

# Boredom, and How Social Media Makes It Worse

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Recently, as I sat waiting to be called for my IELTS Speaking Test, I felt a strong urge to ask one of the people in charge of maintaining the exam conditions to ask for my phone back. This was strange, for the situation was not new to me. I had taken many exams before, and had to wait much longer than I did that day, that too without any devices to distract myself.

However, this test was a familiar one, and my wanting to just get it over with, made me unnaturally restless during the 30 minutes before which I was called. While the feeling surprised me, this need to turn to our gadgets at the slightest hint of boredom is one that has become more than common in the past decade.

Boredom, by itself, is universally considered an undesirable state to be in. It also seems to be ancient. A *New Yorker* article titled "What Does Boredom Do to Us — and for Us?" mentions not just industrial age philosophers but Seneca from the first century who used "taedium vitae" to describe nausea at the repeated nature of life. It can be distressing and even excruciating, and this is a problem that plagues not just adolescents and adults beginning their work-life but older segments of the population as well.

We can get a sharp understanding of just how dire this state can be if we look at a 2016 BBC article mentioning the case of Frederic Desnard who sued his previous employer for "boreout", a term derived from burnout.

Furthermore, links have been found between boredom and adverse mental health conditions. A *Washington Post* article titled "Boredom's link to mental illnesses, brain injuries and dysfunctional



DESIGN: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

behaviors" details how agitated people can be when bored, even for 10 minutes. This was indicated by an experiment where one participant shocked himself 190 times when placed in a situation with zero distractions.

It might seem like a paradox, but the whole issue seems to have been signifi-

cantly exacerbated with the advent of the digital age where unimaginable amounts of content is produced every second.

A line that perfectly encapsulates the differences in reactions to boredom between past generations and this one comes from a Vox article called, "Bored and lonely? Blame your phone", where it

says, "Because of the promises of the digital age, when we experience those feelings, we're more surprised and alarmed than our ancestors were."

The words come from one of the authors of a book called *Bored, Lonely, Angry, Stupid: Changing Feelings about Technology, from the Telegraph to Twitter* where comparisons are made between people of the 19th and 20th centuries and people today, in terms of how both groups felt about boredom. The author states that while former generations viewed monotony as an ordinary feature of life that couldn't be avoided, the potential of instant and constant entertainment and companionship provided by our devices today, make us feel worse when we feel bored and alone.

In addition, the lack of effort with which we are able to use social media is also to blame as it offers no challenges for us to overcome. A study at Kent State University found that the usage of social media increased boredom while self-selected schoolwork decreased it. The results might be shocking, but as members of this generation, we know all too well that this has a grain of truth.

#### References

1. BBC (July 26, 2016). *Is there such a thing as 'boreout'?*
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3. Vox (May 5, 2019). *Bored and lonely? Blame your phone.*
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Matilda sincerely believes it is always other people's fault. Tell her she's right at matilda.tilda1234@gmail.com

# THE ALLURE OF TIKTOK

MRIITIKA ANAN RAHMAN

As soon as I open TikTok, a video of a girl lip-syncing to a song jumps at me. Then, with each beat, her face changes, little by little, until it's fully transformed with red cobwebs covering her skin. I knew I wanted to talk to her. Thankfully, my two-minute research tells me she's Sanjina Islam Lupita.

A week later, I'm on a Zoom call with her.

"During quarantine, I got into face art. I started without the intention of making it a public account. I would draw flowers on my eyelids or dress up as Avatar characters. Once I shared my videos, my friends encouraged me to make my account public," shares Lupita, @isthatgina\_ on TikTok. She's also an influencer, and an Economics student at Brac University.

"My main focus is Instagram," says Lupita. "In Bangladesh, TikTok isn't like abroad — you can't get PR or monetise it. My aim is to gather an audience who'll know me and know my face, to eventually help with Instagram."

When asked if she has experienced toxicity on the app, she explains, "I try to keep a healthy distance from all this and use TikTok to only make videos. I don't reply to all the comments. Somebody once called me 'Illuminati' for doing Goth makeup. I did a red face devil makeup look once and got swarmed. But the audience has changed over time. There's only two percent toxic people now, and 98 percent are good."

During the pandemic, Tazreen Khan, a second semester BBA stu-

dent at North South University (NSU), also discovered the world of TikTok.

"I introduced my younger sister to TikTok. I used to make small videos for fun and they wouldn't get many views. Then, suddenly, one video got 100,000 views and boom, my videos started getting many views. Now I do mostly dance, comedy, or versatile content."

Tazreen is also an influencer. She goes by @typicaltazz on TikTok.

"When I started, there was a negative perception of doing TikTok. There wasn't much quality content. But now, I think people are seeing there is more to the app. People are realising this is helping them grow their presence online. Since quarantine started, the overall content on TikTok has improved a lot," shares Tazreen.

It's also hard work being on the app. "TikTok is tricky. You need time to understand how the mechanism works. TikTok is famous for transitions. There are many effects and you need to learn how to work them. Even if a video is 15 seconds, it might take six to seven takes for those 15 seconds," says Tazreen.

TikTok also shifted many of Tazreen's perceptions. "We always think Bangladeshi people don't think out of the box but TikTok has shown me that we do. There are boys here doing makeup. Some people ask them to stop, but they don't."

Communications executive at Tiger IT Bangladesh, Irfan Aziz, says it was his wife who made him want to get on TikTok after they watched videos on it together.

"I think most people present a much curated version of themselves on platforms like Facebook or Instagram. TikTok felt like a safer platform to be your true wacky self without being judged. I started making TikTok videos because none of my friends were there. By the time they found out, I already had a following going and realised that it's okay for me to create goofy content," says Irfan.

When he made a video about skincare, though, the response told him what he needed to know about people on the app. He adds, "The reaction to my videos has mostly been positive. Even if it's not, the TikTok community always stands up for you. I remember getting some hate on the skincare video but for each negative comment there were two to three people standing up for me."

The app proved to be a safe space for Tazreen, too. She says, "A few people joined after me and I made friends on TikTok. It's always nice to see good quality content makers. You feel like you're part of the same squad, like you belong."

Truth be told, I had my own res-

ervations about joining TikTok. My understanding of the app was based on clips I saw on Facebook, or videos featuring young people breaking things they owned as part of viral challenges.

TikTok was launched in 2018, after ByteDance bought Musical.ly and expanded globally. Ever since, it has appeared in the news for the wrong reasons with surprising frequency.

In December 2020, a Bangladesh Supreme Court lawyer filed a writ petition to ban the app, stating "in order to protect the young generation from social degradation". The lawyer stated that young people on the app are "losing their morality and social values."



In 2021, 11 people were arrested after using TikTok to lure girls for human trafficking. The amount of blame TikTok should get for this when human trafficking has been a problem in the country for quite some time is still a matter up for debate.

My personal reservations about TikTok are different, however. If everyone is following the same trends and challenges, does it not promote groupthink? Mursalin Hasan Chowdhury Alfie, a TikTok user and Marketing student at NSU, provides a counterargument.

"I think TikTok does encourage groupthink to some extent. Then again, those who are emulating these trends have to find their own ways of doing them. How they incorporate their own flavours into these videos is interesting to watch. These challenges, at the end of the day, are started by a certain individual or groups of individuals. It compels them to think originally," Mursalin argues.

The algorithm of TikTok is another thing that confuses users. "Every six to seven months, there's an algorithm change," says Tazreen, based on her experience on the app.

"Suddenly different things will start blowing up and I'll start seeing things I like, good content creators. Then when my videos start doing well, I understand that the algorithm has changed. Few months later, it'll become mostly 'cringe' content. For example, my 'For You Page' will show videos with 20,000 to 40,000 views, then suddenly drop down to 1000 views on a video. Five to six days later, I'll only have 1000 views on a video whereas I have

10,000 followers," Tazreen explains.

To me, this sounds like a lot to take. "I'm old enough to not let social media hurt me," she comments. "But I had so many people following me, and then it went down. My friend started unfollowing people, and so her followers dropped. The For You Page is also messed up so we don't really complain. It was demotivating of course. The video algorithm changes every six months or so and alternate crowds get attention on the platform."

Nahian Ibnat Beg is a co-founder of Trivents, an event management company in Dhaka. I reached out to her in the hope of finding how TikTok influences small businesses. Surprisingly, TikTok's mechanism of randomly boosting videos has served her well.

"I saw some international pages promoting their service-based business in my For You Page. Some had great views and reach, some had none. When I realised no one was really using the platform to promote event-related services here, I took the opportunity," she recalls.

"I took a leap of faith and started uploading videos. Initially, there was not much response. It increased with time. We understood people liked our content. This gave us the confidence to post more. After a few exclusive events, we gained some attention and since then, we haven't looked back."

Asked what TikTok did for her business which other social media platforms couldn't, Nahian replies, "Our views increased, reach increased, we gained a wider audience — potential future clients. There was a sudden increase in the client base. The automated video making and editing ability has allowed us to do more. Previously, we used complicated apps and softwares to make videos."

Shovy Zibran, Assistant Producer in the Multimedia Team of The Daily Star says the algorithm of TikTok threw him off from time to time too, "My friends and I started a face mask business during lockdown. We were a small business without much of a budget but then this app gave us the platform to access a newer audience."

"TikTok wouldn't categorise videos on their app. If you used a certain hashtag, people would see that video with all other videos using that hashtag," he adds.

TikTok seems like it's here to stay for a while. After the app's tumultuous journey, circling back to Lupita a year after her initial interview, I ask what's new.

"I make fewer TikToks now. Once a week or whenever I feel like it," she tells me.

But her face art videos opened new doors for her. Lupita is now a budding makeup artist and when I check out her feed on TikTok, it has a link where you can DM her for makeup appointments.

Mrittika joined TikTok at some point during writing this article. You can find her @rahmanmrittika

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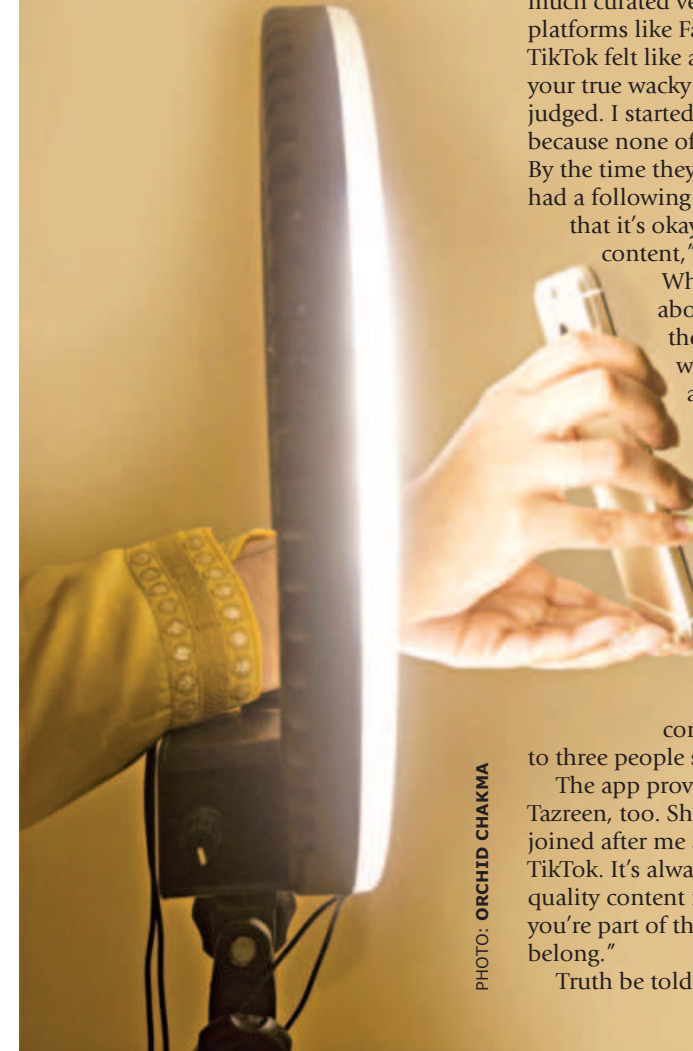


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

THE FIVE STAGES

#1

Elitism

"Huh. It's just people dancing."

#2

Conforming

"Uhhh, what are you even saying?"

#3

Bargaining

"Fine. I'll give it a shot. Okay?"

#4

Engrossing

"Am I a Nicki fan?"  
"Are you new here?"

#5

Full Circle

"Do you want to make a Tiktok?"

OF TIKTOK

DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD