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Caught in the Loop: Examining the Link Between Alexithymia and TikTok Addiction Among Adolescents in Jakarta

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Abstract

This research explores the relationship between alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction among adolescents in Jakarta. A total of 300 adolescents aged 18–24 who use TikTok for at least three hours per day participated in this quantitative research. Data were collected using the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) and the Social Media Addiction Scale-Short Form (SMAS-SF) to measure levels of alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction. Data analysis used bivariate correlation or Pearson's correlation coefficient by SPSS for Windows 26 to assess the relationship between the two variables. Results from two-tailed testing with a significance level of .01 (1%) revealed a positive correlation of .299. These findings indicate that higher levels of alexithymia are associated with higher levels of TikTok addiction.

Kata kunci:
kecenderungan alexithymia;
adiksi TikTok;
remaja;
Jakarta.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi hubungan antara kecenderungan alexithymia dan adiksi TikTok di kalangan remaja di Jakarta. Sebanyak 300 remaja berusia 18–24 tahun yang menggunakan TikTok setidaknya tiga jam per hari berpartisipasi dalam penelitian kuantitatif ini. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) dan Social Media Addiction Scale-Short Form (SMAS-SF) untuk mengukur tingkat kecenderungan alexithymia dan adiksi TikTok. Analisis data menggunakan korelasi bivariat atau koefisien korelasi Pearson dengan SPSS for Windows 26, untuk menilai hubungan antara kedua variabel. Hasil dari pengujian dua arah (2-tailed) dengan tingkat signifikansi 0,01 (1%) menunjukkan korelasi positif sebesar 0,299. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tingkat alexithymia yang lebih tinggi dikaitkan dengan tingkat kecanduan TikTok yang lebih tinggi.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology has significantly transformed various aspects of daily life, including the pervasive use of social media. Global statistics indicate a substantial yearly increase in social media users, with Indonesia ranking 10th in daily social media usage. On average, Indonesian users spend approximately 3 hours and 18 minutes daily on social media, considerably higher than the global average of 2 hours and 24 minutes ("The Global State of Digital in April 2023," 2023). This statistic reflects the centrality of social media in daily life, particularly among young people, who utilize these platforms for communication, information retrieval, and self-image construction.

According to the Global State of Digital in April 2023 (2023), out of 212.9 million internet users in Indonesia, 167 million are active social media users. This means that nearly 80% of internet users in Indonesia regularly engage with social media platforms. Most of these users are from younger gen-

erations, with 32% aged between 18 and 24 years and 30.6% between 25 and 34 years. Furthermore, an Internet Survey by Indonesia Internet Service Provider Association (Indonesian: *Survei Internet Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia [APJII]*, 2023) reveals that 97.17% of internet users in Indonesia, particularly adolescents, use social media to communicate with family or friends, seek entertainment, and remain updated on trending topics.

As individuals access social media platforms, a strong compulsion to engage further is often triggered. This behavior is driven by a desire for online popularity and a fear of missing out on the latest developments and trends. Excessive social media use, however, can lead to addiction. Social media addiction is a psychological disorder characterized by an increased duration of use to derive pleasure, which can negatively impact various aspects of life, including academic performance, family conflicts, and difficulties in balancing online and offline lives (Aguslianto, 2018; Nurmandia et al., 2013; Rithika & Selvaraj, 2013). According to Potenza et al. (2011), addiction affects the brain's adaptive processes, particularly the production of dopamine, making it challenging for users to reduce their social media engagement.

TikTok, a popular platform among adolescents, presents a new challenge related to social media addiction. Initially launched as Musical.ly before rebranding as TikTok by ByteDance in 2018, this platform has rapidly gained a global user base. By April 2023, TikTok had reached over 1.09 billion downloads, with 38.5% of users aged between 18 and 24 years ("The Global State of Digital in April 2023," 2023). Notably, Indonesia has emerged as TikTok's second-largest user base, with over 113 million users and an average monthly screen time of 5 hours and 54 minutes, representing a 25.5% increase in usage.

According to data from Sensor Tower (Briskman, 2022), TikTok was the most downloaded app globally in the first quarter of 2022, surpassing Instagram with over 175 million downloads. Research by Gupta et al. (2021) indicates that 81.68% of TikTok users are individuals under 35, with 32.5% under 19. The platform's appeal, especially to young users, can be attributed to its user-friendly interface and seamless integration between digital and human interaction (Kurian et al., 2021). TikTok allows users to express themselves through video content creation, engage with various filters, and participate in various social interactions.

Although social media platforms like TikTok offer numerous positive benefits, including enhanced creativity in video production and editing (Batoebara, 2020), they also pose risks of addictive behavior. TikTok's ability to provide instant gratification can foster compulsive behaviors, encouraging users to spend excessive time creating or consuming video content (Yang, 2023). This addiction can negatively affect adolescents, leading to academic underperformance, neglect of responsibilities, and a decrease in real-world social engagement (Sabir et al., 2020). Studies have shown that spending several hours per day on social media significantly increases the risk of addiction (Liu et al., 2019), and individuals with compulsive tendencies are more susceptible to this form of addiction (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017).

The desire to seek pleasure and attract attention from others may indicate an individual's underlying difficulty in expressing emotions in real-world contexts. Moreover, the adverse effects of TikTok addiction can manifest across various domains. Socially, individuals addicted to the platform often display diminished awareness and appreciation of their immediate environment and are prone to postponing academic or professional responsibilities. This leads to a notable time displacement, where excessive engagement with social media results in neglecting essential tasks, alongside an increased frequency and intensity of use. Furthermore, these individuals may develop compulsive

behaviors, such as feeling restless or bored when not using the platform and experiencing an overwhelming urge to access the app continuously (Idris et al., 2022).

Alexithymia, defined as the inability to recognize and express emotions, is identified as a significant risk factor contributing to social media addiction, including the compulsive use of TikTok. Individuals with alexithymia often experience challenges in face-to-face communication and may turn to social media as a coping mechanism for emotional expression (Stivaleti Colombarolli et al., 2019). The term alexithymia, initially coined by Nemiah and Sifneos (in Bagby et al., 1986), derives from the Greek words *a-* meaning "lack," *lexis* meaning "word," and *thymos* meaning "emotion." It refers to a psychological condition characterized by difficulty in understanding, processing, and verbalizing emotions, often leading to heightened social anxiety. Individuals affected by alexithymia commonly exhibit impairments in both interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Stivaleti Colombarolli et al., 2019).

Although alexithymia is not classified as a formal mental disorder in either the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) or the eleventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), it is associated with emotional dysregulation. Individuals with alexithymia may experience intense emotional episodes, such as sudden anger or sadness, yet struggle to identify the underlying causes of these emotions or articulate their emotional states verbally (Taylor et al., 1997). This emotional disconnect often results in difficulties forming and maintaining social relationships, as these individuals tend to withdraw from social interactions and are perceived as emotionally distant (Ershad & Aghajani, 2017; Hesse et al., 2012). Consequently, alexithymic individuals are at a higher risk of developing internet addiction, as online platforms offer them a space to express emotions and fulfill social needs without the complexities of face-to-face communication. This reliance on digital communication increases their vulnerability to social media addiction, as they may use these platforms excessively as a substitute for real-world emotional and social engagement.

Previous studies have shown that alexithymia is closely related to internet and social media addiction. Scimeca et al. (2014) found that higher levels of alexithymia correlated with a higher tendency for internet addiction, while van den Eijnden et al. (2016) linked it to social media and online gaming addiction. Individuals with alexithymia often use social media to express emotions indirectly and regulate their emotional state through addictive behaviors (Soranidou & Papastylianou, 2018; Taylor et al., 1991). Lestari et al. (2020) found that 62% of teenagers with alexithymia experienced social media addiction, supported by other studies indicating that communication difficulties and poor interpersonal relationships increase the risk of addiction (Gao et al., 2018; Pertiwi & Hidayati, 2018). Further findings by Baysan-Arslan et al. (2016) and Soranidou and Papastylianou (2018) confirmed the positive correlation between alexithymia and internet addiction, while Gündoğmuş et al. (2021) added that alexithymia predicted smartphone addiction. However, there was no significant relationship with general social media use.

Although several studies have explored the relationship between alexithymia and social media addiction, few have specifically addressed the connection between alexithymia and TikTok addiction among adolescents, especially in Indonesia. Therefore, this research aims to explore further the relationship between alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction among adolescents in Jakarta.

METHODS

This research employs a quantitative research design, a method used to test hypotheses by examining relationships between variables (Noor, 2012). The sampling technique utilized was non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. Respondents were selected based on the criterion of ado-

lescents using TikTok for approximately 3 hours or more daily. The research sample comprised 300 TikTok users aged 18–24 in Jakarta, with 140 males (46.67%) and 160 females (53.33%).

Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire that included sections on demographic information, the alexithymia scale, and the TikTok addiction scale. The TikTok addiction scale was adapted from the Social Media Addiction Scale-Student Form (SMAS-SF) by Şahin (2018). The items in this scale underwent content validity testing (expert judgment) by faculty members from the Psychology Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka. The term *social media* was replaced with *TikTok* to suit the specific context of the research. TikTok addiction was assessed across four dimensions: virtual tolerance, virtual communication, virtual problems, and virtual information. An example item is "I prefer using TikTok even when there are people around me." Responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Discriminant validity testing demonstrated that all items were valid, with a high internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .944$).

Alexithymia was measured using the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20), developed by Bagby et al. (1994), which assesses three dimensions: difficulty identifying feelings, difficulty describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking (Taylor et al., 2003). While TAS-20 has been extensively validated in non-clinical research and is widely used to measure alexithymia tendencies, it is not intended as a diagnostic tool for clinical purposes but rather to capture alexithymic traits within respondents. An example item from the TAS-20 is "I am often confused about what emotions I am actually feeling." Responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The reliability of the TAS-20 in this research was also strong, with $\alpha = .853$.

Data were analyzed using bivariate correlation or Pearson correlation coefficient via IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. This technique was employed to assess the relationship between alexithymia tendencies (independent variable) and TikTok addiction (dependent variable). This method allows for examining the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables of interest, providing insights into how alexithymia may be linked to excessive TikTok usage.

RESULTS

This research included a sample of 300 adolescents in Jakarta, aged between 18 and 24 years, who actively use TikTok. The respondents' descriptions in this research encompass the age, gender, and domicile of the research respondents.

Table 1.
Overview of Research Respondent

Description	Frequency (n = 300)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	140	46.67
Female	160	53.33
Age		
18	45	15
19	55	18.33
20	62	20.67
21	51	17
22	34	11.33
23	28	9.33
24	25	8.33

Description	Frequency (n = 300)	Percentage (%)
Domicile		
West Jakarta	78	26
East Jakarta	42	14
South Jakarta	59	19.67
North Jakarta	43	14.33
Central Jakarta	42	14
Seribu Archipelago	36	12

Based on Table 1, among the 300 respondents, the majority were female, totaling 160 individuals (53.33%), whereas the male respondents numbered 140 (46.67%). Most respondents belonged to the 20-year-old age group, with 62 individuals (20.67%), while the fewest respondents were in the 24-year-old age group, with 25 individuals (8.33%). Most research came from West Jakarta, with 78 respondents (26%), while the fewest came from the Seribu Archipelago, with 36 respondents (12%).

Table 2.
Comparison of Alexithymia Tendencies and TikTok Addiction Between Male and Female Respondents

Variables	Respondents	N	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Alexithymia tendencies	Male	140	46.67	69.25	12.38
	Female	160	53.33	70.41	11.92
TikTok addiction	Male	140	46.67	95.79	19.83
	Female	160	53.33	98.92	24.81

According to Table 2, the analysis of alexithymia tendencies reveals that females exhibit a slightly higher mean score (M = 70.41) than males (M = 69.25). The standard deviation for males (SD = 12.38) indicates greater variability in alexithymia scores among males than females (SD = 11.92). Similarly, in terms of TikTok addiction, females demonstrate a higher mean score (M = 98.92) compared to males (M = 95.79). Moreover, the larger standard deviation for females (SD = 24.81) compared to males (SD = 19.83) suggests greater variability in TikTok addiction levels among females.

Table 3.
Normality Test Results

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	Unstandardized Residual
N	300
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.200

The normality test in this research used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess the normality of the distribution of the variable scores. The results in Table 3 indicate a significance value of .200, which is greater than .01, suggesting that the data are normally distributed.

Table 4.
Linearity Test Results

ANOVA Table	Sig.
Deviation from Linearity	.132

An ANOVA test was conducted to assess the linearity of the data. The results indicated a significance level of .132, greater than .01, confirming that the two variables, alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction, have a linear relationship.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used as the hypothesis test in this research. The results of the hypothesis test are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.
Hypothesis Test Results

Correlation	
Pearson Correlation	.299
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	300

Based on Table 5, the significance level was determined to be .000, below the threshold of .01. These results indicate a statistically significant correlation between alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction, thus confirming the acceptance of the hypothesis. Additionally, the Pearson correlation coefficient (R) and the critical value from the R-table were utilized to assess the hypothesis further. If the R-value is more than the R-table, it suggests a significant correlation; if the R-value is less, no significant correlation is present. The computed R-value was .299, while the critical R-table value for a sample size of 300 respondents was .113. Given that .299 is more than .113, the analysis confirms a significant correlation between alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction, leading to the acceptance of the research hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

Alexithymia is characterized by difficulties in identifying, understanding, and expressing emotions in oneself and others. This condition often impedes the development of emotional intelligence, which is critical for adolescents in a transitional phase toward adulthood and experiencing significant emotional changes (Goleman, as cited in Desiningrum et al., 2017). Emotional intelligence involves recognizing, managing, and responding to emotions rationally and the capacity for empathy. However, individuals with alexithymia, as described by Lestari et al. (2020), frequently struggle to attain optimal levels of emotional intelligence, which negatively affects interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships and reduces empathy levels.

This research aims to explore the correlation between alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction among adolescents in Jakarta, considering that TikTok has increasingly become an integral part of adolescent life, and excessive use may lead to addiction, particularly in individuals with difficulties managing emotions. The results of the hypothesis analysis showed a positive relationship between alexithymia tendency and TikTok addiction. This suggests that higher levels of alexithymia are associated with a higher tendency for TikTok addiction, whereas lower alexithymia levels correspond to a lower addiction tendency. These findings are consistent with previous studies, such as those reported by Scimeca et al. (2014), which found that individuals with higher levels of alexithymia are more vulnerable to internet addiction, a phenomenon closely related to social media addiction and online gaming disorder (van den Eijnden et al., 2008)

Moreover, the analysis indicated gender-based differences in alexithymia and TikTok addiction tendencies, with females scoring higher than males. These findings align with the research conducted by Mattila et al. (2009), which reported higher rates of alexithymia in males compared to females. However, a study by Hamaideh (2018) found that females exhibited higher alexithymia tendencies,

in contrast to studies by Alzahrani et al. (2020) and Zhu et al. (2017), which reported higher alexithymia rates in males.

Individuals with alexithymia often struggle to express emotions verbally, which can manifest in socially isolated behaviors and difficulty forming relationships (Messina et al., 2014). This difficulty can drive them to use social media as a tool for mood regulation and a distraction from the negative emotions they experience (Rahmat, 2015). Adolescents with alexithymia often view social media as a safer platform to express emotions indirectly, without the pressure of face-to-face interaction, which they may find challenging (Scimeca et al., 2014).

Additionally, several studies have shown that individuals with alexithymia tend to have poor mood regulation and lower coping abilities, exacerbating their vulnerability to social media addiction (Knapton et al., 2018; Nezhad et al., 2017). When faced with negative emotions such as stress and depression, they often seek escape through social media, which provides temporary satisfaction but increases the risk of addiction (Mahapatra & Sharma, 2018). In conclusion, social media platforms like TikTok offer a means for individuals with alexithymia to avoid emotional discomfort in a seemingly more accessible and less demanding way than direct social interactions (Scimeca et al., 2014).

Furthermore, individuals with alexithymia exhibit difficulty identifying and describing their emotions, negatively impacting their ability to build interpersonal relationships (Alzahrani et al., 2020). This condition hampers their capacity for empathy, as highlighted by Goerlich (2018), who found that alexithymia reduces an individual's ability to imagine themselves in another's position. Similarly, Mersin et al. (2020) revealed that individuals with alexithymia have lower empathic abilities than those without the condition.

TikTok addiction in individuals with alexithymia is largely driven by their limited ability to understand and express emotions, making them more susceptible to addictive behaviors as a form of psychological diversion (Lyvers et al., 2019). Lestari et al. (2020) confirmed that alexithymia directly influences social media addiction, echoing findings by Scimeca et al. (2014) that alexithymia contributes to internet addiction and may lead to social media addiction.

In this context, TikTok allows individuals with alexithymia to engage in social interactions without facing the emotional challenges they typically encounter in face-to-face interactions (Mahapatra & Sharma, 2018). This suggests that individuals with alexithymia are more likely to use TikTok as a tool to manage and express their emotions, indirectly increasing their risk of social media addiction, particularly in the case of TikTok.

This research underscores the importance of understanding alexithymia as a significant risk factor in the development of social media addiction among adolescents, highlighting the need for more holistic approaches to addressing social media and TikTok addiction that incorporate emotional and psychological interventions.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction among adolescents in Jakarta. This research also highlights that females tend to exhibit higher alexithymia tendencies and TikTok addiction compared to males. In contrast, males show more significant variability in alexithymia tendencies than females. Nevertheless, the research is subject to certain limitations, including a relatively narrow sample size and limited demographic variation. Future research should consider expanding the demographic range of participants to include more diverse populations and extend the scope of the investigation beyond adolescents in Jakarta to incorporate various age groups. Additionally, further research should explore the contextual factors that may mediate the relationship between alexithymia and social media addiction.

Expanding the focus of future studies to examine the impact of alexithymia across different social media platforms beyond TikTok could yield a more comprehensive understanding of the role of alexithymia in the context of social media behaviors.

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