Motivation and Inspiration, Social Interaction, Advice and guidance, Escapism
Wang et al. (2024)	China	n = 2280 rural residents n = 900 short videos	Content analysis, online survey	Enjoyment, Social needs, Affective needs, Cognitive needs
Zhu et al. (2024)	China	n = 1302 adolescents	Survey	Entertainment need gratification, Socialize need gratification, Self-presentation need gratification, Information need gratification
Shi, Ali & Chew (2024)	USA and China	n = 148 (USA) n = 150 (China)	Survey	Escapism, Relaxation, Learning, Procrastination, Status-seeking, Community belonging
Dong & Xie (2024)	China	n = 238	In-depth interviews	Seeking novelty, Habit, Relationship maintenance, Releasing pressure, Killing time, Escapism; Pursuing fame, Recording and Sharing, Satisfying curiosity
Jin et al. (2024)	China	n = 115.965 user-related data	Big data analysis	health cognition, personal identity, idolatry, entertainment
Alhabash et al. (2024)	USA	n = 685 undergraduate students	A cross-sectional online survey	Entertainment, Passing time, Coolness, Escapism, Relaxation, Trust, Privacy awareness, Self-documentation
Jung et al. (2025).	South Korea	n = 500 users	A survey-based approach	Information-seeking, Time-killing, Self-expression, Trend-seeking, Escapism, Inspiration-seeking
Xu, Luo, Hou & Liu (2025)	China	n = data from 941 live streaming rooms and 489.426 comments.	Quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews	Entertainment, Social interaction, Personalization, Trust in streamers

Source: Authors' own research

The existing literature was searched in the Web of Science database, which represents one of the key databases of reference scientific publications. In the source identification phase, the search was performed by entering the keywords „Uses and Gratifications“ and „TikTok“, which should be in the content of the source. It was not required that key words appear in the title or abstract, in order not to possibly overlook papers that were based on this theory, but this could only be concluded from the text and the study concept. By applying these keywords, 50 articles were obtained. In the next phase, screening was performed and there

were no duplicate publications to be eliminated. In the third phase, the following eligibility criteria were applied: (1) it is a research article in a scientific journal; (2) it is written in English; (3) the content of the article can be openly accessed or though institutionally available repository; (4) the research is dedicated specifically to TikTok and not to social media in general. After applying these filters, 46 papers were obtained. In the last stage, after reviewing the content of the papers and considering their relevance, a final set of 25 papers that meet all the criteria and entered further analysis was reached. These articles are presented in Table 1.

#### 4. RESULTS

Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020) explored what gratifications and needs motivated three categories of behavior of pre-adolescent and adolescents on TikTok: passive consumption, participatory and contributory behavior. By surveying a sample of 159 pupils (aged 11-16) at randomly selected 60 schools in Denmark, they came to the conclusion that entertainment/affect was the primary driver behind all categories of behaviors, with the emphasis on passive consumption. Additionally, identity-creation, social recognition and the desire for social network expansion were found to be motivators of participatory behavior, whereas self-expression, social recognition and fame-seeking were identified as stimulating factors of contributory behavior.

Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) investigated the motives behind using and not using TikTok of young adults. Their sample included 247 young adults in USA, among which slightly more than a half reported using this social network. Those who identified as active users were mostly motivated by: realism, coolness, agency-enhancement, community building, bandwagon, interactivity, browsing/variety seeking, and play/fun gratifications. On the other hand, perception of being too juvenile/cringey and providing too much (cyberbullying) or not enough agency (privacy and censorship) were identified as failed gratifications for past-users and non-users. On the basis of niche theory and UGT, Scherr and Wang (2021) investigated the main motives behind using and actively posting content on TikTok and whether there were differences depending on gender, age and time of the day. On the basis of interviewing a sample of users (mean age of 30) in China, the authors discovered the four gratification categories: socially rewarding self-presentation, trendiness, escapist addiction, and novelty. Observed by age, novelty was found to be the most important gratification for all users. The only difference in relation to gender was in the case of escapism, which appeared to be more relevant for women. Finally, trendiness was identified as the most important driver of daytime use, novelty as the most prominent driver of nighttime use, whereas socially rewarding self-presentations were motivator for posting TikTok videos. Duarte and Dias (2021) conducted an online survey on a sample of teenagers in Portugal, with the intention of determining what motivates users who create content. They concluded that they are the most motivated by self-promotion and on the expansion and dynamization of their online community.

In their subsequent publication on this topic, Dias and Duarte (2022) explored the practices of TikTok use of teenagers in Portugal by conducting an online survey. They explored the significance of following gratifications: social interaction/belonging, hedonism, self-expression, escapism, learning, information, entertainment, escapism, peeking. They concluded that entertainment and self-expression were the main motivations for using this platform.

Falgoust et al. (2022) interviewed a group of college students, aged 18-23, and qualitatively analyzed their answers. Their conclusion was that six categories of motivators, consistent with UGT, underlined individual use of TikTok: entertainment, convenience and utility for widespread communication, increasing social interaction, finding social support, seeking and sharing information, and escaping from everyday life. Other study published in 2022, conducted by Xiao et al. (2023) aimed to explore what characteristics of short-form videos on TikTok influence consumer engagement behavior. Authors based their analysis on data they collected, related to one thousand videos and three million reviews, posted by the top sellers over the period of a year and half. They found out that key features associated with consumer engagement behavior were: performance expectancy, entertainment, tie strength (interpersonal relationship between consumers and sellers), and sales approach. Mao (2022) explored the relationship between popular live stream content types on TikTok and psychological and social gratifications and support behaviors of viewers (continuous watching, "like", follow/subscribe, "comment" and "tipping/donate"). The main gratifications identified, even though varying across content types, were informative seeking and learning (cognitive motivation), perceived enjoyment (affective motivation), recognition by peers (personal integrative motivation), companionship (social integrative), shared emotional connection (social integrative), escape (tension release), distraction (tension release), relaxation (tension release). Additionally, Gu et al. (2022) investigated diverse motives of users aged 17-58, residing in China, for using TikTok. Four main motives that were explored were: socially rewarding self-presentation, trendiness, escapist addiction, and novelty. Depending on the intensity of identified motives, users were grouped into four profiles: overall low motives, overall medium motives, overall high motives, and profile of users solely motivated by escapist addiction and novelty.

There were six papers published in 2023 that were included in the analysis. Deng et al. (2023) conduct-

ed a cross-cultural study, aiming to discover the differences in TikTok use among users from the USA, Spain and Chile. The study identified six primary motivations for using TikTok: archiving, self-expression, escapism, information seeking, socializing, and entertainment. The findings pointed out that motivation was significantly associated with users' national cultural dimensions, particularly individualism versus collectivism and levels of uncertainty avoidance. For instance, users from collectivistic societies like Spain and Chile were more inclined to use this platform for socializing purposes, whereas users from USA, which is more individualistic culture, exhibited higher motivations for self-expression and archiving. Additionally, the research indicates that users from Chile, characterized by a high uncertainty avoidance level, tended to avoid self-expression and archiving on TikTok compared to users from America, who are characterized by a low uncertainty avoidance level. Roberts and David (2023) explored the association between Instagram and TikTok use and psychological well-being. They surveyed two samples of adult users, one for each social media. In case of TikTok, sample included 225 users with mean age 37. The investigation was based on five flow dimensions: focused attention, curiosity, enjoyment, telepresence, and time distortion. Findings indicated that the levels of overall flow were higher for TikTok than Instagram users, especially in the context of dimensions "enjoyment" and "time distortion". "Telepresence", which reflected users escape from real world and immersion in a world created by the social media application, was associated with higher depression and anxiety levels in case of both groups of users.

Grounding their research on UGT and technology acceptance model (TAM), Abbasi et al. (2023) explored how TikTok users' hedonic consumption experiences determined their intention to use the app in future and, consequently, their actual usage behavior. The findings indicated that escapism, role projection, arousal, sensory experience, and enjoyment were main motivators of intentions to use TikTok app and its effect on its actual usage. On the other hand, fantasy and emotional involvement did not significantly impact intention to use the TikTok app. Miranda et al. (2023) also grounded their research on two theories, UGT and the Stimulus-Organism-Response, to gain better understanding of antecedents and formation mechanisms of social media addiction. They surveyed a sample of self-selected TikTok users. In particular, they investigated mutual relations of escapism and social interaction motivations, flow experience state, and

sense of belonging to explain addictive behavior on the example of TikTok. The findings indicated that users who sought escapism might develop an addiction to the social networking site either directly, through a flow state induced by the application, or via a sense of belonging to the TikTok community. Conversely, users who fulfill their social interaction needs appeared to develop addiction solely through the sense of belonging to the TikTok community.

Shao et al. (2023) investigated the main motivations of adolescents from China for continuous use of TikTok. The motivations that were identified were: self-expression, entertainment, information seeking, communication and passing time. Among these, entertainment, communication and passing time were found to positively influence user satisfaction with this social media app. Furthermore, it was identified that user satisfaction and loyalty positively impacted teenagers' intention to continue using TikTok. In other paper published the same year, also conducted in China, Wang and Oh (2023) investigated the gratifications which influence consumers' continuous purchase intentions on TikTok. Their findings showed that four types of gratification had an influence on persistent purchasing intent in livestream shopping: content gratification (information sharing), utilitarian gratification (cost-saving and information seeking), social gratification (social presence), and hedonic gratification (passing time, enjoyment and escapism). These gratifications varied across different educational levels, whereas social presence and enjoyment were more pronounced gratification in the group of high-educated users than in case of low educated users.

Among papers that were finally selected for further analysis, eight were published in 2024. Chaihanchai and Anantachart (2024) investigated the psychological mechanisms influencing TikTok usage intentions. They identified the following factors: perceived value (users' assessment of the benefits they receive from TikTok, such as entertainment, information, or social interaction), user engagement (the level of cognitive and emotional involvement users have with the platform, including attention, interest, and interaction) and positive emotions (enjoyment, excitement, and satisfaction experienced during TikTok usage). Authors concluded that perceived value enhances user engagement, which in turn fosters positive emotions, ultimately leading to a stronger intention to use TikTok. Similarly, Garcia (2024) explored the psychological motivations driving TikTok usage among physical education students in Philippines. The key motives that were identified were: entertainment, mo-

tivation and inspiration, social interaction, advice and guidance, escapism. It was found out that both male and female students primarily engaged with TikTok fitness content for entertainment purposes. Male students were more inclined to seek motivational content and social interaction to inspire their physical activities, while female students predominantly sought practical tips and instructional content and escapism.

The study of Zhu et al. (2024) examined the association between the usage of short-form video and depression among Chinese adolescents (senior high school students), focusing on the mediating effects of need gratification and short-form video addiction. The findings pointed out a direct link between short-form video use and adolescent depression, whereas entertainment need gratification, social-related need gratification, and short-form video addiction had a mediating effect. The focus of Dong and Xie's (2024) study was the motivation and well-being of TikTok users by conducting in-depth interviews with a sample of Chinese users. They identified six main motives for watching content on this platform: seeking novelty, habit, relationship maintenance, releasing pressure, killing time, and escapism. Additionally, they came up to three motives for shooting and submitting short-form videos on TikTok, namely: pursuing fame, recording, and sharing.

Wang et al. (2024) explored how rural users in China engaged with TikTok, transitioning from passive information recipients to active participants in knowledge services on the basis of UGT and the Media Enjoyment Theory. They used a mixed-methods approach, combining big data analysis with comprehensive survey. The study identified that rural users primarily engage with TikTok for enjoyment (entertainment), social interaction (social needs), affective needs and information seeking (cognitive needs). Also in China, Jin et al. (2024) aimed to discover the motives of users to watch short home fitness videos on TikTok. By analyzing a large number of data related to users' comments, IP addresses, comment dates etc., authors came to the conclusion that users were mainly motivated to watch home fitness videos by: health cognition, personal identity, idolatry and entertainment.

Alhabash et al. (2024) investigated different motivations for using social media platforms, among which TikTok, in USA. The results indicated that primary motivations for using TikTok were entertainment and passing time. Additionally, users rated TikTok highly for coolness, escapism, and relaxation, aligning with its reputation for engaging, short-form

video content. Authors also explored predictors of TikTok problematic use, and found out that coolness motive was the strongest predictor of problematic TikTok use, suggesting that users seeking to appear trendy may be more prone to excessive use, followed by the entertainment (positive association) and relaxation (negative association), trust in the platform (positive association) and privacy awareness (negative association). Similar to problematic use, coolness and entertainment motives positively influenced users' intentions to continue using TikTok, whereas self-documentation and passing time motives were negatively associated with continued use intentions. Finally, continuous use intentions of TikTok were also influenced by privacy-related trust (positive predictor) and privacy awareness (negative predictor). Whereas majority of studies were focused solely on one country, Shi et al. (2024) conducted a comparative study of USA and China TikTok users' gratifications sought, gratifications obtained and engagement. The researchers introduced a new model to conceptualize user engagement, highlighting the gratifications such as escapism, relaxation, learning, procrastination, status-seeking, and community belonging as drivers of TikTok usage across both cultures. The study further revealed that American users placed a greater emphasis on the gratifications they seek from TikTok usage than their Chinese counterparts. TikTok users in both countries were found to engage more actively in self-promotion and content interaction compared to users of other short-video apps which suggests that it is a goal-oriented platform for users seeking personal expression and recognition.

A survey of Jung et al. (2025) was employed to identify users' motivations for engaging with TikTok and to examine differences in psychological symptoms related to usage patterns, specifically distinguishing between active and passive use. They outlined six key reasons for engaging in TikTok: information-seeking, time-killing, self-expression, trend-seeking, escapism, and inspiration-seeking. The study found that active use of TikTok was positively associated with dependency and addictive symptoms, suggesting that users who actively engaged with the platform might be more susceptible to problematic usage patterns. Finally, Xu et al. (2025) explored the motivations behind consumer behaviors (product purchase and gift-giving) in live-streaming e-commerce environments, particularly focusing on TikTok. They concluded that hedonic and social factors were related to users' gratifications of enjoyment and social needs, whereas, utilitarian gratifications, professionalism, topic orien-



tation and product diversification, referred to the ration approach of users in achieving the desired results of certain activities. They found out that main motivations for TikTok use in live streaming e-commerce were: entertainment, social interaction, personalization, and trust in streamers.

Based on a detailed analysis of all the articles included in the final set, it is possible to get answers to the set research questions. Even though the research in this particular field is still scarce, thus, it can be considered to be an under researched area, it can be said that the body of the research that addresses the motivations of TikTok users from a Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) perspective has been growing steadily (RQ1). Therefore, it is anticipated that this topic would gain greater interest in the future. The largest number of studies on the motivations of TikTok users has been conducted in China (RQ2), which is to be expected considering that TikTok originated from the Chinese application Douyin and has the largest user base there. After China, the United States leads the way in the number of studies, especially in the context of young users and their behavior patterns on the plat-

form. In contrast, Europe and other parts of the world lag behind in this research domain, where the number of empirical studies is significantly lower, which indicates the need to expand the geographic focus and include more diverse cultural contexts in future analyses. Regarding the methodologies that are most applied, it can be seen that research based on the on-line surveying of a sample of TikTok users dominates. Therefore, most of the research is of an empirical type and is based on the collection of primary data from users. A smaller number is based on the collection of a large number of secondary data and their analysis.

Although different authors list a large number of gratifications in their publications, it is still possible to systematize them so that they are grouped into larger clusters. On the basis of grouping similar concepts, that can be logically connected, the entire list of gratifications was structured into ten larger clusters (Table 2). It can be concluded that these clusters represent the most common categories of gratifications associated with TikTok use in the existing literature (RQ3). Some of the cluster labels are kept from the available literature, as they refer to the same concepts.

**Table 2:** Formed clusters of gratifications from the existing body of the research

Motivation cluster	Gratifications from studies listed in Table 1
Cognitive	Information-seeking, Seeking and sharing information, Learning, Health cognition, Informative seeking and learning, Cost saving, Advice and guidance, Curiosity, Cognitive needs, Performance expectancy, Trust, Privacy awareness
Affective	Perceived enjoyment, Enjoyment, Affective needs, Positive emotions, Perceived value, Arousal and emotional involvement, Sensory stimulation, Fantasy
Social/Relational	Social Interaction, Companionship, Shared emotional connection, Socializing, Social needs, Social presence, Increasing social interaction, Community belonging, Community building, Social integration, Social interaction/Belonging, Finding social support, Relationship maintenance, Relationship building, Tie strength, Expansion/Dynamization of online community, Communication, Convenience and utility for widespread communication
Self-expression/ Self-identity	Self-expression, Personal identity, Role projection, Self-promotion, Identity-creation, Self-documentation, Archiving, Recording and sharing, Self-presentation need gratification, Socially rewarding self-presentation
Relaxation	Relaxation, Releasing pressure, Tension release, Distraction, Focused attention
Recognition and fame	Recognition by peers, Fame/recognition, Pursuing fame, Status-seeking
Escapism	Escapism, Escaping from everyday life, Escapist addiction, Tension release, Fantasy, Distraction, Killing time, Procrastination, Passing time, Telepresence and time distortion
Hedonic	Entertainment, Play/fun, Motivation and inspiration, Entertainment need gratification, Browsing/variety seeking
Trendiness/ Novelty	Trendiness, Seeking novelty, Novelty, Coolness, Bandwagon, Inspiration-seeking, Trend-seeking, Habit
Agency and interactivity	Interactivity, Agency-enhancement, Personalization and trust in streamers, Content gratification (information sharing), Utilitarian gratification, Sales approach, User engagement

Source: Authors' own research

## 5. CONCLUSION

The application of UGT enables a deeper understanding of the reasons why individuals choose TikTok as the dominant medium to fulfill their psychological and social needs. The studies analyzed in this paper examine different patterns of platform use, including information, entertainment, self-expression, and interaction, to understand the needs that users seek to satisfy. Based on a systematic literature review of these studies, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of users' engagement on the short-form video platform TikTok, and highlight the different motivations use that are emphasized in the available literature. From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for content creators, marketers, and platform developers aiming to design more engaging and user-centered strategies.

By providing a detailed overview of the literature in this interesting, but still under-researched area, this paper provides a valuable theoretical basis for further research. Based on the insight gained from other authors, as well as the systematization of gratifications given by the authors, it is possible to identify where

there are major research gaps and where future empirical research could make the greatest contribution. Additionally, the findings of this review encourage scholars to conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in user motivations over time and to explore cross-cultural differences in TikTok usage. Such studies would help validate and expand the applicability of UGT in rapidly evolving digital contexts.

The use of the PRISMA framework ensures that their literature review is as clear, replicable and methodologically valid as possible, which contributes to the reliability and quality of the presented findings and results. However, the paper has several limitations that are common to review papers. Firstly, focusing on only one scientific database may mean that some of the important articles in the field are not included. Therefore, the inclusion of other databases could improve the analysis. In addition, only English-language articles were considered, which may also be a limiting factor. Finally, the analysis and the classification of gratifications offered are subject to the subjective judgement of the authors, so they are not necessarily applicable in all contexts.

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## Apstrakt

### Primena Teorije koristi i zadovoljenja na TikTok: sistematski pregled literature o motivaciji korisnika

Jelena Krstić, Ivana Domazet

U radu je prikazan sistematski pregled postojeće literature koja se bazira na Teoriji koristi i zadovoljenja (eng. *Uses and Gratifications Theory - UGT*) kako bi se objasnili motivi korisnika za korišćenje platforme TikTok. Cilj rada je identifikovanje i klasifikovanje glavnih motiva koji podstiču angažovanje korisnika na ovoj društvenoj mreži, kao i pružanje uvida u istraživačke trendove, geografsku rasprostranjenost studija na ovu temu i metodološke pristupe koji su primenjeni u relevantnoj literaturi. Analiza odabranih naučnih radova dovela je do identifikacije deset dominantnih klastera korisničkih zadovoljenja: kognitivna zadovoljenja, afektivna zadovoljenja, socijalna/relaciona zadovoljenja, sa-

moizražavanje/samospoznavanje, relaksacija, priznanje i slava, bekstvo od stvarnosti, hedonistička zadovoljenja, praćenje trendova/novina i pokretanje akcije i interaktivnost. Ovaj pregled doprinosi dubljem razumevanju ponašanja korisnika na TikToku i pruža osnovu za buduća istraživanja u ovoj oblasti. Na kraju, u radu je ukazano na praznine u postojećoj literaturi i predložene su smernice za buduća teorijska i empirijska istraživanja.

**Ključne reči:** *Teorija koristi i zadovoljenja, TikTok, motivacija korisnika, društvene mreže*

#### Kontakt:

**Jelena Krstić**, Institut ekonomskih nauka, Beograd  
jelena.krstic@ien.bg.ac.rs (autor za korespondenciju)  
**Ivana Domazet**, Institut ekonomskih nauka, Beograd  
ivana.domazet@ien.bg.ac.rs