

# **Young Men and the TikTok that Shapes Them:**

**How does the social media platform TikTok  
affect adolescent men's self-image in  
Western culture?**



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## **Proposed Title :**

My research proposal, the title is 'Young Men and the TikTok that Shapes Them: How Does the Social Media Platform TikTok Affect Adolescent Men's Self-image in Western Culture?' In our modern society, we are constantly playing catch-up with the effects of the newest social media and dealing with its impact, but by researching and scrutinising what is happening now, we may equip ourselves on how best to handle the situations we find ourselves in now and situations we might find ourselves in the future.

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## **Mode of Submission :**

My format for submission in fourth year will be the extended essay. As this is a current topic, there is little academic writing about it. I have to look back at similar situations and academically published work that discusses similar situations and practices throughout our modern history. Even though this is an extended essay and will focus on written sources and documentation to inform my research, disregarding TikTok's visual landscape and language would mean ignoring a key component of its practice and how users utilise it, so by calling upon academic writing that we can apply to this situation and comparing that to the current situation with the aid of multiple research methods and the consideration of TikTok's visual elements, I believe that it would give the best results and assistance with visuals rather than relying on them.

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## **Topic Outline :**

The speed of technology today is nothing the human race has seen in its history. We have never been so connected, and that connection has never been so instantaneous; we are all connected all the time, and that gives us the possibility to see things we would never have seen and create a community with people we would never have met, modern technology has given us the opportunity to develop beautiful, captivating things, but it also has like any great innovation, it has the same chance to be used for harm, hatred or manipulation but with knowledge and understanding this can be combated.

Today, social media is one of the most widely adopted and less widely understood pieces of technology. It brings people together and informs us about what is happening in our local and global communities. But if unchecked and not held accountable, it can be used against those sensitive to or dependent on it.

As social media is so vast, rapidly progressing, and ever-changing, we can not understand it all at once. Still, we may derive meaning, understanding, and skills from studying it and focusing on a specific branch and demographic. TikTok is one of the newest, most widely adopted and most controversial social media platforms that is having a wide-scale effect on us as a global community, and the young men who use it are some of the most notable participants and seemingly the most affected by it. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ceci, TikTok: distribution of global audiences 2025, by gender.

This research will predominantly focus on cisgender men between the ages of thirteen and eighteen in Western culture who have unlimited access to the internet and use that access to interact with TikTok. However, consider that these ages or genders are not the only people exclusively affected by this app; the range of those affected could be any age and gender. However, as the demographic I aim to focus on is the most susceptible, most would be gained from focusing my research in that area.

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## Source Summary :

As this topic is still developing and still being researched to be understood, there are no apparent sources that can be looked to for any evident answers, so as we can't confidently know what will happen in the future, we have to look at instances and examples that are happening at this moment in time and also similar situations throughout our modern history and let that inform how these modern situations may play out. To find the most valuable sources, the best practice would be to isolate elements of the current focus and find credible research, findings and practices that apply, as well as less academic sources to inform of current perceptions and examples of how TikTok is affecting peoples lives outside of the educational structure and through other sources of media as well as the application itself.

As stated, young men of western culture is where my focus will be, and *bell hooks*, 'Popular Culture: Media Masculinity', *The Will To Change Men, Masculinity, And Love* discusses the psychology of Young Men and how media can influence that and even though this does not concern social media the same understanding applies and how the media these young men consume affect their world view, their interactions with others and how they treat themselves consciously and subconsciously.<sup>2</sup>

The second aspect of the research topic is TikTok itself. Not researching the platform itself would mean absolving TikTok and its algorithm from any agency or blame in this ongoing situation. Looking at Sherry Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversations: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* can help us better understand the effects of social media and, in turn, apps like TikTok and their impact on people's social dynamics and habits.<sup>3</sup> Again, Turkle's writing does not directly discuss TikTok in its current incarnation. However, by reading this, we can understand the impact these precursor applications had on local and global communities and personal interactions. To aid Turkle's writing, the added benefit of medical journals that have studied the effects these apps have on us on a medical and biological level would add another dimension to understanding the topic, and these apps, such as TikTok, are not just having a psychological effect on those who use it but a physical<sup>4</sup> and social effect as well.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> hooks, *The Will to Change*.

<sup>3</sup> Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversations*.

<sup>4</sup> Affleck, Carmichael, Whitley, 'Men's Mental Health: Social Determinants and Implications for Services'.

<sup>5</sup> Primack, Shensa, Sidani, Whaite, Lin, Rosen, Colditz, Radovic, Miller. 'Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation among Young Adults in the U.S.'

So, after understanding the people who use and are susceptible to TikTok and the application itself, the next piece would be to understand the media and the communities on the platform; as this is current and ongoing, I turn to modern media and credible outlets that have tackled this same subject, like the Netflix drama *Adolescence* and articles from sources such as the BBC<sup>6</sup>, as well as the influencers and communities themselves. By understanding and being aware of the media and the rise of incel culture, there is more chance to understand and prevent it.

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## **Research Context :**

During my research, I need to overcome a few issues related to this topic, mainly its immediacy and volatile nature, which could elicit very emotional reactions from those involved, be it the topic of young men on TikTok and social media or the app itself.

A problem to face is the question of blame within this topic: are the young men inherently hateful, or has TikTok given them a place to come together, or are they manipulated, their worldview warped by others that weaponised technology intending to convert susceptible minds to their way of thinking? Does the blame lie with TikTok itself and its ability to create these echo chambers where this kind of manipulation can occur, or if it wasn't TikTok, would it be some other platform where these people would conjugate? There might be no clear answer, but asking the questions is essential to the betterment of society.

This rapidly developing and changing situation makes it harder to pin down or speak with abject certainty, but again, by looking to examples from the past and pairing that with academic writing and social perception, a suggestion or roadmap for how this topic may develop might be possible.

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## **Research Question :**

As mentioned several times above, I wish to explore the question, 'How does the social media platform TikTok affect adolescent men's self-image in Western culture?' I think this is an essential question to be asked at this time because of its cultural currency and vehement hold on our collective social consciousness.

When researching this topic, a point to remember is that these young men are vulnerable and should be considered as such during the process to involve them in the process is to involve them in the discussion and the solution.

Looking now to the technological side of the research, another problem that would be faced would be understanding TikTok in itself, as it is widely documented that TikTok is fiercely protective and secretive when it comes to its defining algorithm. Now, the scope of this research proposal is not to serve TikTok with an injunction to understand the inner workings of its algorithm but to gain some understanding of how this algorithm is affecting these young men in one way or another and how others are using said algorithm to manipulate or monetise the attention span of these young men.

Finally, the subject of the content produced for TikTok and targeted towards these young men and understanding it is a vital avenue to gain a clear picture of the situation. The problem with this is that so much content is being produced by so

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<sup>6</sup> Griffin, 'Incels: Inside a dark world of online hate'.

many users, and each is produced explicitly for the audience that it will resonate with the most. As it would be impossible to analyse every single video made, it would have to be a tailored focus on the most influential or the biggest creator in each of these echo chambers. Understanding the video content itself is another key element in the puzzle of this situation.

By understanding each key element of this situation and its most prominent players, I will be able to grasp a base-level understanding of what is going on. I could then extrapolate that into other, more minor situations within the same sphere.

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## **Research Methodology :**

In the final submission, I'll employ several research methods to create a complete and encompassing image of the situation, such as secondary sources through academic published writing that can then inform and be applied to the current topic. I'll also look at current and recent articles from reputable sources to gain a more personal and current understanding of the situation and its effects on those involved and their lives. In the same vain of understanding the current media perspective on the situation, I would look at and analyse media such as dramatised media that explore the same subject as well as explorations and documentaries from places like YouTube from well-known edited sources as well as from people that are deeply engrained in the internet culture and may have a deeper understanding and perspective over someone from convention media outputs who may be forced edit their production to a greater extent.<sup>7</sup>

Also inspired by friends and colleagues from my course, I wish to make my own TikTok account with a focus on integrating into these echo chambers to access the videos these young men might see and interact within the comment section to understand their headspace and opinions better. An obvious downside would be that I would be subjecting myself to this media. Still, creating a fictional character that would be my role when interacting within these spaces allows for separation and, if this shows, yields results. Multiple characters that all gain access to different echo chambers would be more beneficial and aid in separating myself and the characters interacting in these spaces.

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## **Conclusion :**

By completing this research, I aim to better understand how young men's self-perception is affected by exposure to targeted media on TikTok and what takes place before, during, and after this media is consumed. How does the young man on social media come out the other side with a warped worldview and ideals shifted from the ones he was raised with?

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<sup>7</sup> Wall Street Journal Podcast, Zoe Thomas.

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# DHT

## Student declaration of the use of AI

SESSION                      YEAR 3                      SEMESTER 1

**AI can be used to make improvements to the clarity of student-created work to improve the final output, but no new content can be created using AI.**

**Content created by Generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT) is not permitted in DHT submissions, except as an object of study. In Box 1, please acknowledge you have not used Generative AI to create written or visual content in this submission that could be confused as your own.**

If you have used Assistive AI tools for tasks such as checking your grammar, translating your writing from one language to another, and/or to help structure your submission, this should be clearly stated in Box 2.

If you have not used an AI tool beyond basic spell check, please say so in Box 3.

I confirm that I have not used Generative AI to create new written or visual content, except as an object of study and clearly referenced.	1: I have not AI to generate any content.
I have used the AI tools listed here for grammar, translation, or similar purposes.	2: Grammarly for grammar and spelling checks.
I have not used AI in any capacity.	3:

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