THE IMPACT OF DISTORTED HISTORICAL INFORMATION IN TIKTOK VIDEOS ON STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY
(Naturalistic Inquiry Study in Class XI SMAN 1 Garut)

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ABSTRACT
Abstract in Historical distortions in social media content, particularly on TikTok, pose a new challenge in history education because the information disseminated is often simplistic, provocative, and lacking in historiographical accuracy. This study was motivated by the phenomenon of widespread historical content on TikTok that does not align with historical facts yet remains popular and trusted by students. The objective of this study is to examine the impact of historical distortion in TikTok content on students' understanding of history at SMA Negeri 1 Garut. The method used is qualitative with a naturalistic inquiry approach, focusing on in-depth interviews with students and history teachers, participatory observation, and document analysis of the historical content consumed by students. The results of the study indicate that most students are influenced by invalid historical content on TikTok, which leads to misinterpretations of historical events, weak critical thinking skills regarding sources, and the emergence of narrow and biased historical perceptions. On the other hand, teachers play a crucial role in countering such distortions through educational approaches that emphasize source clarification, open discussions, and media literacy enhancement. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that history education in the digital age must be accompanied by adaptive and critical pedagogical strategies, so that students can distinguish between valid and distorted historical narratives and grow into active subjects in building reflective and responsible historical understanding.

INTRODUCTIONS

An accurate and deep understanding of history is an important foundation in shaping historical awareness, national identity, and critical thinking skills in the younger generation. History is not merely a series of events to be memorized, but rather a narrative construction that requires analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of various sources and perspectives. Wineburg (2010) emphasizes that a good understanding of history requires students to view the past contextually, taking into account the accompanying social, economic, and political dimensions. n the context of learning, students should ideally obtain historical knowledge from academic sources such as textbooks, historical documents, and other learning materials that have been scientifically verified. These sources enable students to build a holistic understanding that is not only factual but also analytical. Barton and Levstik (2004) emphasize the importance of developing historical thinking skills so that students can

assess the cause and effect of an event, understand the socio-cultural background, and evaluate various historical perspectives. Similarly, Supriatna (2019) asserts that history education must actively involve students in critical thinking processes through document analysis and event reconstruction. However, the reality of history education in the digital age presents new challenges. The development of information technology, particularly social media, has changed the patterns of information consumption among students. TikTok, as one of the most popular short-video platforms among teenagers, has become one of the primary sources of information, including historical information. With algorithms prioritizing visual and emotional appeal, TikTok offers historical narratives in a concise, engaging, and easily accessible format. This potential can be utilized positively in education, but it also poses significant risks if the information presented is inaccurate.

According to Rizal et al. (2024), educational videos on TikTok have high retention rates due to their visual and emotional format. Furthermore, Greenhow and Lewin (2016) note that social media can create interactive and collaborative learning spaces. In the context of history, TikTok has the potential to be an engaging medium for presenting historical narratives in a creative and relevant manner, tailored to the characteristics of today's students. Many teachers in Indonesia have used TikTok as an alternative medium to deliver history material, making it part of a more communicative and modern pedagogical strategy (Sulistyaningrum et al., 2024). However, not all historical content on TikTok is sourced from academic literature or produced by experts. Most viral content simplifies historical narratives, inserts biases, and even spreads misinformation. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the "filter bubble" effect, where social media algorithms present content based on user preferences rather than accuracy or quality (Wulandari et al., 2021). As a result, students are often exposed to biased, provocative, or even seriously distorted historical information. For example, the account Napoleon VOC Pasukan 1976 posted historical content depicting the Javanese ethnic group as the main collaborators of the Dutch in the colonization of Sumatra. This claim not only simplifies the complexity of colonial history but also contains ethnic bias and has the potential to cause polarization. Similarly, the About History ID account contains a confrontational narrative between Sukarno and Tan Malaka without adequate context, creating a false dichotomy in the strategy for independence. Such narratives can shape negative perceptions of national figures simply because of manipulative visual presentation.

Other content, such as that produced by the Jugo Media account, also depicts the history of the construction of the Anyer–Panarukan road by Daendels in a sympathetic light. The narrative that forced laborers received wages, but that the funds were embezzled by local priyayi, shifts the responsibility for colonialism to the local elite. In fact, historical data shows that the project claimed thousands of lives and was built for the benefit of the Dutch military, not for the welfare of the people. Such distortions are increasingly permeating the classroom. Observations by researchers at SMAN 1 Garut show that students often rely on TikTok to seek historical information. The history teacher at this school, Mr. Gelar Fajar Rachman, applies Paulo Freire's dialogical approach, which allows students to actively seek information through their devices during lessons. However, when the information consumed comes from unverified social media, students often misinterpret it. For example, when answering quizzes in class, many students provide answers based on TikTok information, which turns out to be inaccurate.

Interviews with several students revealed the forms of distortion they experienced. Student FM, for example, stated that historical writing should be neutral and unbiased, citing a TikTok video claiming that all historians have hidden agendas. This perspective reflects a lack of understanding of historiography, which acknowledges that history is always written from a particular perspective but must still be based on evidence and scientific methods. Another distortion emerged in the perception of RA Kartini, who was considered not to represent women's struggles because she came from the aristocracy. However, Kartini's contribution to opening up the discourse on emancipation remained significant in the social context of her time. A similar view was found in the perception of the Youth Pledge and Budi Utomo. Both events were considered to have had little impact because they did not involve physical struggle or mass participation. This understanding shows a tendency among students to evaluate historical events solely from the perspective of physical militancy, without understanding the symbolic and strategic value they carry in the process of nation-building.

One of the most common distortions is the assumption that Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch for 350 years. KA students consider this claim reasonable because they often hear it on TikTok and YouTube. This claim actually originates from Bung Karno's political rhetoric and does not reflect the complex historical reality, where colonialism occurred gradually and unevenly across the archipelago (Ricklefs, 2008; Kartodirdjo, 1993). This situation indicates that students not only lack historical knowledge but also lack media literacy skills. They tend to accept information from TikTok without critical thinking, as emotional and visual narratives are easier to remember than academic texts. This poses a significant challenge for history teachers who must correct information that students have come to believe.

The distortion of historical information on TikTok raises several key issues: (1) Students develop a false understanding of history; (2) Their critical thinking skills are impaired because they are accustomed to instant information; (3) The complexity of history is reduced to black-and-white narratives; and (4) Distortions are used to spread divisive identity sentiments. Therefore, this study has three main urgencies. First, to understand how the distortion of historical information on TikTok affects students' understanding of history. Second, to identify the long-term impact of the spread of inaccurate historical narratives on collective memory and public opinion. Third, to formulate pedagogical approaches that are responsive to the challenges of the digital age, including the integration of media literacy into the history curriculum. Although previous studies have addressed information distortion on social media (Chen, 2025; Bhardwaj, 2024), most have focused on issues related to health, politics, or religion. Studies highlighting the specific impact of historical distortion on TikTok remain limited. Some relevant studies, such as Bhat (2023) and Stefania (2022), discuss the correction of historical bias in the case of the Holocaust, while Romdhon (2016) and Hakiki (2024) highlight Islamic narratives in textbooks and digital media. However, there has been no research specifically examining how students receive and interpret historical content on TikTok in the context of formal education in Indonesia.

This study attempts to fill this gap with a naturalistic inquiry approach, which emphasizes direct exploration of individual meanings in their social context. Through classroom observation and in-depth interviews, this study reveals the cognitive and affective processes of students in understanding history from digital content. Thus, this study not only identifies forms of distortion but also explores how beliefs are formed and maintained. Another novelty lies in the attention given to the role of teachers in addressing the phenomenon of distortion. Teachers are not merely conveyors of material, but facilitators of critical dialogue. Documentation of the pedagogical strategies applied by teachers at SMAN 1 Garut shows that the classroom can become an arena for resistance against misleading narratives from social media. The dialogical approach used by teachers is evidence that participatory and reflective history education can build students' resilience to misinformation. Thus, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of adaptive history education in the digital age, while also promoting stronger historical media literacy among students. Based on the above, this study focuses on the impact of distorted historical information in TikTok video content on the historical understanding of Grade XI students at SMAN 1 Garut. This research is important to understand the dynamics of changes in students' perspectives on history and to identify relevant pedagogical strategies to address new challenges in historical education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a naturalistic inquiry method that aims to deeply understand the subjective experiences of students related to exposure to historical content on TikTok, as well as its impact on their understanding of history. This approach is considered relevant because it allows researchers to explore phenomena in their original context holistically, without intervening in the environment or behavior of the research subjects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic research places the researcher as the main instrument who is directly involved in data collection and interpretation through natural interaction with participants. Research on the impact of historical information distortion in video content on TikTok on the historical understanding of 11th grade students at SMAN 1 Garut was conducted during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, from January 15, 2025, to June 6, 2025. The subjects of this study were 11 eleventh-grade history teachers and eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Garut. This school was selected based on a number of strategic considerations: (1) high integration between conventional learning processes and the use of digital technology, including social media; (2) the majority of students are active users of TikTok; and (3) school support for academic research, particularly related to digital literacy and history education. This context supports the collection of representative and contextual data on how students receive, interpret, and make sense of historical content circulating on social media.

The research subjects consisted of one history teacher and eleven 11th-grade students selected using purposive sampling. Participant criteria included: (a) being an active student at SMAN 1 Garut; (b) being an active TikTok user; (c) having an interest in history or experience consuming historical content on social media; and (d) being willing to participate in interviews and observations. This technique allows the researcher to focus on individuals considered most relevant to provide in-depth information about the phenomenon being studied. Data collection techniques were conducted through three main methods: observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted passively, both inside and outside the classroom, to observe history learning activities, student discussions, and their

interactions with TikTok content related to history. This observation aims to capture the dynamics of behavior as well as verbal and non-verbal expressions that emerge when students compare historical information from social media with school lesson materials.

Interviews are conducted in an unstructured manner to explore the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers in depth. This approach provides flexibility in exploring meaning and allows for flexible conversations, in line with the principles of phenomenological research. Techniques such as laddering, stimulus recall, think-aloud protocol, and critical incident were used to help participants reflect on their experiences when consuming historical content on TikTok and how that content influenced their understanding. Interviews were recorded (with permission) and then transcribed for data analysis purposes.

Document analysis was conducted to support and confirm the findings from observations and interviews. The documents analyzed included history subject syllabi or lesson plans, students' written assignments, and (where possible) excerpts of historical content from TikTok consumed by students. This document analysis was conducted using a descriptive-interpretative approach to explore the alignment or misalignment between curriculum materials and historical representations in social media.

All data were analyzed thematically using an interpretative approach consistent with qualitative principles. Data validity is maintained through source and method triangulation techniques, participant verification (member check), and an audit trail to document the analysis and interpretation process. With this approach, the research aims to capture the full meaning of the phenomenon being studied and provide a reflective understanding of how historical information distortion on TikTok influences how students understand the past in the context of formal learning at school.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS
Form of Historical Distortion in Video Content on Tiktok

Most Interviews and observations of students' interactions with TikTok content show that this platform is an active space for the dissemination of historical narratives, but it is not uncommon for information to be distorted. Researchers observed the content displayed by students in the classroom and outside the classroom (e.g., during breaks or informal discussions) and analyzed their comments and interactions with the content.

The most common forms of distortion found relate to national figures, colonialism, and narratives of the struggle for independence. For example, student Abil mentioned content featuring Sukarno's speech at the UN with the narrative that "Indonesia was praised by the world for Sukarno's courage," even though the content of the speech was not explained historically and the original source was not mentioned. Another piece of content observed was the narrative that "Java collaborated with the Dutch to colonize Sumatra," as told by student A. This video spread a provocative narrative with visuals of Dutch soldiers smiling with local children. Observations show that viral content uses dramatic editing techniques: such as old-fashioned film filters, emotional background music, black-and-white image cuts, and large text with suggestive language like "HIDDEN HISTORICAL SECRETS!" This combination creates a strong emotional effect but disregards factual accuracy. Researchers noted at least 7 videos watched by students that featured such editing without clearly citing sources.

Most of the observed content originated from unofficial or personal accounts without a background in history education. From observations of accounts watched by students, only about 2 out of 10 accounts had academic credentials or cited scientific references. Student Doni said he trusted blue-tick accounts more, but in reality, some blue-tick accounts also posted overly simplified popular content. Researchers compared the content of the videos mentioned by students with official documents such as lesson plans, national curriculum history books, and teacher notes. For example, in a video that mentioned Sukarno collaborating with Japan for personal gain, the RPP explained that the collaboration was part of a diplomatic strategy to deal with the Japanese occupation. History teacher Mr. Gelar emphasized that some content deviated substantially, especially in explaining the context of colonialism and the roles of historical figures.

Based on observations of student interactions and an analysis of captions and comments, much of the content is created for virality rather than education. History teachers noted that many creators simply quote snippets of information and embellish them to attract attention. Student Gilang also emphasized the importance of verification, as much content is "created for sensationalism, not education." Some videos explicitly use hashtags like #conspiracy or #secret history, indicating an intention to dramatize for the algorithm rather than clarify history. From observations and

interviews, historical distortion in TikTok content manifests as simplification, dramatization, and visual and narrative manipulation. This distortion occurs due to a combination of creators' lack of knowledge, inconsistency with official sources, and the drive for virality. However, some students demonstrate critical thinking by comparing information from TikTok with their teachers' explanations in class. These findings emphasize the importance of historical and digital literacy in navigating the flow of information on social media.

Student Ability to Filter Historical Information on Tiktok

This section describes students' ability to assess the validity of historical information they find on TikTok, by reviewing aspects of understanding historical validity, the ability to identify inconsistencies, comparing content with official sources, verifying information, and the level of trust in digital content. Initial interviews indicate that not all students possess adequate critical awareness. Dodi, for example, stated that he assesses the truthfulness of content based on the credibility of the account:

"*If it's from an account that frequently discusses history and provides references, I tend to believe it. But if the video is just a series of images with sensational narration, I become suspicious.*" (Interview, February 20, 2025)

However, other students like Ratih admitted difficulty distinguishing between true and false information:

"*Because the video is convincing, I just watch it—sometimes I believe it, sometimes I don't.*" (Interview, February 20, 2025)

Regarding information verification skills, students' approaches vary. Susan provided a concrete example of how she verifies content she believes to be incorrect by directly asking her teacher:

"*I once asked Mr. Gelar about the date when Bung Karno visited Dalat. It turned out the TikTok video had the wrong date.*" (Interview, February 20, 2025)

Meanwhile, Riska relies more on comment sections as an initial reference:

"*I look at the comments; sometimes people say it's wrong. If many say it's wrong, I look for other sources.*" (Interview, February 20, 2025)

When asked whether they compare the content of TikTok videos with classroom lessons, only some students do so. Tiara, for example, shares:

"*I asked Mr. Gelar about Daendels, who supposedly paid wages to the people, and it was clarified in class.*" (Interview, February 21, 2025)

However, Rahma explained that she had never compared them, as the themes of TikTok content often differ from the lessons being discussed.

Most students also acknowledge that distinguishing historical information on TikTok is quite challenging, especially due to its engaging and dramatic presentation style. Nissa notes:

"*It's really hard, sir. Sometimes the wrong information is presented like a movie, with music, so you believe it.*" (Interview, February 21, 2025)

However, for students like Dineu, the level of difficulty depends heavily on familiarity with the topic:

"*If the topic hasn't been taught in class, I find it hard to distinguish what's true.*" (Interview, February 21, 2025)

To strengthen the data, the researcher also conducted direct observations of history lessons in the 11th grade. On February 21, 2025, the researcher observed that the history teacher (GFR) often ended the class with an open quiz, where students were free to find answers from books, notes, or even TikTok. During the observation, there was a class discussion triggered by viral TikTok content, indicating that social media has become part of the learning dynamics.

In an interview on the same day, the GFR explained:

"*Some are critical and like to compare, but others just believe it. The content is interesting, but not everyone can distinguish between facts and manipulation.*"

He also added that students often bring TikTok content into the classroom to ask questions or discuss:

"*Someone once asked why Tan Malaka didn't become president because he was from Sumatra. They started hating Sukarno because of that video. I had to clarify to prevent history from fostering hatred.*" (Interview, February 21, 2025)

Based on interviews and observations, the researcher concluded that students' ability to filter historical information on TikTok is still uneven. Some students are beginning to develop critical awareness, but others remain mere consumers of content without the ability to evaluate it. The role of teachers is crucial in providing contextual

understanding and promoting historical literacy and digital literacy in the face of the overwhelming flow of information circulating on social media.

The Impact of Historical Distortion on Tiktok on Students Understanding of History

The presence of TikTok as a short video platform has had a significant impact on how students access and interpret historical information. On the one hand, TikTok serves as a bridge to introduce history through visually appealing presentations. However, on the other hand, its instant and dramatic approach risks simplifying or distorting historical facts.

Some students acknowledge that TikTok content helps them understand history that was previously difficult to grasp through textbooks. As Habibi stated:

"*I understand better from TikTok videos because they often use images, maps, or dramatic sounds.*" (Interview, April 24, 2025)

However, this understanding is not always accompanied by verification. Anjani, for example, was impressed by the AI-generated reconstruction of Gajah Mada's face, though she herself doubts the accuracy of the information:

"*It's awesome, but I'm not sure if it's true or not.*" (Interview, April 24, 2025)

Another case shows that the presentation of distorted information can influence students' thinking and assessment of history. Rana, for example, admitted that she began to doubt the content of her textbooks after seeing alternative narratives on TikTok:

"*I often see TikTok videos saying that Indonesian history has been manipulated. So I started to doubt the history books at school.*" (Interview, April 25, 2025)

This phenomenon shows a change in students' perceptions triggered by exposure to viral content, rather than based on the credibility of the source. Some students even confuse facts and opinions, such as misunderstandings related to the Proclamation and the Diponegoro War. GFR, a history teacher, said:

"*Some students believe that Sukarno was forced to sign the Proclamation under pressure, when in fact it was the result of an agreement among national leaders. Others think Diponegoro went to war only because his grandmother's grave was disturbed, ignoring many structural factors.*" (Interview, April 25, 2025)

Such distortions sometimes surface in class discussions or when answering assignments. This presents a new challenge for teachers to correct the narrative without dampening students' enthusiasm. GFR noted that exposure to TikTok does make students more active in discussions, but also more prone to falling into generalizations:

"*They ask more questions, but they also assume that what's viral must be true. I have to dissect the narrative using primary sources and help them distinguish between entertainment and academia.*" (Interview, April 25, 2025)

Nevertheless, not all students accept information passively. Some demonstrate critical thinking and enthusiasm. Kayla, for example, chooses to trust teachers and textbooks:

"*I still trust books and teachers. TikTok is just an extra.*" (Interview, April 25, 2025)

Meanwhile, Anjani uses TikTok as a learning catalyst:

"*I learn new terms. But I still double-check on Google or ask the teacher.*" (Interview, April 25, 2025)

TikTok has also proven effective in sparking interest in history when balanced with a reflective approach from teachers. During a classroom observation on April 25, 2025, researchers noted that teachers leveraged students' enthusiasm by assigning critical presentations comparing TikTok content with academic historical sources. In an interview, GFR stated:

"*I see them becoming more active. They present short videos for discussion. But I always emphasize that TikTok is not the primary reference. There must be clarification and deeper understanding.*" (Interview, April 25, 2025)

In conclusion, TikTok's impact on students' understanding of history is ambivalent. On one hand, the platform sparks interest and opens up broader opportunities for historical exploration. On the other hand, without digital literacy skills and teacher guidance, TikTok has the potential to become a serious source of historical misconceptions. Therefore, the critical integration of digital media and formal history education is an urgent need in 21st-century education.

Discussions

Form of Historical Distortion in Video Content on Tiktok

Historical content on TikTok has proven to be highly appealing to students, particularly due to its visual, dramatic, and easily accessible presentation. Videos that appear on the For You Page are often emotionally charged, using evocative background music and archival video clips or black-and-white photos to add to the sense of authenticity. For students, this makes history feel more alive and easier to understand than textbooks. TikTok's popularity as a social media platform among teenagers makes it a new gateway for them to access historical information, both educational and problematic. Behind the attractive and dramatic packaging, many historical videos on TikTok actually present information that has been simplified or even distorted. Complex historical facts are often condensed into a single narrative lasting less than a minute, with the omission of context and blurring of sources. As a result, historical events that should be examined from various perspectives are transformed into instant stories that steer certain opinions. This process blurs the line between facts, opinions, and the creator's personal interpretations, especially since there is no curation or academic verification process in their dissemination.

The distortions that occur can take the form of provocative narratives, such as accusations that certain ethnic groups or figures are unilaterally considered traitors to the nation. For example, a student recounted seeing content that claimed the Javanese conspired with the Dutch to colonize Sumatra, simply because of a single photo of Dutch soldiers smiling with children. Such presentations are highly problematic because they create stereotypes and distort students' understanding of the complex dynamics of Indonesian history (Nippi, 2022). In fact, history requires an understanding of the socio-political context that cannot be simplified. Additionally, content that refers to Soekarno as the mastermind behind Romusha is another example of dangerous historical distortion. This narrative is not only misleading but also erases the dimensions of struggle and political strategies employed by national figures in confronting Japanese occupation. Some students admitted they initially believed the content but realized its inaccuracy after clarification by teachers or comparison with textbooks. This highlights that TikTok has the potential to become a source of historical misinformation if not balanced with critical thinking skills and good contextual understanding.

One reason students are easily swayed by misleading content is that they tend to judge information based on the popularity of an account or the number of likes and comments. In interviews, some students revealed that they are more likely to trust content from accounts with verification badges (blue checkmarks) or accounts with millions of followers, without verifying the validity of the information source. This assumption is very risky, as digital platforms do not have academic curation standards for determining popular content. As a result, viral narratives are often considered true simply because of their virality, not because of their historical accuracy. History teachers are also aware of the potential and challenges of TikTok's presence in the history learning process. On one hand, teachers see that TikTok can help spark students' interest in history, which has long been considered boring. On the other hand, teachers also have to work harder to correct misinformation, compare material circulating on social media with that in textbooks, and encourage students to think more critically about the historical narratives they consume online. This challenge is made even more complex by the fact that TikTok is very fast at spreading content, so that misinformation can spread widely in a short time.

The distortion in TikTok videos lies not only in the content or historical narrative presented, but also in the way it is presented, which manipulates the emotions of the audience. Many creators take clips from the internet, mix them with dramatic music, and then add provocative text or text that builds a certain opinion. This manipulative visual arrangement influences how students interpret historical information, not as objective facts, but as narratives that rely on dramatic effects for virality. This is exacerbated by the lack of knowledge among most creators about historical methodology and the importance of source validation. Interestingly, some students demonstrate a critical attitude toward the historical content they watch on TikTok. Some realize that the narratives they watch do not match what their teachers teach in class, and then seek clarification by asking questions or looking for additional sources. This attitude shows a reflective thinking process that can be the foundation for good historical literacy. Although not all students have this attitude, at least some students make an effort not to immediately believe popular narratives without questioning their content first.

This phenomenon proves that the formation of students' historical understanding is no longer entirely under the

control of teachers or formal curricula, but is also significantly influenced by social media algorithms (Reich, 2015). TikTok has become an "alternative classroom" that provides historical material instantly, albeit in an unstandardized manner. Therefore, historical thinking processes need to be developed more systematically so that students not only know "what happened," but also "why and how it happened" and "from whose perspective history is written" (K, Wilson. D, Dudley. J, 2023). Thus, digital literacy has become a crucial competency for students to master in this digital age. Students must not only be able to use digital media but also assess the quality of information, recognize biased narratives, and verify the truthfulness of content before trusting it. Without these skills, students will continue to be easy targets for distorted history that is attractively packaged on social media. Therefore, interventions from teachers, curricula, and educational policies need to be directed at strengthening critical and historical thinking skills as an effort to counteract the negative influence of misleading digital content.

Student Ability to Filter Historical Information on Tiktok

Students' ability to distinguish historical information in the digital age is greatly influenced by the extent to which they are able to develop critical thinking skills and awareness of information sources (Cremin, Teresa. Hendry, 2022). Based on the interview results, some students have an initial awareness that not all historical content on TikTok can be trusted at face value. They recognize that the presentation of viral or emotionally charged information does not guarantee the accuracy of the content. This indicates the emergence of a foundation for digital literacy, although it is not yet uniformly developed among all students.

Some students admitted to having their own strategies for assessing the truthfulness of historical information they encounter on TikTok. For example, they will compare the information with school curriculum materials, ask their history teacher directly, or seek clarification through textbooks. This process shows that some students have developed the habit of cross-checking as a simple form of verification for digital information. Although not yet systematic, this step reflects an effort not to passively accept information. However, there are still a number of students who assess the accuracy of information based on visual or social attributes, such as the number of likes, agreeing comments, or the blue tick status of an account. In this context, popularity is often equated with truth. Reliance on these indicators has the potential to be misleading, especially when content creators do not have an academic background in history. This highlights a gap in students' ability to distinguish between the credibility of a source and the appeal of its presentation.

In in-depth interviews, some students mentioned that they often feel confused when they encounter historical content that differs from what their teachers teach. This situation becomes a crucial point in determining how they take a stance: whether to follow the popular narrative on TikTok or trust official sources at school. When students lack adequate historical thinking tools, they tend to be uncertain and confused about where to stand. This highlights the need for educational intervention to equip students with deeper historical analysis skills (Syahraini et al., 2024). Nevertheless, some students demonstrated that they were able to distinguish historical information based on the internal logic of the narratives presented. For example, when there was a claim that Dutch colonization was a form of cooperation because the indigenous people were paid wages, some students immediately rejected it because it did not make sense and contradicted the principles of historical justice. This indicates that students do not only rely on memorization but also begin to use reasoning in assessing the truth of historical information. This approach needs to be continuously practiced in the formal learning process.

History teachers play an important role in developing this skill through open dialogue in the classroom (Rahman et al., 2021). In some findings, teachers deliberately opened discussions about TikTok content and allowed students to critique the content of the videos together. This strategy creates a contextual learning space and brings history education closer to the realities students face in the digital world. In this way, students not only learn about historical events but also about how history is produced, presented, and manipulated in the digital space.

On the other hand, not all students have strong media literacy awareness. Some students feel confused or even change their perceptions of historical figures after watching certain content. In such cases, TikTok directly influences students' understanding of history, indicating that their ability to distinguish information remains inconsistent and highly

dependent on their prior knowledge and literacy experiences. This highlights the urgency of raising awareness about the mechanisms of information production on social media. This uneven level of historical understanding makes some students vulnerable to misinformation, especially when faced with content presenting conspiracy theories or alternative narratives without scientific basis. Some students even believed this information because it sounded "new" or "not taught in school," which became an attraction in itself. This pattern shows that interest in controversial information often overrides students' rational considerations in assessing historical truth.

The ability to distinguish historical information is also closely related to historical thinking skills, such as understanding cause and effect, context, and multiple perspectives in historical events. Unfortunately, the learning approach in schools still often focuses on memorizing chronology and names of figures, rather than critical thinking skills. As a result, students are not always prepared when faced with different versions of history outside the classroom, including those circulating on TikTok. Therefore, the approach to teaching history needs to be directed toward training students in historical analysis and interpretation, not merely mastery of facts. Thus, students' ability to distinguish historical information still varies greatly and is influenced by factors such as digital literacy, learning experiences, and teacher guidance. Some students have shown maturity in filtering information, but many still need intensive guidance so that they are not easily influenced by misleading narratives. It is important for history education in schools to respond to this dynamic by providing space for critical discussion, source-based learning, and contextual approaches that are relevant to the digital media familiar to students (Sholikah et al., 2021).

The Impact of Historical Distortion on Tiktok on Students Understanding of History
Historical information distortion on TikTok has a significant impact on how students understand historical events taught in school (Rahman et al., 2023). Historical narratives presented in a dramatic, visual, and emotional manner on the platform often leave a stronger impression on students' memories than formal classroom instruction. As a result, students' understanding of history often becomes intertwined with factual inaccuracies and misinterpretations. This phenomenon highlights a clash between valid historical knowledge and viral information. One of the most obvious impacts is the confusion among students when they have to distinguish between the historical information taught by teachers and the narratives they consume on social media. Some students admitted to feeling doubtful about their history lessons at school after watching TikTok content that presented a different version of certain events. This confusion becomes an opening for misguided understanding, especially if it is not immediately clarified by teachers or other credible learning sources.

Historical distortions on TikTok also impact the formation of new perceptions of historical figures or events that were previously understood conventionally (Syahraini et al., 2024). For example, some students began to view national figures such as Sukarno with suspicion after watching content that claimed he collaborated with colonizers for personal gain. Although not all students accepted this narrative at face value, it introduced bias into how they assess the roles of historical figures and weakened their critical thinking skills regarding sources. Some students even experience a change in attitude toward history as a subject due to frequent exposure to misleading TikTok content. They become more skeptical of the content of textbooks or even history teachers themselves, because they feel that there is a "different version" that is more interesting or "more honest" presented on social media. If left unchecked, this attitude has the potential to undermine trust in educational institutions as legitimate authorities of knowledge. In addition, the impact of distortion is also evident in the way students answer assignments or work on history projects. Some teachers reported that there were students who wrote opinions based on TikTok content without clarification or additional reference searches. This shows that TikTok is not only a space for consuming information, but has also reshaped students' historical thinking frameworks in their learning products. The distortion that occurs is not only at the level of information, but also in the process of historical thinking and reasoning.

History teachers in schools acknowledge that distorted content on TikTok creates new challenges in the learning process. They have to spend extra time correcting narratives that students already believe to be true. This process is not easy, as teachers must confront students' personal beliefs shaped by viral content, which is often more emotionally

compelling despite being academically inaccurate. This makes the teacher's role not only as an educator but also as a narrative balancer and digital literacy guide. However, not all distortions have negative effects. In some cases, distortions serve as the starting point for critical discussions in the classroom. Some teachers use misleading TikTok content as study material to train students to analyze sources and distinguish historical facts from opinions. This strategy opens up a more reflective learning space, where students learn not only to receive information but also to test and reinterpret it based on evidence and context. Nevertheless, it is important to note that TikTok's visual and narrative appeal remains a powerful force influencing students' understanding. When invalid information is wrapped in emotionally evocative narratives and visually appealing content, students are more likely to believe it, even if it contradicts historical logic. This demonstrates that emotions in the presentation of information can influence cognition, so the process of learning history must involve an approach that is not only logical but also aesthetic and communicative.

Distortions also show that students need stronger digital and historical literacy skills (Rizal et al., 2024). They must be equipped with the ability to verify sources, identify biases, and understand the structure of valid historical narratives. Without these skills, they will continue to be passive consumers easily shaped by social media algorithms. Therefore, integrating digital literacy into history education is no longer an option but a necessity in the current educational context. Overall, the impact of historical distortions on TikTok on students' understanding is complex and multidimensional. On the one hand, this platform provides quick and broad access to various historical narratives. However, on the other hand, without adequate supervision and literacy training, TikTok has the potential to shape a superficial, erroneous, and manipulative understanding of history. Therefore, collaboration between teachers, schools, and students is essential to ensure that history continues to be studied as a critical, contextual, and meaningful science.

CONCLUSION

Historical distortions in TikTok video content have a significant impact on students' understanding of history, whether in the form of factual errors, misinterpretations, or changes in attitudes toward historical figures and events. Narratives disseminated through short, dramatic content on TikTok often shape new perceptions that are not always based on valid historical evidence. Students who rely on TikTok as a source of historical information tend to experience confusion and demonstrate a mixed understanding of facts and popular opinions. Some of them believe false information because of social cues such as the number of likes, positive comments, or accounts that appear credible visually. History teachers have observed a decline in students' accuracy in filtering historical information circulating on social media. The learning process becomes more challenging because teachers not only teach the material but also have to correct information that has been embedded from viral content. Some students show a positive response by comparing information from TikTok with official sources such as textbooks or teacher explanations. This critical attitude emerges especially among students who are accustomed to open discussion in class and are encouraged to verify information. This phenomenon indicates an opportunity to develop digital literacy and historical literacy simultaneously. TikTok is not only a space for disseminating information but also a field for interpreting history that demands reflective learning in the classroom. The role of teachers is crucial in guiding accurate and deep historical understanding amid the flood of information that is often biased and manipulative. Adaptive pedagogical strategies such as critical discussions, clarification of viral content, and involving students in historical literacy projects are approaches that need to be strengthened. Schools, as formal educational institutions, need to respond to this dynamic with policies that support the integration of digital literacy into the history curriculum. A curriculum responsive to new media will help students not only understand the past but also distinguish between popular narratives and scientific facts. Students' historical understanding is no longer shaped solely in the classroom but also through daily interactions with social media. Educational interventions must acknowledge this reality by designing learning experiences that critically engage with digital information. Historical distortions on TikTok present both a challenge and an opportunity to strengthen history education that is more contextual, critical, and relevant for the digital generation. Students need to be equipped with historical thinking skills and digital literacy to accurately understand history in an ever-changing information landscape.

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