Surveying the Scroll: A Mixed-Methods Study of College Students' TikTok Privacy Literacy

Jad Dargam, Sein Oh

School of Information, Florida State University

FSU SCHOOL OF INFORMATION
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

FSU UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM
CENTER FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH & ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

TikTok continues to be one of the most popular social media platforms amongst college students, even as policymakers and industry experts continue to highlight privacy concerns with how it collects, stores, and uses user data. This includes a total ban of the platform from public universities in the state of Florida. As the platform engrains itself into daily life for most college students, it is important to assess how undergraduate students comprehend and manage privacy features, approve of university policy regarding TikTok and how their actions are influenced by familial and social beliefs.
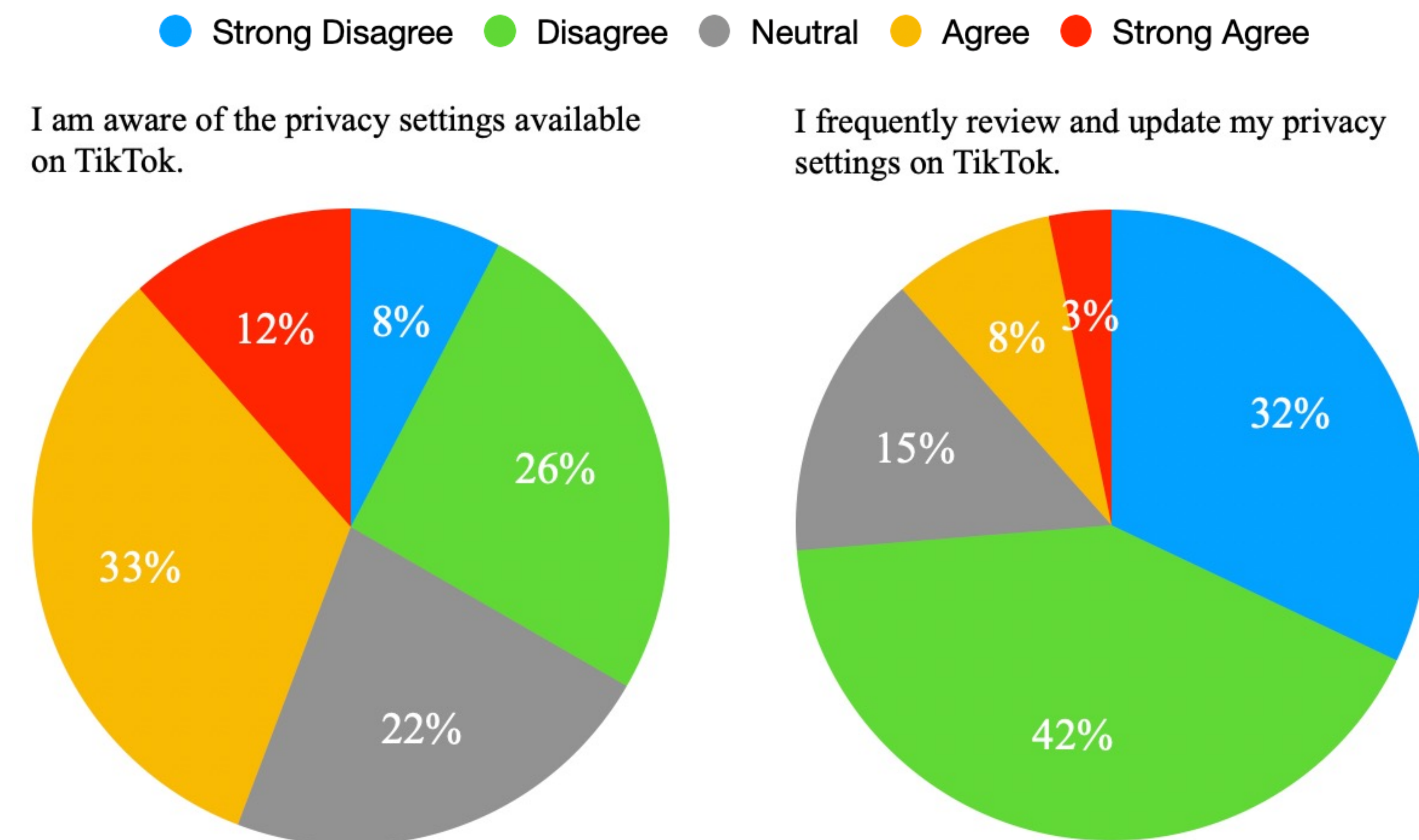
In April 2024, the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act was signed into law which banned all ByteDance applications, including TikTok, nationwide.
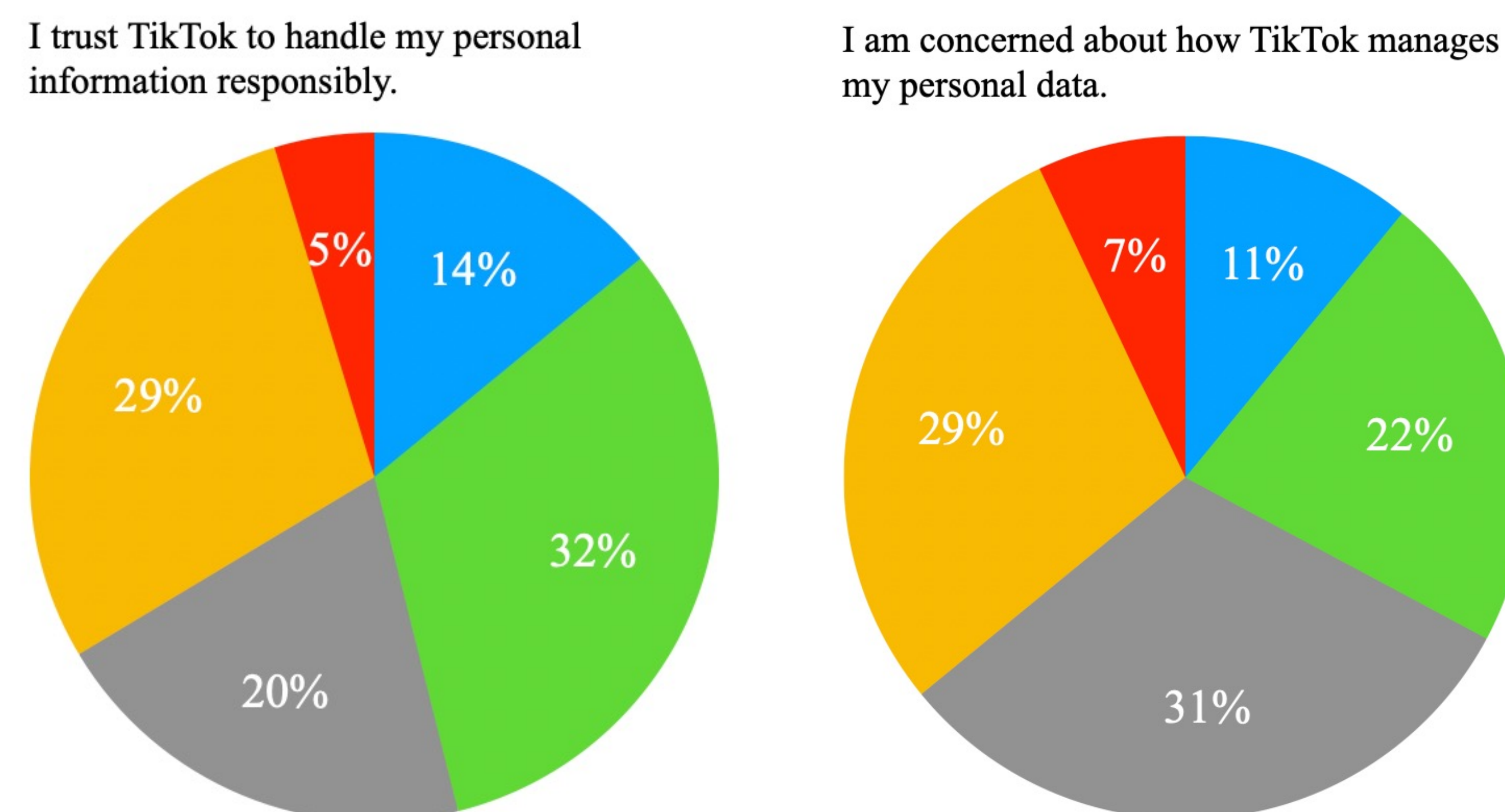
Methodology

This study aims to answer its research questions by using a mixed methods approach that incorporates a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. Questions will measure students' usage of TikTok, their own privacy concerns, and behaviors on the platform. This data will be examined in the context of social and cultural norms that the participants provide in order to better understand how user experience is shaped on experience and knowledge.

Preliminary Results & Findings

● Strong Disagree ● Disagree ● Neutral ● Agree ● Strong Agree

I am aware of the privacy settings available on TikTok.
- 8% Strong Disagree
- 26% Disagree
- 22% Neutral
- 33% Agree
- 12% Strong Agree

I frequently review and update my privacy settings on TikTok.
- 32% Strong Disagree
- 42% Disagree
- 15% Neutral
- 8% Agree
- 3% Strong Agree

Most students neglect to review or update their privacy settings, even though they are aware these settings exist.

I trust TikTok to handle my personal information responsibly.
- 14% Strong Disagree
- 32% Disagree
- 20% Neutral
- 29% Agree
- 5% Strong Agree

I am concerned about how TikTok manages my personal data.
- 11% Strong Disagree
- 22% Disagree
- 31% Neutral
- 29% Agree
- 7% Strong Agree

While most students do not trust TikTok to handle their personal information, a majority are neutral or not concerned with how their data is managed.

Discussion

The findings of this study will help researchers better understand how college students dictate their actions on TikTok through the perceived value of their privacy and data. It will also evaluate the effectiveness of institutional polices that aim to block TikTok.

A preliminary study conducted by the principal investigator has shown limited change in college students' behavior and beliefs through prohibiting TikTok usage on campus. The final study will add to the conversation regarding how humans interact with technology that has the potential to expose personal information and create safety concerns.

As the viability of TikTok in the United States is still uncertain, future research could potentially expand on this study by investigating different social media platforms. Furthermore, understanding the efficacy of banning websites/technologies to the public will also be critical to anticipate the future of these polices.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sein Oh for her help and guidance throughout this research mentorship. I also want to extend my gratitude to the School of Information and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Academic Engagement for their support of this project.

References

Scan QR Code: