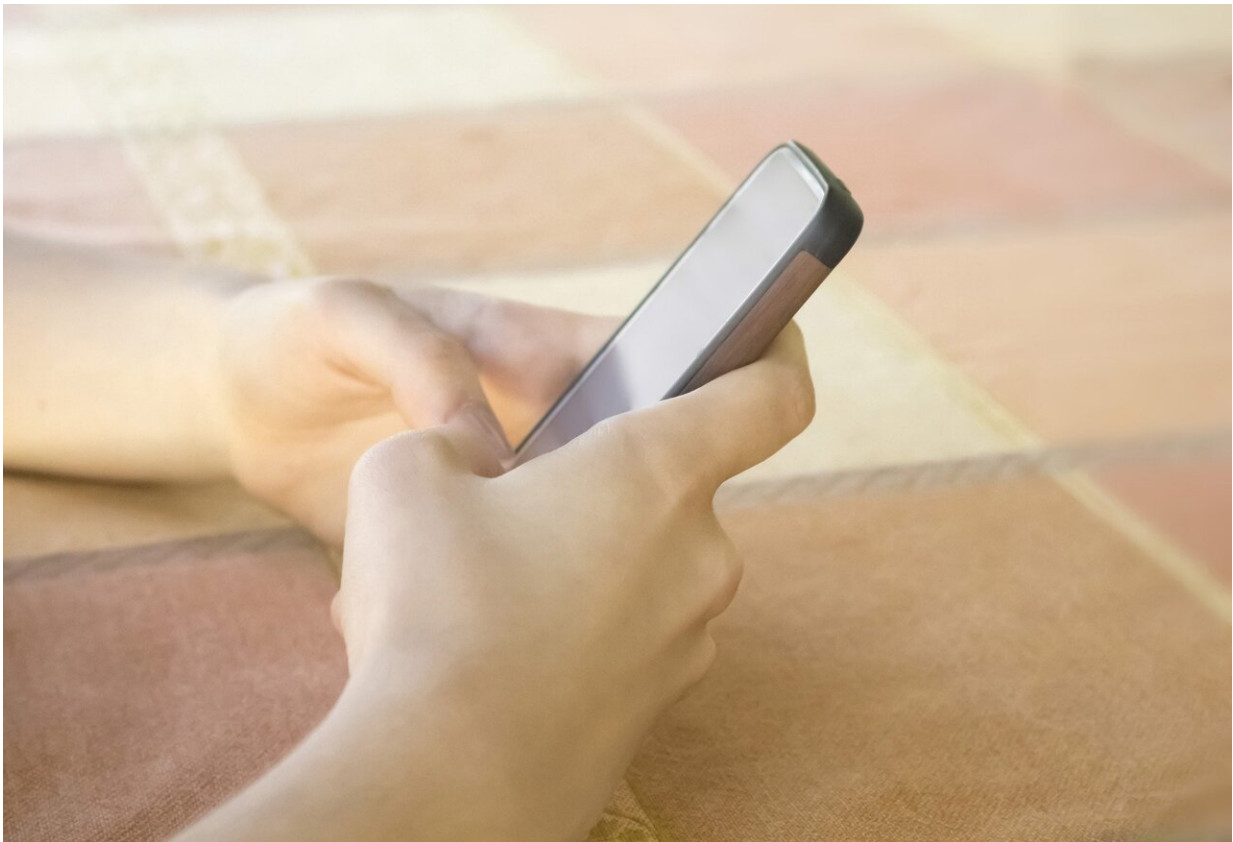


# Getting high for 'likes': TikTok exposes teens to videos on cannabis

January 25 2022

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Teenagers are being exposed to videos on social media platform TikTok that portray cannabis use as funny and entertaining rather than risky, University of Queensland researchers have found.

Lead author and Ph.D. student Brienna Rutherford from UQ's National Centre for Youth Substance Use Research said the research analyzed 881 publicly available videos to determine how [cannabis](#)-related content was seen by users.

"Our research found 54 percent of videos had a positive sentiment and were viewed more than 417 million times," Ms. Rutherford said.

"Only 24 of the 881 videos—or 2.7 percent—warned audiences of the dangers associated with high-frequency cannabis use.

"This is concerning, as we know this exposure can influence an adolescent's attitudes and potentially lead to problematic cannabis use, posing the risk of mental health issues or neuropsychological decline.

"With over 1 million young Australians using TikTok, there is an urgent need for effective age restrictions or warning banners to be placed on publicly available videos depicting substance use."

Co-author Dr. Gary Chan said there had been a rise in the perceived cultural and social acceptability of cannabis.

"We have seen an increase in the number of pro-cannabis groups that have started to pop up online," Dr. Chan said.

"From the videos analyzed in this research, we found a vast majority depicted cannabis use as humorous or entertaining.

"Around 42 percent of videos featured the creator discussing their personal cannabis use experiences and close to a quarter promoted the acceptability of using it socially or culturally."

Ms. Rutherford said TikTok had recently made moves to protect young

people from risky behavior online, including removing hashtags explicitly referencing substance use; however, the videos were still publicly available.

"Cannabis remains one of the most widely used substances internationally among young people and was linked to increased risk of depression and suicide in young adulthood," she said.

"TikTok has more than 1 billion active monthly users across the world.

"In America, a third of TikTok's users are under the age of 14, and 63 percent of people aged 12 to 17 use the platform on a daily basis.

"There is a significant opportunity to minimize the exposure of positive [substance use messaging](#) through improved regulation and monitoring."

**More information:** Brienna N. Rutherford et al, Getting high for likes: Exploring cannabis-related content on TikTok, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/dar.13433](https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13433)

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: Getting high for 'likes': TikTok exposes teens to videos on cannabis (2022, January 25) retrieved 20 April 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-high-tiktok-exposes-teens-videos.html>

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