تأثير فيديوهات التحفيز البدني على صورة الجسد لدى جيل Z
دراسة ميدانية في إطار نظرية المقارنة الاجتماعية

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ملخص الدراسة

تهدف الدراسة الى بحث تأثير استخدام تيك توك على المقارنة الإجتماعية، ومخاوف صورة الجسد لدى عينة من جيل **Z** الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 18 و20 عامًا. تركز الدراسة على هذه الشريحة الديموغرافية، التي تُعرف بالمواطنين الرقميين، نظراً لتأثرهم الكبير بمقارنات الأقران. وتتناول أنماط استخدام تيك توك، مع تركيز خاص على المحتوى المتعلق باللياقة البدنية، وتأثيراته النفسية والاجتماعية.

اعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً كمياً، حيث أشارت النتائج إلي تفاعل يومي مكثف مع تيك توك بين العينة، مع تصنيف ما يقرب من نصفهم كمستخدمين كثيفي الاستخدام. ورغم هذا التفاعل الواسع، أظهرت النتائج أن التفاعل مع المحتوى الخاص باللياقة البدنية كان متوسطاً، متأثراً بشكل أساسي بمدربي الصالات الرياضية والمؤثرين في هذا المجال. وأكدت النتائج أن نسبة قليلة فقط من العينة سجلوا مستويات مرتفعة من المقارنة الاجتماعية، مما يشير إلى وجود تباين في مستويات التعرض للمحتوى الرقمي والإقرار بسلوكيات المقارنة.

أظهرت نتائج اختبار الفروض دور التفاعل مع مقاطع تيك توك المتعلقة باللياقة البدنية في تعزيز المقارنة الاجتماعية التصاعدية. وقد وُجد أن هذه المقارنة تتوسط بشكل كامل العلاقة بين التفاعل مع المنصة وعدم الرضا عن الجسد، بينما تتوسط جزئياً فقط الميل إلى النحافة. وتشير هذه النتيجة الأخيرة إلى تأثير مباشر لاستخدام تيك توك على الميل إلى النحافة، بغض النظر عن المقارنة الاجتماعية. وبشكل عام، تؤكد الدراسة أن عدم الرضا عن الجسد ظاهرة شائعة بين هذه الفئة السنية، وأن استخدام تيك توك له تأثير واسع في تعزيز هذا الشعور.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المقارنة الاجتماعية، الجيل **Z**، عدم الرضا عن الجسد، مقاطع التيك توك الخاصة باللياقة، الميل إلى النحافة

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Fitspiration and Body Image: Examining the Influence of social comparison on Gen Z

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Abstract:

This quantitative study investigates the impact of TikTok engagement on social comparison, and body image concerns among Gen Z students aged 18-20, a key demographic group identified as digital natives with heightened susceptibility to peer influence and social comparison. Conducted through a survey technique the study explores patterns of TikTok usage, content consumption focusing on fitness-related videos and their psychosocial impacts. Results reveal intense daily engagement with TikTok, with nearly half of the participants classified as heavy users. Engagement with fitness content is moderate, predominantly influenced by gym trainers and fitness influencers. Despite widespread exposure, only a minority report high levels of social comparison suggesting variability in the experience or reporting of comparison behaviors. The findings support the proposed hypotheses that engagement with fitness inspiration content fosters upward social comparison, which fully mediates the relationship between engagement and body dissatisfaction but only partially mediates the drive for thinness. This indicates a direct effect of TikTok engagement on the drive for thinness apart from social comparison. The study highlights that while body dissatisfaction is prevalent, the drive for thinness is more culturally and socially reinforced, reflecting the tension between globalized fitness ideals and local cultural norms.

Keywords: TikTok, Social Comparison, Body Dissatisfaction, Drive for Thinness, Fitspiration.

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Introduction:

More than ever, social media consumption has become an integral part of individuals' daily lives. With its multiple forms, attention-grasping content, and viral visuals, the over-reliance on these platforms has become a practice that is universally bound. Individuals use these platforms for different purposes, ranging from communication to entertainment and news acquisition. Having widely distinguished features, these different platforms are attracting an ever-growing variety of audience members. Among these platforms is TikTok, which has emerged as a relatively new one with increasing popularity and mass appeal, surpassing previously established ones, including Facebook and Instagram.

Reasons for this broad audience base are numerous to list; nevertheless, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the aftermath of the lockdown acted as catalysts for the expansion of users, eventually reaching 656 million global users by 2021. Furthermore, the nature of the content curated on TikTok, combined with its algorithmic design, has successfully turned it into a platform of mass appeal. TikTok is characterized by video-centric content and emphasis on short, vertical-oriented videos, including viral trends, challenges, and dance videos. The duration of most of these videos ranges from 30 to 60 seconds, making it particularly interesting to younger generations who have an ever-shrinking attention span. Recent statistics showed that the majority of users belong to younger generations, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Moreover, and in addition to feedback loops that permit active content generation among users, the significant "for you" feature feeds users with content that aligns with their own preferences, resulting in a more engaging experience.

Among the frequently circulating content on TikTok are fitspiration or fitspo movements. Recent years have witnessed a rise in these contents that promote healthy lifestyles and eating habits. Though fitspiration or fitspo is primarily designed to constitute a means to trigger individuals to pursue a journey towards fitness, a link between these videos and body dissatisfaction has been firmly established. Other research evidence has even proven a solid connection between these contents and the dissemination of eating disorders and the drive for thinness,

particularly among younger generations. Nevertheless, one intervening factor can be held accountable for this adverse effect -namely, appearance comparison tendencies. Fitspiration images are highly idealized, edited, and crafted to present body standards that are unattainable to regular individuals, eventually diminishing those individuals' sense of self-esteem and confidence. In other words, since individuals determine their self-worth through comparing themselves to others, encountering highly idealized beauty standards that circulate over TikTok fitspiration videos results in a diminished sense of self-worth among individuals.

As previously stated, younger generations constitute the vast majority of TikTok users. Adolescence is a phase in an individual's life span that is characterized by fluctuation in self-esteem. Additionally, this period witnesses the onset of body dissatisfaction, which exacerbates the negative impact of the visually saturated idealistic body images curated over TikTok. Building on the previous, this research aims to examine the impact of exposure to fitspiration videos on late adolescence. The paper examines two distinct adverse outcomes -body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. Further, the study examines the mediating role of social comparison in exacerbating the negative effects of such exposure on the study sample.

Research Problem:

While social media constitute a powerful tool for various users to accentuate their sense of belonging and foster their social engagement and participation, these platforms too have several aversive repercussions that should not be underestimated. Research has consistently proven that different social media platforms -especially TikTok- constitute a fertile environment for social comparison and, more precisely, appearance-based ones. This finding should be considered precautionary since individuals tend to develop their sense of self-worth through comparing themselves to others, with upward social comparison fostering a broad span of dissatisfaction emotions. Consequently, the current work aims to examine the impact of engagement in TikTok fitspiration videos on users' body image dissatisfaction and drive for thinness that might even lead to unhealthy dietary behaviors. The significance of the problem stems from the

greater engagement among users who spend considerable amounts of time consuming this platform. The repercussions of such exposure are furthermore concerning, given the fact that the members of the selected age group are vulnerable to appearance-based comparisons.

Research Significance:

While numerous studies exist on the impact of social media on body image (e.g., Instagram, Facebook), TikTok's unique nature (short-form, algorithm-driven, highly engaging video content) and its immense popularity, especially among younger generations, warrant a specific investigation.

TikTok's powerful algorithm can create echo chambers, potentially exposing users to a concentrated stream of idealized body types and fitness routines. This eventually renders users susceptible to several adverse effects as a direct outcome of intensive exposure.

Body image dissatisfaction and excessive drive for thinness are significant risk factors for the development of eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Accordingly, this research can help pinpoint exposure patterns on TikTok that may exacerbate these risks. It further raises awareness of the intriguing necessity for precautionary actions that should be undertaken in this regard.

While "Fitspiration" is a broad term that has been frequently used, this research can help differentiate between content that genuinely promotes health and well-being and content that perpetuates and promotes unrealistic body ideals, encourages obsessive behaviors, and eventually contributes to body dissatisfaction.

Research objectives:

1-To investigate the extent and nature of exposure to fitspiration content on TikTok among young adults and the types of videos consumed (e.g., workout routines, "what I eat in a day," body transformation content) and frequency of exposure.

2-To assess the current levels of body image dissatisfaction (e.g., dissatisfaction with weight, shape, or specific body parts) within the study sample.

3-To measure the prevalence of drive for thinness (e.g., preoccupation with weight, dieting, fear of gaining weight) among the study participants.

4-To determine if there is a statistically significant correlation between the extent of exposure to TikTok fitspiration videos and increased body image dissatisfaction.

5-To assess if there is a statistically significant correlation between the level of exposure versus engagement to TikTok fitspiration videos and an increased drive for thinness.

6-To explore potential mediating factors (social comparison tendency and age) that may influence the relationship between TikTok fitspiration exposure and adverse body image outcomes.

7-To identify specific characteristics or themes within TikTok fitspiration content that are most strongly associated with negative body image outcomes (e.g., emphasis on extreme thinness, promotion of restrictive diets, focus on aesthetic over health).

Literature review:

Literature review:

TikTok: A New and Widely Proliferating Social Media Platform

Among the various proliferating social media platforms, TikTok has penetrated as one that has a steadily increasing popularity and mass appeal, especially among the younger generations of adolescents and young adults. Launched in China in 2016 and spreading after that all over the world, the platform achieved engagement rates surpassing previously existing platforms, including Instagram and Twitter (Zoelfakar, 2021). Statistical reports state that it received around 2.5 billion visits each month as of September 2024 (Semrush, 2025).

Since its inception, TikTok has gained unprecedented popularity, solidifying its position as one of the most widely used platforms (Preutt, 2024). In 2021, TikTok had approximately 656 million global users, a figure that was projected to increase by around 15 percent year-over-year. More recent reports stated that the number of users reached 955.3 million by the onset of 2025 (Statista, 2025). Egypt has recently been

ranked 11th among the countries with the most TikTok users in the world. According to a 2023 survey by the cabinet's Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC), TikTok came third among the most-used social media platforms, after Facebook and Instagram (Dataportal, 2025)

Multiple evidence has consistently confirmed that the platform has achieved unprecedented popularity among users. In 2024, 25% of US TikTok users were aged 18-24, in addition to 35% of the users aged 25-34 years, together yielding 55% of the entire users of the platform (Duarte, 2025). TikTok had 32.94 million users aged 18 and above in Egypt in early 2024 (Dataportal, 2025). In terms of gender, the platform is popular among both genders, with males bearing a greater inclination. According to recently published data in the US (July 2024), the percentage of distribution across genders was 54.8% and 45.2% for males and females, respectively (Duarte, 2025). Egypt witnessed greater skewness toward male users. In early 2024, 38.3 percent of TikTok's ad audience in Egypt was female, while 61.7 percent was male (Dataportal, 2025).

TikTok has two main unique characteristics that render the application appealing to its users. The first characteristic has to do with the nature of the content curated on the application, while the second lies in the algorithmic nature of the platform. In terms of the nature of the content, the platform features video-centric driven content and emphasis on short, vertical-oriented videos, including viral trends, challenges, and provocative dance videos. Traditionally, the duration of these videos ranges between 30 and 60 seconds in length, rendering it massively appealing to younger generations who have an ever-shrinking attention span. This results in an inclination toward this sort of short content-particularly compared to other platforms, as Facebook and Instagram host lengthier videos of 10 min or more (Gurtala & Fardouly, 2023). This primarily video-based social media platform permits users to record and share videos that are overlaid with music tracks (Harriger et. al, 2023). Further, its immersive design and personalized content curation have resulted in prolonged user engagement, cementing its popularity (Pruett, 2024). It further boosts engagement with content

through likes, comments, shares, and the use of tags for better discoverability (Pryde & Prichard, 2022; Pruett, 2024)

In addition to the previously stated, the TikTok algorithm is the primary contributor to boosting users' engagement with the platform. Similar to the functions of other social media, TikTok operates through feedback loops that permit active content generation among users in addition to viewing others' content (Pruett, 2024). TikTok recommends content that coincides with both the user preferences and demographic factors. Yet, its significant algorithmic feature is evident in the "For You" page. Compared to other social media platforms, TikTok utilizes an algorithm as the primary moderator of users' experiences with the viewing of recommended content, constituting the majority of the platform's user experience (Xu et al., 2019). With the viewing of recommended content constituting the majority of the platform's user experience (Xu et al., 2019), The "For You" page is primarily designed to show a curated feed coinciding with users' preferences, interests, and viewing history (TikTok, 2020); and further suggesting content from any other users not only confined to the followed accounts. Consequently, this expands the dissemination of personalized content, allowing users to reach a diverse audience, making the whole exposure experience engaging and satisfactory for younger generations. These key features provide solid justification for why TikTok is increasingly popular with users spending a greater amount of time on this application compared to other previously existing platforms as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Pruett, 2024; Mussa, 2023; Gurtala & Fardouly, 2023).

TikTok usage, Body image dissatisfaction, and drive for thinness:

TikTok, as a platform heavily saturated with video content, has triggered researchers to further investigate the impact of exposure to this content on individuals' self-perception of their body image and the relevant detrimental outcomes. To begin with, the term body image is defined as "an individual's perception of their body appearance, and the attitudes (feelings, beliefs, and behaviors) that result from that perception (Jerónimo & Carraça, 2022). It is a multi-dimensional psychological construct encompassing an individual's perceptions and attitudes toward their own physical appearance, including size, shape, and overall appearance of the body (Pruett, 2024; Pryde & Prichard,

2022; Campbell, 2022). The term also refers to individuals' mirror reflection, involving social constructs, which depend on a society's culture and norms. It is created using body ideals that are substantially communicated via media, family, and peers (Jiosta et. al, 2012; Afana et. al, 2021). Body image as an umbrella construct encompasses multiple individual sub-concepts, including body dissatisfaction, body shame, and body esteem (O'Connor et. al, 2024).

The term body dissatisfaction refers to subjective negative evaluations of one's own body, including evaluation of weight and shape (Jiosta et. al, 2021). In other terms, it implies any negative thoughts and feelings about one's body (Ladwig et. al, 2024). The term also reflects discrepancies between idealized body standards -that is, by and large unattainable- and one's own body (Jiosta et. al, 2021); encompassing discrepancies between an individual's perception of the two concepts (Ladwig et. al, 2024).

Beauty ideals that are consistently disseminated throughout the various media portray women as curvaceously slender and physically appealing, but unrealistically thin. This thin ideal imagery is significantly problematic as it suggests to female viewers that this body type is the typical standard of attractiveness that should be desired and aimed for to attain social acceptance, leading to the internalization of the thin ideal (Pryde, & Prichard, 2022). Males, too, are not in isolation from the adverse impacts. Exposure to media content results in the proliferation of an intriguing drive for muscularity and thinness among them (Kelly et. al, 2010).

Existing research has consistently confirmed a positive association between exposure to video-saturated content curated on social media, particularly TikTok, and an increase in body dissatisfaction. Body image's sociocultural construct uses body ideals that are communicated through media, family, and peers and are thereafter internalized by individuals. Achieving this ideal body standard is usually perceived as proof of self-control and success, which leads one to stand out from the crowd in a positive way. This can trigger body dissatisfaction, which usually involves a feeling of inadequacy between one's body estranged from the ideal figure that one pursues. Further, fear of gaining weight can lead to behaviors such as food restriction, excessive physical

activity, with the aim of modifying one's appearance and thus fit into the unattainable social standards (Jiosta et. al, 2021).

Building on the previous, Ladwig et al. (2024) reported that attending to video-saturated curating on TikTok resulted in an increase in body dissatisfaction among the study sample, even among women with no eating disorders. Similar findings were reported by Granhof (2024) regarding the negative impact of TikTok on body image (Granhof, 2024). Stoneking (2018) found that following thinspiration videos resulted in a decrease in body image. Drivas et al. (2024) reported that viewing low-calorie WIEIAD videos resulted in a subsequent reduction in positive mood, which, in turn, was associated with decreased body appreciation and increased body dissatisfaction. All these detrimental effects were fostered and mediated by an increase in upward social comparison. Similar findings were reported among a sample of Egyptian university students, where exposure to TikTok videos featuring influencers had negative impacts on the study sample. Students expressed ample negative emotions, including jealousy, envy, and diminished self-confidence. TikTok influencers exaggerated in showcasing their appearances, looks, and successes through these videos, setting unattainable beauty standards and body images, which ignited feelings of jealousy among the study sample (Nassar, 2022) .

Not only is body dissatisfaction a psychologically distressing experience that has been linked to a reduced quality of life, but it is also a risk factor for the development of a myriad of physical and psychosocial difficulties, particularly risky health behaviors, and most importantly, clinical eating disorders (Pruett, 2024). Existing research has associated body dissatisfaction with drive for thinness (a finding that is exacerbated among individuals with eating disorders or at-risk of eating disorders) (Jiosta et. al, 2021).

Jiotsa et al. (2021) reported that a significant correlation existed between the frequency of comparing one's own physical appearance to that of people followed on social media, on one hand, and the prevalence of body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness on the other. The more individuals compared themselves with idealized images, the more dissatisfied they felt, eventually developing an urge for thinness. Griffiths et al. (2024) reported precautionary findings regarding the

correlation between TikTok algorithm features and exacerbating eating disorders among users. Algorithms belonging to users with eating disorders delivered more appearance-oriented, dieting, exercise, and toxic eating disorder videos. Repercussion of this bias resonated in more severe symptoms of eating disorders.

To sum up, while social media practices may vary, it is plausible to postulate that exposure to social media is a predictor of body dissatisfaction through an inevitable drive of social comparison, rigid physical appearance perfectionism that is fairly unattainable. This practice of comparison also results in a drive for thinness in a pursuit to achieve an ideal thin body, eventually achieving social acceptance.

TikTok and fitspiration effects:

Fitspo is viewed as a means for people to hold themselves accountable and stay motivated on their fitness journey (Boepple & Thompson, 2016). In Stoneking's study (2018), the researcher investigated the impact of viewing thinspiration and fitspiration images on body image in a group of female students. The research aimed to compare Thinspiration, often found in pro-eating disorder communities, which promotes the thin ideal and has been linked to negative body image and disordered eating behaviors, with Fitspiration, a newer trend intended to motivate a healthy lifestyle, but shares similar content with Thinspiration.

Although social media presents fitspiration images that are equally idealized, edited, and posed as those found in traditional media sources (Meier & Gray, 2014), research has shown that social media has a greater impact on thin-ideal internalization, appearance comparison, and body dissatisfaction than traditional media (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018; Roberts et al., 2022).

Unlike traditional media, which is primarily produced by advertising firms and media companies, social media allows users to create and share content directly with their personal networks (Bennett et al., 2020). This emphasis on showcasing images of peers and familiar individuals leads viewers to perceive the content as authentic and relatable, increasing its influence on shaping their body image ideals (Vogel et al., 2014).

The link between exposure to fitspiration content and body dissatisfaction has been firmly established. Initially, research on the impact of these media on body image focused on the use of Facebook, one of the first social media platforms. A study by Fardouly and colleagues in 2015 showed that Facebook exposure was related to body image concerns. Research indicated that it is not just the amount of time an individual spends on Facebook, but the amount of time spent on photo-related activities that correlates with body image concerns (Fardouly et al., 2015). This study also highlighted that Facebook exposure was associated with negative mood and negative body image, emphasizing the tendency for physical appearance comparison (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Later, researchers began to examine the impact of fitspiration content on Instagram, where images are usually denoted and searchable by specific hashtags (short, searchable phrases preceded by the '#' symbol). Results demonstrated that the frequency of viewing fitspiration images on Instagram was associated with a drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction (Cohen et al., 2017; Fardouly et al., 2017). When compared to Facebook, Instagram users reported higher levels of body image dissatisfaction and concern (Cohen et al., 2017). Researchers also noted significant concerns related to fitspiration exposure, particularly regarding its influence on young adults from Generation Z. Evidence suggests that older adults report a lower tendency to engage in appearance-related social comparisons than younger adults.

Similarly, experimental research has demonstrated that, among undergraduate women, viewing fitspiration images leads to greater body dissatisfaction than viewing travel images, with this relationship mediated by appearance comparison (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Individuals who specifically view photos of people exemplifying an idealized body image are more likely to develop a negative body image (Hogue & Mills, 2018). Users who engage more in appearance-focused activities, such as viewing, sharing, and commenting on images of individuals meeting beauty standards, report higher levels of body image concerns (Cohen et al., 2017; Fardouly et al., 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015). The effects of media representation on body image are attributed to the process of social

comparison between an individual's physical appearance and the idealized bodies conveyed in the media. Individuals who evaluate their own appearance by comparing it to the cultural and beauty ideals presented in the media invariably show dissatisfaction with their body and physical appearance.

Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) indicated that appearance comparison tendencies mediate the effect of viewing fitspiration posts on body dissatisfaction, highlighting the harmful impact of comparing one's appearance to idealized bodies in those images. Their findings suggest a strong association between fitspiration-related content and heightened body surveillance. Similarly, Ladwig et al. (2024) conducted an online experimental study involving 382 women, both with and without eating disorders, to assess the effects of fitspiration on body dissatisfaction and affect. Participants were exposed to 30 Instagram posts featuring thin, muscular women promoting health and fitness. The results demonstrated that exposure to fitspiration content led to increased body dissatisfaction in both groups, reinforcing the notion that fitspiration evokes harmful appearance comparisons and results in reduced body satisfaction. Collectively, these studies underscore the detrimental effects of fitspiration content on body image, emphasizing the urgent need for prevention programs to mitigate these negative impacts.

Building on this understanding, Betz and Ramsey (2017) examined how different types of body ideals affect women's self-perception. A group of women rated their feelings towards messages promoting thin, athletic, and curvy ideals. The findings revealed that exposure to athletic ideal images particularly increased self-objectification - the tendency to view oneself primarily as a physical object to be evaluated. This happens because these idealized images reinforce cultural standards about how bodies "should" look, leading people to constantly check whether they measure up to these expectations. Overall, several researchers proved the direct relationship between exposure to fitspiration content and a negative impact on body image. (Bessenoff, 2006; Dignard & Jarry, 2021; Prichard et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2017; Rounds &Stutts, 2020; Seekis et al., 2021).

With the rapid rise of TikTok as a dominant social media platform, researchers have increasingly focused on its implications for body

image concerns among Generation Z, who are notably heavy users of TikTok compared to other platforms. TikTok in particular promotes content that reinforces societal ideals of thinness, emphasizing the importance of pursuing unrealistic appearance ideals (Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019; Rodgers & Rousseau, 2022). Pruett (2024) investigates the relationship between TikTok use and body dissatisfaction among young adults. The study hypothesizes that increased TikTok usage correlates with higher levels of body dissatisfaction, mediated by thin-ideal internalization and upward appearance comparisons. Involving 861 undergraduate students, the research utilized surveys to assess TikTok use, appearance-ideal internalization, appearance comparisons, and body dissatisfaction. Findings indicate a positive correlation between TikTok use and body dissatisfaction, primarily driven by upward appearance comparisons.

Emerging research supports this notion, indicating that women who perceive the idealized video content as unedited or unenhanced tend to report lower levels of appearance satisfaction compared to those exposed to idealized image content. Thus, for some individuals, viewing video content may be more harmful than viewing image content (Guartala & Fardouly, 2023).

Recent research by O'Connor and colleagues (2024) reveals a concerning correlation between TikTok usage and body image perception. Their findings demonstrate that regular engagement with the platform significantly increases users' tendency to make upward physical appearance comparisons, ultimately leading to decreased body appreciation.

TikTok predominantly features singing and dancing content, with its structure and culture actively encouraging user participation and trend replication. Of particular concern are the dance trends, which frequently incorporate provocative elements such as suggestive music, sexualized choreography, and revealing attire that emphasizes specific body features (Mink & Szymanski, 2022).

This effect is further amplified by the platform's content creators. Many trends originate from young, conventionally attractive influencers who frequently employ filters and digital editing tools to enhance their

appearances. Consequently, users find themselves immersed in a continuous stream of highly curated, appearance-focused content that perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards and promotes potentially harmful social comparisons (Mink and Szymanski, 2022).

In conclusion, the existing body of research underscores a significant and direct relationship between social media usage, particularly TikTok, and body dissatisfaction. As platforms like TikTok promote content that reinforces unrealistic beauty standards and societal ideals of thinness, they exacerbate appearance-related concerns through mechanisms such as thin-ideal internalization and upward social comparisons.

The interplay between users' age and the adverse effects of TikTok engagement:

The term Gen Z refers to individuals who are born somewhere between 1995 and 2012. According to WHO, this generation can be referred to interchangeably with the term adolescence (Martin et. al, 2023). Generally, there is no single definition for adolescence. Some have called it the teenage years, others the second decade of life, and in North America, it is either referred to as adolescence, youth, or emerging adulthood. Other researchers consider this stage of life to begin somewhere around the onset of puberty and end sometime when the individual obtains adult rights, responsibilities, and recognition by family, law, and society. It is a life stage that is generally characterized by internal disharmony and prevalent anxiety (Gullotta & Adams, 2007). It is also characterized by heightened vulnerability.

Within the span of an individual's life, individuals are confronted with various developmental tasks that are paired with multiple insecurities and obstacles for them to overcome. In late adolescence, with increasing independence, those late adolescents are faced with multiple challenges and insecurities about their own current and future standing in various aspects. In a relatively short period of time, these emerging adults are intriguingly required to make important and far-reaching decisions concerning college, work, intimate relationships, and children.

Social comparisons then provide useful information about how comparable others are dealing with such decisions, and eventually facilitate the decision-making processes among those individuals. In addition, the elevated levels of mating among those emerging adults foster social comparisons among them (Buunk et al., 2020). Multiple research studies have consistently confirmed that social comparison is a prevalent practice among late adolescents and emerging adults. Callan, Kim, and Matthews (2015) reported that when comparing social comparison among various age groups (an age group of 18-30 years of age with participants older than 60 years), social comparison significantly declined with age. Of similar stances, Mulgrew and Cragg (2017) compared males in three age-groups: 18-30 years of age, 31-55 years, and 57-77 years old. They also found that social comparison was most evident among the youngest group compared to the oldest counterpart.

In addition, during this period, self-esteem generally fluctuates (Carlén et al., 2023). Body dissatisfaction tends to onset during adolescence, with this dissatisfaction increasing over time. Bucchianeri et al. (2013) stated that over a 10-year longitudinal, population-based study, with 1902 participants from diverse ethnic/racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, both female and male participants' body dissatisfaction increased between middle and high school, with body dissatisfaction increasing further during the transition to young adulthood. Other research evidence found that 24% to 46% of adolescent girls and 12% to 26% of adolescent boys report marked dissatisfaction with their bodies (Bucchianeri et al., 2013; Neumark-Sztainer et. al, 2004; Presnell et. al, 2004; Stice & Whitenton, 2002).

Many adolescents are highly invested in their appearance and are vulnerable to the development of body image concerns (Bullot et. al, 2017; Grosick et. al, 2013). They begin to demonstrate declines in body esteem (i.e., appearance and weight satisfaction) at 13 years of age. These concerns persist throughout mid-adolescence (Lacroix et. al, 2020; Wang et. al, 2019). The prevalence of body dissatisfaction in adolescents is particularly concerning, given that it has been found to prospectively predict negative physical and psychological health outcomes, including depression, poor self-esteem, and eating disorders.

More concerning body dissatisfaction has also been shown to predict engagement in risky body-change behaviors such as supplement use, excessive exercise, muscle-gaining strategies, and restrictive dieting practices among adolescents (McCabe et. al, 2004; Neumark-Sztainer et. al, 2006).

As adolescents are increasingly confronted with the unhealthy standard of the 'strong' and 'skinny' paradox on social media, it is unsurprising that those who endorse such ideals also experience body dissatisfaction. Overall, findings from existing research on the positive associations between social media use and body dissatisfaction, and between thin- and muscular-ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction are proven valid in adolescent boys and girls (Vuong, 2021).

Theoretical Framework:

This study is mainly based on social comparison theory developed by Festinger (1954). Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to others, especially those who seem similar. The use of TikTok is likely associated with body dissatisfaction through upward appearance comparison and body surveillance. Social Comparison Theory underlies the tendency for humans to compare their appearance to others and differentiates three directions of comparison: 1) upward (against individuals perceived as more attractive), 2) lateral (against individuals perceived similarly), and 3) downward (against individuals perceived as less attractive).

In the context of fitspiration content on TikTok, women may compare and evaluate their appearance, including their bodies, against those of women in idealized images (Want, 2009). According to the theory, upward comparisons, where the individual views herself unfavourably with others, may lead to body satisfaction. This comparison may link idealized images and body image concerns. Feltman and Szymanski (2018) found that upward appearance comparison connects TikTok use and body surveillance. Body image disturbance can be exhibited when a person fails to meet societal standards while also internalizing those standards as important goals (Thompson & Stice, 2001).

More frequent TikTok use may lead young adults to compare their appearance to popular users, resulting in body dissatisfaction. Recreating sexualized dance videos for popularity may also cause body dissatisfaction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996).

Prior research shows social media use relates to appearance comparison and body surveillance (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016), which are associated with body dissatisfaction (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2012; Mercurio & Rima, 2011; Myers & Crowther, 2009; Szymanski & Mikorski, 2017). Recent research emphasizes including social comparison processes when studying objectification and body image, offering insights into how body image concerns develop.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework surrounding TikTok use, upward social comparison, and body dissatisfaction highlights the significant impact of social media on body image perceptions among females. Drawing on social comparison theory, it becomes evident that TikTok serves as a platform where users frequently engage in upward appearance comparisons, leading to heightened body dissatisfaction with their own bodies.

Research hypotheses:

This research will employ a quantitative approach to examine the relationships among following fitspiration content on TikTok, upward social comparison, body dissatisfaction, and the drive for thinness. The researchers will utilize a survey design to collect data from TikTok users, focusing on the proposed correlations among following fitspiration content, self-reported body image perceptions and concerns, and tendencies toward upward social comparison. Specifically, the researchers hypothesize that there is a positive relationship between the degree of engagement with fitness content on TikTok and upward social comparison (H1).

To further investigate the implications of upward social comparison, the researchers will explore its relationship with body dissatisfaction and the drive for thinness. The second hypothesis posits that there is a positive relationship between upward social comparison tendencies and body dissatisfaction (H2). Additionally, the researchers will examine

the connection between upward social comparison and the drive for thinness (H3), aiming to clarify the conditions under which these comparisons may lead to either motivation or dissatisfaction concerning body image. To analyze these relationships, the proposed structural model will examine them both linearly and non-linearly. Linear relationships imply a consistent, direct correlation between variables. In this study, statistical analysis will be used to investigate the direct relationships between following fitspiration content and body dissatisfaction and the drive for thinness (H4 and H5).

Finally, partial correlation analysis will assess the mediating role of upward social comparison in the relationship between engagement with fitness content and both body dissatisfaction and the drive for thinness (H6)

Study Hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive relationship between the degree of engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and upward social comparison.

H2There is a positive relationship between upward social comparison tendencies and body dissatisfaction.

H3:There is a positive relationship between upward social comparison and the drive for thinness.

H4: There is a positive relationship between the Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and body dissatisfaction.

H5:There is a positive relationship between the Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and drive for thinness.

H6:Upward social comparison mediates the relationship between the Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and both drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction.

Methodology:

This quantitative study, which employed the survey method, focused on late adolescents from Generation Z, specifically those between the ages of 18 and 20 who have a TikTok account. This age group was chosen for two main reasons. The first reason is that they are the ones who

adapt to new technological developments the fastest, often referred to as the Internet generation and the first generation of true digital natives.

The second reason relates to brain development in this age category. In early adolescence, individuals are still developing concrete thinking abilities and exploring decision-making opportunities, which may initially make them less aware of social comparisons. However, as they transition into adolescence, several factors contribute to an increased susceptibility to social comparison (Strickland, 2014).

During this period, adolescents experience greater autonomy from their parents and engage in more frequent and often unsupervised peer interactions. This shift leads to a heightened emphasis on peer status and approval, particularly regarding body image. The desire to fit in and be accepted by peers can drive adolescents to compare themselves to others, often leading to negative body image and self-esteem issues (Nesi, 2014). Overall, the combination of developing cognitive abilities, increasing peer influence, and societal pressures significantly heightens the likelihood of social comparison and its impact on body image during this critical age period.

Sampling and method of data collection: The study utilized a non-probability purposive sample of 220 TikTok users. An online questionnaire was administered from May 15 to June 15, 2025. It was distributed electronically across various social media platforms and manually within several universities. The sample included individuals from both middle and late adolescent developmental stages, aged 18-20 years, of both genders, and who possessed at least one TikTok account. Participants were recruited from Cairo and Giza governorates in Egypt.

Study Variables:

Conceptual and Operational definitions

-Gen Z: Generation Z (Gen Z) refers to individuals born between 1995 and 2012. This cohort is characterized as the first generation of "digital natives," having been exposed to smart technology and the internet from a young age. This exposure fosters an intuitive understanding of digital environments and tools. Members of Gen Z are recognized as today's young adults, forming a significant demographic that interacts with technology in ways that influence their social behaviors,

communication styles, and consumption patterns. This definition aligns with classifications provided by the United Nations Development Program and the Pew Research Center, which highlight their unique relationship with technology in contemporary society. (Dimock, 2019; UNDP, 2021)

-Fitspo movement: short for "fitness inspiration," refers to a cultural trend that promotes fitness, health, and body positivity through inspirational content, primarily shared on social media platforms.

-Following Fitspiration Content on TIKTOK: Following fitspiration content on TikTok refers to the engagement with videos, advertisements, and profiles that promote fitness, health, and wellness, particularly through the lens of female sports stars and athletes. This concept encompasses the active consumption of content, including watching videos or ads featuring female athletes that highlight their achievements and promote physical activity, engaging with material focused on weight loss strategies such as diets, supplements, and superfoods to motivate healthier lifestyle choices, and following fitness and health personalities or influencers who share tips, workout routines, and motivational messages designed to inspire followers to pursue their fitness goals. Additionally, it involves actively seeking out and following female sports stars or athletes on the platform, fostering a connection with role models in the fitness community.

Upward social comparison: Upward physical appearance comparison occurs when young adults evaluate their own physical attractiveness by comparing themselves to individuals they perceive as superior in attractiveness. This process is characterized by the tendency to reflect on one’s appearance in relation to idealized standards set by athletes, celebrities, or peers depicted in fitspiration content shared on TikTok. Such comparisons can lead to feelings of inadequacy and negatively affect body image perception, as individuals may feel inferior when measuring themselves against these perceived ideals

Body Image Perception: In this study, body image perception is conceptualized through two primary pillars: Drive for Thinness and Body Image Dissatisfaction. Drive for Thinness encompasses young adults' psychological preoccupation with achieving and maintaining a

thin body shape, often associated with attitudes and behaviors linked to eating disorders, including dietary concerns, guilt related to eating, and fears of weight gain. Body Image Dissatisfaction, on the other hand, reflects an individual's negative feelings and evaluations about their physical appearance in relation to societal beauty standards, emphasizing how individuals perceive and assess their bodies compared to idealized images. Together, these constructs provide a comprehensive framework for understanding body image perception within the context of this study.

Measurements:

-TikTok Usage:

Consistent with Fardouly and Vartanian (2015), the researchers assessed TikTok use via two highly correlated questions. Participants were asked, "On a typical day, how often do you check TikTok?" and responded on a 5-point Likert scale from very often (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), and very rarely (1).

They were also asked "Overall, how long do you spend on TikTok on a typical day?" and responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) (one hour or less or less) to (5) (5 hours or more). Higher scores indicate more hours/time spent on TikTok. The TikTok usage measure demonstrates construct validity, as indicated in prior research by Fardouly and Vartanian (2015) and Holland & Tiggemann (2016), Mink and Szymanski (2022), Pruett (2024). The current measures took into account that TikTok use is not one-dimensional; therefore, instead of just looking at social TikTok use in terms of total time spent on the site, both total time spent on the site and frequency of use of the site were examined.

-Following fitspiration Content on TikTok:

This variable was measured using a scale consisting of 6 items on a 5-point scale ranging from (5) Very often to (1) very rarely. The items were "I use TikTok to watch videos or ads on how to keep fit", "I use TikTok to watch videos or ads featuring female sports stars or athletes", "I use TikTok to watch videos or ads on weight loss (e.g., diets, supplements, superfoods", "I use TikTok to follow fitness and/or health personalities/influencers who share tips, workout routines, and

motivational messages", "I use TikTok to follow female sports stars or athletes", 'I use TikTok to follow fitness challenges and competitions", This scale is adapted from Seekis et al. (2020), and proved to be a valid measure for following fitspiration content on TikTok.

-Upward social Comparison:

Upward physical appearance comparison was measured using the upward Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (UPACS) (O'Brien et al., 2009). This measure consists of a total of 10 items, which assess the tendency to compare oneself with targets considered to be (more) physically attractive (e.g., "I find myself thinking about whether my own appearance compares well with models and movie stars"). The items are answered on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (5) "Always" to (1) "Never" with higher scores indicating a greater tendency to engage in upward physical appearance comparison. The UPACS has established good psychometric properties, including strong internal consistency and good construct validity (O'Brien et al., 2009). Higher scores on the UPACS indicate more frequent comparisons. Statements were adjusted in the scale to be more oriented towards measuring social comparison after watching fitspiration content on TikTok. The items are as follows, "After watching fitspiration videos, I compare myself to those who are better looking than me rather than those who are not", "I tend to compare my own physical attractiveness to that of models in fitspiration videos", I find myself thinking about whether my own appearance compares well with those in fitspiration videos on tiktok", "At the beach or athletic events (sports, gym, etc.), I wonder if my body is as attractive as the people I see in fitspiration videos on tiktok", "I tend to compare myself to people I think look better than me after watching fitspiration videos.", "When I see a person with a great body in fitspiration videos, I wonder how I 'match up' with them.",When I see good-looking people in fitspiration content on tiktok, I wonder how I compare to them.", At parties or other social events, I compare my physical appearance to that of very attractive people I see in fitspiration videos.","I find myself comparing my appearance with people who are better looking than me after watching fitspiration videos", "I compare my body to people who have a better body than me after watching fitspiration content.".

Drive for Thinness: Drive for thinness was measured using the The 7-item Drive for Thinness subscale from the Eating Disorders Inventory-3 (Garner, 2004), which is one of the most commonly scales in measuring behavioral indicator of characteristics associated with eating disorders. this scale has been proved as valid measure for measuring thinness-focused body dissatisfaction on international level (Calusen et al., 2010) and also in Arabic countries (Gerges at al., 2023) the sale consists of 7 items on a 5 point likert scale ranging from (5) always to (1) Never. The items were "I eat sweets and carbohydrates without feeling nervous", "I think about dieting", "I feel extremely guilty after overeating", "I am terrified of gaining weight", I exaggerate or magnify the importance of weight", "I am preoccupied with the desire to be thinner", "If I gain a pound, I worry that I will keep gaining".

Body Dissatisfaction: To measure body dissatisfaction, the study also depended on the subscale from the Eating Disorders Inventory-3 (Garner, 2004). The Body Dissatisfaction Subscale is a 7-item subscale presented on 5 point scale ranging from (5) always to (1) Never The items were "My weight negatively affects my perception of myself as a person", "My appearance negatively affects my perception of myself as a person.", "It is annoying to be asked to weigh myself once a week.", "I am not satisfied with my weight.", "I am not satisfied with my appearance." ,"I feel uncomfortable when seeing my body (for example, seeing my reflection in the mirror, in a store window, or while changing clothes or showering",I feel uncomfortable when others see my appearance or body (for example, when swimming or wearing tight clothes).

Validity and reliability:

After designing the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted on 25 respondents to ensure the validity and reliability of the scales in measuring what they were designed for. The questionnaire was then modified in its final form according to the respondents' feedback regarding ambiguous or unclear questions and statements. A factor analysis test was conducted to establish construct validity, with all values exceeding 0.6, indicating high validity. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) showed that all item values were greater than 0.5, which is an acceptable level of convergent validity. To

assess reliability, Cronbach's alpha was applied to measure internal consistency, with all values higher than 0.7, which is considered good.

Table No. (1)

Reliability and Validity

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Internal Validity
Intensity of following fitspiration content on TikTok	0.725	0.851
Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok	0.731	0.854
Upward social comparison	0.709	0.842
Drive for thinness	0.825	0.908
Body dissatisfaction	0.814	0.902

The results presented in Table (1) demonstrate that the measurement scales used in this study achieved acceptable to high levels of reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.709 to 0.825, which exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency across all variables. This suggests that the items within each scale reliably measure the intended constructs.

In addition, the internal validity coefficients ranged between 0.842 and 0.908, reflecting a high degree of construct validity. These values indicate that the items within each variable are highly correlated and effectively represent the underlying concepts. Notably, the constructs of "drive for thinness" ($\alpha = 0.825$, validity = 0.908) and "body dissatisfaction" ($\alpha = 0.814$, validity = 0.902) achieved the highest reliability and validity scores, confirming the robustness of these measures in capturing sensitive psychological dimensions.

Overall, these results affirm that the measurement tools employed in the study are both reliable and valid, ensuring that subsequent analyses and interpretations based on these variables rest on a sound methodological foundation.

Statistical Data processing:

After completing the data collection necessary for the study, it was entered - after coding - to the computer, then it was processed, analyzed, and statistical results were extracted using the "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" program, known as SPSS for short: Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences (Version 23), by resorting to the following statistical transactions, tests and treatments:

1.Frequencies and percentages.

2.Averages and standard deviations.

3.Calculate the percentage weight of the items measured on the Likert scale by calculating their arithmetic mean, multiplying the results by 100, and then dividing the results by the maximum scale scores.

4.Pearson Correlation Coefficient: to study the intensity and direction of the correlation between two variables of the level of distance or ratio (Interval or Ratio). The relationship was considered weak if the coefficient value was less than 0.4, medium between 0.4-0.7, and strong if it reached 0.7 or more.

5.Partial Correlation Coefficient: To study the correlation between two variables of the level of distance or ratio (Interval or Ratio) after isolating a third variable.

The results of the statistical tests were accepted at a confidence level of 95% or more, that is, at a level of significance of 0.05 or less.

Sample demographic characteristics

Table No. (2)

Sample demographic characteristics (n=220)

Characteristics		F	%
Gender	Male	63	28.6%
	Female	157	71.4%
Age	18	41	18.64%
	19	88	40.0%
	20	92	41.82%
University	MIU	5	2.3%
	MSA	11	5.0%
	Cairo University	132	60.0%
	Future	72	32.7%
Type of Education	Public	118	53.6%
	Private	102	46.4%
Socioeconomic level	Low	19	8.6%
	Moderate	66	30.0%
	High	135	61.4%
Parents Status	Married	188	85.5%
	Other	32	14.5%

The demographic profile of the sample, as presented in Table 2, reveals several salient patterns that offer critical context for the interpretation of the study's findings regarding TikTok usage, upward social comparison, and body image concerns among university students.

The sample consists of 71.4% female and 28.6% male participants. This distribution is noteworthy given that previous studies have identified women as more prone to appearance-based social comparisons and body dissatisfaction, particularly on visually-driven platforms like TikTok.

In terms of age distribution, the sample is heavily concentrated among younger university students, with 40% aged 19, followed by 41.8% aged 20, and 18.6% aged 18. This study focused on late adolescents aged 18 to 20 due to their status as digital natives with rapid technology adoption and their heightened vulnerability to social comparison stemming from ongoing cognitive development and increased peer influence during this critical developmental period.

Regarding university affiliation, the sample includes a strong presence from public education, particularly Cairo University (60%), followed by Future University (32.7%), and smaller numbers from MSA and MIU. Coupled with the slight majority of students enrolled in public education (53.6%), this suggests a relatively diverse educational background, though skewed somewhat toward public institutions. The type of university and educational exposure may influence the students' media literacy levels, peer comparison norms, and susceptibility to influencer culture on TikTok.

Socioeconomically, the sample is weighted toward the upper tiers, with 61.4% identifying as high SES, 30% as moderate, and only 8.6% as low SES. This economic positioning likely influences both access to digital platforms and responsiveness to fitness and appearance ideals promoted in social media spaces. Higher socioeconomic status is frequently associated with increased exposure to globalized beauty norms and greater access to fitness services or products, which may, in turn, shape engagement behaviors on TikTok.

Finally, the vast majority of respondents (85.5%) come from households with married parents, which may suggest relative familial

stability. While this variable may not be directly linked to media behavior, it can have indirect implications for self-esteem, body image development, and media consumption habits, especially in adolescence and emerging adulthood.

General Findings:

1. Times of browsing TikTok daily

Table No. (3)

Times of browsing TikTok daily

Times	F	%
Always	114	51.8%
Often	46	20.9%
Sometimes	38	17.3%
Rarely	14	6.4%
No	8	3.6%
Total	220	100%

Among the surveyed university students, the data in Table No. (3) reveals a significant tendency toward frequent engagement with TikTok, as 51.8% of participants reported browsing the platform always on a daily basis. This majority underscores the habitual nature of TikTok use among this age group, highlighting the platform's integration into their everyday routines. The additional 20.9% who browse often further support the view that TikTok is not simply an entertainment outlet, but rather a primary channel of digital interaction and media consumption.

These high levels of daily browsing may be closely tied to the app's design, particularly the personalized "For You" feed, which offers a continuous stream of engaging content, including fitness videos that are visually appealing and socially validated through likes and shares.

In contrast, only 3.6% of participants reported not browsing TikTok at all, and another 6.4% browsed rarely. These minimal percentages suggest that disengagement from the platform is relatively uncommon in this demographic, further emphasizing the dominant role of TikTok in shaping daily media habits. The high frequency of exposure documented in Table No. (2) thus serves as a crucial contextual factor in understanding the platform's psychological and behavioral influence on young users.

This finding supports previous studies (Qin et al., 2022; Tang & Zhang, 2024; Coker et al., 2025), which show that young people spend extended time on TikTok, often describing their use as "almost constant." It is also consistent with Xie and Gallo (2024), who found a high prevalence of TikTok addiction among college students compared to other platforms.

2. Time Spend using TikTok daily

Table No. (4)

Time spend using TikTok daily

Time	F	%
From 2-3 hours	54	24.5%
4 hours or more	51	23.2%
From 3-4 hours	40	18.2%
Less than 1 hour	38	17.3%
From 1-2 hours	37	16.8%
Total	220	100%

An examination of Table No. (4) reveals that a large portion of university students report extended daily use of TikTok, with 24.5% spending between 2 to 3 hours, and 23.2% spending 4 hours or more on the platform. This means that nearly half of the respondents (47.7%) fall into what may be considered heavy-use categories. When combined with the 18.2% who spend 3 to 4 hours, the proportion of those who use TikTok for more than two hours daily reaches an even more striking 65.9%. Such findings suggest that the platform plays a dominant role in the daily media routines of young users, not merely as a form of passive entertainment but as a space for identity exploration, social comparison, and emotional engagement.

In contrast, only 17.3% of participants reported spending less than an hour on TikTok daily, and 16.8% fell within the 1–2 hour range. This suggests that minimal engagement is the exception rather than the norm, and further emphasizes the potential psychological implications of the platform's immersive nature. The patterns reflected in Table No. (4) should be considered foundational when interpreting the emotional and cognitive consequences associated with consistent exposure to curated, appearance-focused content on TikTok.

This result is consistent with what several studies have found regarding TikTok's potential to foster addictive behaviors. Research by Montag et al. (2021) and Mink and Szymanski (2022) emphasizes that the platform's algorithmically driven, short-form content creates a continuous feedback loop that encourages compulsive use and prolonged screen time. Likewise, Qin et al. (2022) highlight TikTok's infinite scrolling and curated feeds as central to its high user retention and increased risk of behavioral addiction. These findings help explain the high engagement levels observed in the current study.

3. Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok

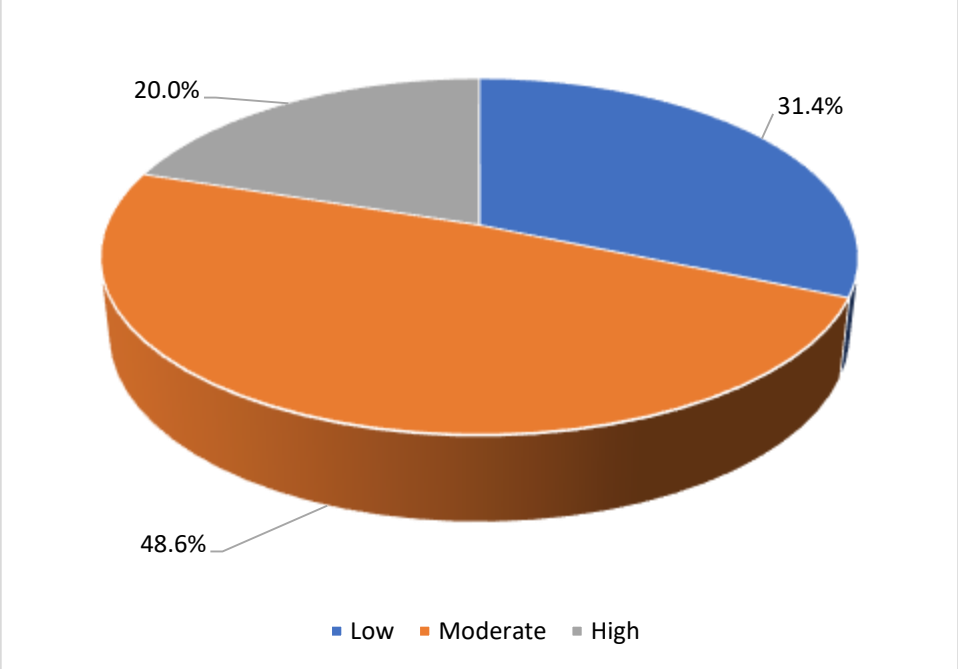

Fig No. (1): Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok

A close examination of Figure No. (1) reveals that nearly half of the university students in the sample (48.6%) report a moderate level of engagement with fitness content on TikTok, suggesting that while this type of content holds noticeable appeal, it is not necessarily dominant in every user's feed. The substantial percentage of moderate engagement may reflect a balance between intentional following of fitness influencers and passive, algorithm-driven exposure—especially

through the "For You" page, where fitness videos often appear even if not explicitly sought out.

Meanwhile, 20% of respondents reported high engagement, a group likely to be more personally invested in fitness-related themes such as body transformation, workout routines, or appearance-driven goals. For these individuals, such content may serve not only as a source of information or motivation but also as a reference point for self-evaluation.

By contrast, the 31.4% of participants who indicated low engagement suggest that a notable minority either do not prioritize fitness content or possibly resist its influence. However, even low-engagement users may not be immune to its effects, as TikTok's algorithm can still intermittently present such videos, blurring the line between active consumption and incidental exposure. Ultimately, the distribution in Figure No. (1) underscores that while not all youth are deeply immersed in fitness content, a majority are meaningfully engaged to some extent—making this exposure a relevant factor in understanding evolving patterns of physical self-awareness and emotional response in the TikTok era.

Table No. (5)

Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok (n=220)

Degree Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	No	M	RI
To follow fitness and/or health personalities/influencers who share tips, workout routines, and motivational messages	f	47	53	67	24	29	3.30	65.9 %
	%	21.4%	24.1%	30.5 %	10.9 %	13.2 %		

Degree Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	No	M	RI
To watch motivational videos that encourage me to keep exercising.	f	44	41	57	43	35	3.07	61.5 %
	%	20%	18.6%	25.9 %	19.5 %	15.9 %		
To watch videos or ads on how to keep fit	f	27	39	87	49	18	3.04	60.7 %
	%	12.3%	17.7%	39.5 %	22.3 %	8.2%		
To watch videos or ads on weight loss (e.g., diets, supplements, superfoods	f	24	52	48	45	51	2.79	55.7 %
	%	10.9%	23.6%	21.8 %	20.5 %	23.2 %		
To follow sports stars or athletes.	f	26	23	50	47	74	2.45	49.1 %
	%	11.8%	10.5%	22.7 %	21.4 %	33.6 %		
To follow fitness challenges and competitions.	f	18	27	52	51	72	2.40	48%
	%	8.2%	12.3%	23.6 %	23.2 %	32.7 %		

The data in Table No. (5) reveals that university students demonstrate a moderate level of engagement with fitness content on TikTok, with some forms of content generating noticeably more interest than others. The highest mean score (M = 3.30; R = 65.9%) is associated with following fitness and health influencers who share tips, routines, and motivational messages. This suggests that students are drawn to personalized, practical content delivered by relatable figures—especially when it promotes attainable body goals or lifestyle habits. Such engagement is consistent with the appeal of TikTok's fitness niche, which relies heavily on the credibility and consistency of content creators.

A similarly moderate level of interest is evident in watching motivational exercise videos (M = 3.07; R = 61.5%) and general content about keeping fit (M = 3.04; R = 60.7%). These figures imply that fitness content is consumed not only for aesthetic inspiration but also

for behavioral reinforcement. The steady engagement with such content may reflect students' desire to adopt healthier routines or to align themselves with peer-driven wellness trends—both of which are commonly amplified through algorithmic repetition and peer validation on TikTok.

Slightly lower mean scores are found in content related to weight loss, such as diets or supplements (M = 2.79; R = 55.7%), indicating that although appearance-focused content is still relevant, it does not dominate user interest to the same extent. This could reflect growing skepticism toward overly commercialized or restrictive approaches to fitness. It might also suggest a preference for functional health and fitness rather than aesthetic transformation alone.

The lowest levels of engagement are found in following sports stars or athletes (M = 2.45; R = 49.1%) and fitness challenges or competitions (M = 2.40; R = 48%). These findings suggest that students may not identify with elite athleticism or competitive fitness culture, which often presents less attainable standards. Instead, the data points toward a pattern in which youth prefer everyday, lifestyle-oriented content over aspirational or high-performance models. Overall, the engagement pattern in Table No. (5) emphasizes a content preference rooted in relatability, practicality, and emotional accessibility—factors that may influence students' sense of self, motivation, and susceptibility to social comparison.

This result reinforces findings by O'Reilly et al. (2021), who reported that TikTok's short, engaging fitness videos often encourage active involvement among Gen Z users. However, the presence of low engagement among a notable minority aligns with Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015), who found that exposure alone does not guarantee participation, as many users interact passively. These studies highlight that individual motivation and context are key in shaping actual fitness behaviors despite high exposure.

4. The influencers' preferred to follow for fitness videos on TikTok

Table No. (6)

The influencers' preferred to follow for fitness videos on TikTok (n=220)

Influencers	F	%
Gym Trainers	82	37.3%
Regular People	80	36.4%
Life Coach	63	28.6%
Specialized Doctors	59	26.8%
Sport Players	2	0.9%

The data presented in Table No. (6) offers valuable insight into the types of influencers university students prefer to follow for fitness-related content on TikTok. The most followed category is gym trainers, accounting for 37.3% of the sample, followed very closely by regular people at 36.4%. This preference suggests that users are drawn to influencers who present attainable, realistic body ideals, rather than celebrity figures or highly specialized professionals. Both gym trainers and regular individuals often share content grounded in personal experience, daily routines, and step-by-step progress, which aligns with the motivational and self-improvement narratives appealing to young audiences.

The significant preference for these two categories may reflect a psychological need for identification with relatable figures, especially in the context of body image and fitness aspirations. Unlike elite athletes or idealized celebrities, gym trainers and everyday individuals present physiques and lifestyles that feel more achievable. This can foster a greater sense of motivation and trust, while also subtly reinforcing internal benchmarks for appearance and health. In this way, the preference itself may contribute to both positive encouragement and pressures of comparison, depending on the user’s mindset and self-perception.

Meanwhile, life coaches and specialized doctors were followed by 28.6% and 26.8% of respondents, respectively. Though lower in percentage, these figures indicate a notable level of trust in authority and expert advice—suggesting that students are not only motivated by appearance but also by health-related or psychological guidance. However, the near absence of sports players as preferred influencers

(0.9%) highlights that professional athleticism may be viewed as too distant or unrealistic, further reinforcing the idea that users gravitate toward figures whose lifestyles and bodies feel attainable.

Thus, Table No. (6) underscores how the nature of the influencer followed can shape the direction and intensity of social comparison. When users align themselves with relatable content creators, they may feel more empowered—but at the same time, they may also internalize normative body expectations that contribute to body dissatisfaction and a persistent drive for thinness, especially when progress is perceived as insufficient compared to these seemingly "doable" ideals.

This finding aligns with research showing that young adults are drawn to fitness influencers and relatable figures on TikTok who reflect achievable goals (De Brabandere et al., 2025; Durau et al., 2022). While gym trainers are valued for their structured guidance, concerns remain over the credibility of content, as many influencers lack qualifications. Studies by Ramachandran et al. (2018) and Curtis et al. (2023) highlight that much of the popular diet and fitness advice online is not evidence-based and may promote harmful practices.

5. The preferred influencers to follow for fitness videos on TikTok:

Table No. (7) The preferred influencers to follow for fitness videos on TikTok (n=220)

Who is fady bakry?

Influencers	F	%
Fady Bakry	20	9.1%
Coach sama	7	3.2%
Yousef edrees	6	2.7%
Hossam Mansour	4	1.8%
Sara hany	4	1.8%
Mohamed Eldora	3	1.4%
Informa	3	1.4%
Karim Gabriel	3	1.4%
Mira reda	2	0.9%
Tamer Elgayar	2	0.9%
Moataz Hafez	2	0.9%
Kg.workouts	2	0.9%
Youssef Ismael	2	0.9%
Big rami	2	0.9%
Sally fouad	1	0.5%
Mireille Ishak	1	0.5%
Kariman Maher	1	0.5%

The results shown in Table No. (7) illustrate a fragmented pattern of preferences when it comes to specific fitness influencers followed by university students on TikTok. Fady Bakry emerges as the most followed individual, with 9.1% of the sample indicating they follow him. While this percentage is relatively modest in absolute terms, it places him significantly ahead of other named influencers, the majority of whom register at less than 2%. This dispersion indicates that fitness influence on TikTok among this demographic is not centralized around a few dominant figures, but rather diversified and personalized, reflecting the algorithm's tailored feed and the platform's encouragement of micro-influencers.

The preference for Fady Bakry may be explained by his reputation for sharing accessible, motivational content centered on home-friendly workouts, physique transformation, and body positivity, often presented in a manner that feels authentic and relatable. This again reflects the broader trend noted in previous tables: individuals are more inclined to engage with figures who represent attainable fitness goals, rather than aspirational extremes. His consistent use of colloquial language, culturally relevant references, and demonstration of personal progress likely enhance emotional resonance and trust, key factors in the dynamics of influence and comparison.

Notably, the presence of a long tail of influencers with followership percentages hovering around or below 1% (e.g., Big Rami, Sally Fouad, Moataz Hafez, Kg.workouts) reinforces the decentralized nature of fitness influence on TikTok. Many of these individuals may hold niche appeal or offer specialized content, but they do not dominate the collective attention of the youth sample. This pattern is crucial when considering the psychological effects of content consumption—while the comparison is often thought to occur with celebrities, it may in fact occur more intensively with semi-familiar, "real" individuals whose perceived attainability makes the comparison more psychologically impactful.

Hence, Table No. (7) reflects not only who is being followed but also how the structure of TikTok's content ecosystem promotes individualized pathways of social comparison. Exposure to fitness influencers like Fady Bakry, who frame their progress as achievable

and normative, can reinforce upward social comparison, especially when audiences fail to replicate such transformations. This, in turn, may contribute to body dissatisfaction and an increased drive for thinness, particularly within an impressionable age group navigating self-image and body-related anxieties.

This finding aligns with previous research indicating that visual transformations and authenticity in fitness influencers enhance viewer engagement and motivation (Li et al., 2023; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Generation Z, in particular, demonstrates a preference for relatable and aspirational fitness content that highlights real progress and attainable goals (Sengsuebphol, 2025). The popularity of Fady Bakry's videos suggests that transformation narratives and muscle-revealing content serve as effective motivational tools within this demographic.

6. The beginning of following TikTok fitness videos

Table No. (8)

The beginning of following TikTok fitness videos

Beginning	F	%
Less than a year	85	38.6%
From one year to less than two years	53	24.1%
From two years to less than three years	37	16.8%
Four years and more	28	12.7%
From three years and less than four years	17	7.7%
Total	220	100%

A review of the data in Table No. (8) shows that the majority of university students in the sample—38.6%—began following fitness videos on TikTok less than a year ago, while another 24.1% started between one and two years ago. These two categories combined represent 62.7% of the participants, indicating that engagement with fitness content on TikTok is a relatively recent phenomenon for most of them. This surge in interest could reflect broader global trends, as TikTok consumption increased significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic and became deeply embedded in youth media habits.

Although the explanation cannot rely solely on the pandemic, the platform's exponential growth and the transition to more individualized digital self-expression during that period likely contributed to a

heightened focus on appearance-related content. Moreover, it is noteworthy that many individuals in this age group typically begin university between the ages of 17 and 18—a developmental phase in which self-image and body awareness intensify. The entrance into university life often comes with increased social comparison pressures, the desire for social belonging, and exposure to new peer environments. This combination of factors may drive the turn toward fitness content as a means of shaping, improving, or even validating one's physical appearance.

The remaining responses show that 16.8% have been following fitness videos for two to less than three years, while smaller segments report a longer engagement—12.7% for four years or more, and 7.7% for three to four years. These longer durations, while representing a minority, may point to users who are more deeply embedded in fitness culture, or who began consuming such content in late adolescence. Regardless of when the engagement began, what matters in terms of media effects is the intensity and emotional meaning attached to the content. The more recent wave of followers may still be in the stage of forming aspirations and setting physical ideals, which can heighten the risk of upward social comparison and increase vulnerability to body dissatisfaction or an intensified drive for thinness—particularly when fitness progress is perceived as a prerequisite for social validation.

Therefore, the results provide important temporal context for understanding user exposure patterns. The dominance of recent followers suggests that the current generation of students is being shaped by TikTok fitness culture in real-time, making it essential to consider how such content interacts with their evolving identities and self-perceptions.

7. The duration of videos

Table No. (9)

The duration of videos

Duration	F	%
From one minute to two minutes	98	44.5%
Less than a minute	75	34.1%
From two minutes to less than 3 minutes	28	12.7%
From three minutes to less than 4 minutes	12	5.5%
4 minutes and more	7	3.2%
Total	220	100%

The findings in Table No. (8) indicate a clear preference among university students for short-form fitness content on TikTok. A substantial 44.5% of respondents reported that the fitness videos they follow are between one to two minutes in length, while an additional 34.1% engage with videos that are less than a minute long. Together, these two categories account for 78.6% of the sample, highlighting a dominant inclination toward short-form content in media consumption.

This strong preference for shorter videos aligns with broader generational trends in digital behavior, where youth increasingly favor fast-paced, bite-sized content that caters to their reduced attention spans. Unlike platforms such as Facebook or YouTube—where longer-form content remains common—TikTok's design capitalizes on quick visual engagement, allowing users to consume a high volume of videos in a short amount of time. This not only intensifies screen exposure but also accelerates content rotation, meaning users are frequently cycling through new bodies, routines, and aesthetic ideals. In the context of fitness content, such rapid exposure can contribute to heightened social comparison as users are presented with numerous physical exemplars in succession, often without the time or context to critically assess them.

At the same time, the 12.7% who engage with videos lasting two to less than three minutes, and the smaller 5.5% and 3.2% who consume even longer videos, suggest that a minority of users are willing to invest slightly more time—perhaps for content that is more instructional, transformation-based, or involves detailed routines. However, the overwhelming preference for shorter videos may reflect a shift in how youth process media: rather than deep engagement with a few videos, they opt for frequent, shallow exposure to many, a pattern that can

subtly reinforce internalized body ideals through repetition and perceived social norms.

Thus, the results underscore not just a preference for short-form content, but a media consumption style that favors visual immediacy over cognitive elaboration. This has significant implications for body image and self-perception, particularly as quick, polished, and aesthetically curated fitness clips dominate the feed—shaping not only what youth aspire to look like, but how quickly they expect to achieve it.

This aligns with TikTok's design, which promotes rapid content consumption through short, engaging videos (Opara et al., 2025). Research indicates that this preference is tied to a reduced attention span among young users, making it harder for them to engage with longer-form content found on other platforms like Facebook (Qin et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2025).

8. Upward social comparison:

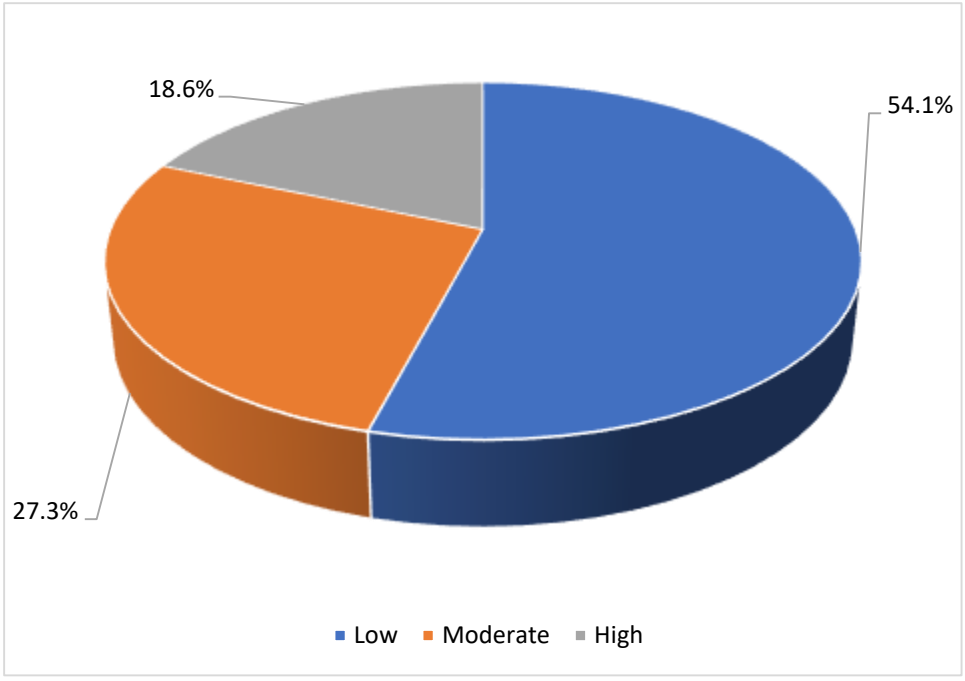

Fig No. (2): Upward social comparison

The distribution in Figure No. (2) shows that a majority of university students—54.1%—reported a low level of upward social comparison in response to fitness content on TikTok. At first glance, this may suggest that most individuals do not perceive themselves as frequently engaging in self-evaluations based on others' physical appearances. However, this finding must be interpreted cautiously, as social comparison is often an implicit process, and individuals—particularly those with a certain level of self-awareness or educational attainment—may be reluctant to openly acknowledge that they compare themselves to others. This hesitancy may reflect a desire to maintain a socially acceptable self-image or to deny vulnerability to such influences.

Meanwhile, 27.3% of respondents identified with a moderate level of upward social comparison, and 18.6% reported a high level. Although smaller in percentage, the latter group is especially important in understanding the psychological dynamics at play. These students are likely more sensitive to appearance-based cues and more deeply invested in how they measure up to the idealized body types frequently depicted on TikTok. This tendency is particularly relevant among adolescents and young adults who are still navigating identity formation and are more susceptible to internalizing societal beauty standards. Their age and developmental stage, characterized by heightened self-consciousness and peer-oriented thinking, make them more vulnerable to the negative emotional effects of social comparison.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider the subtle ways in which educational background and media literacy may shape these perceptions. University students may recognize the artificiality or selectivity of social media content, but this cognitive awareness does not necessarily shield them from its emotional impact. In this light, Figure No. (2) reflects not only varying degrees of comparison but also the complexity of how users interpret and respond to visual stimuli—often negotiating between critical thinking and emotional reactions. The presence of even a modest proportion of highly affected individuals points to a significant risk area for body dissatisfaction and a heightened drive for thinness, especially when fitness content is framed as aspirational and presented without balance.

Although previous studies frequently report that Generation Z tends to experience high levels of upward social comparison when exposed to fitspiration content on platforms like TikTok (e.g., Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Guartala & Fardouly, 2023), the current study reveals a comparatively lower prevalence of such experiences. This contradiction may be attributed to a reluctance among some individuals to acknowledge or report feelings of comparison, potentially due to social desirability bias or the stigma surrounding body-related insecurities. Alternatively, it could reflect a shift in how Gen Z interprets social comparison—viewing it not solely as a source of distress but sometimes as a neutral or even motivating factor. Furthermore, this discrepancy between previous international findings and the current study's results for Egyptian university students may highlight significant societal or cultural differences. In support of this, a 2021 study by Maurice on a similar population of university students also reported low levels of social comparison tendencies related to social media usage, suggesting a consistent trend within Egyptian society that differentiates it from some foreign contexts. Supporting this interpretation, Barry et al. (2017) found that while social media use facilitates comparison, not all users experience it negatively, suggesting substantial variability in its emotional impact. This indicates that the nature of social comparison among Gen Z is more complex and context-dependent than previously assumed, warranting further exploration into their subjective experiences and reporting tendencies.

Table No. (10)

Upward social comparison (n=220)

Degree / Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	No	M	RI
After watching fitspiration videos, I compare myself to those who are better looking than me rather than those who are not.,	f	30	33	56	33	68	2.65	53.1%
	%	13.6%	15%	25.5%	15%	30.9%		

Degree Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	No	M	RI
I find myself thinking about whether my own appearance compares well with models and stars	f	26	37	52	38	67	2.62	52.5%
	%	11.8%	16.8%	23.6%	17.3%	30.5%		
When I see good-looking people in fitspiration content on tiktok, I wonder how I compare to them.	f	24	27	51	44	74	2.47	49.4%
	%	10.9%	12.3%	23.2%	20%	33.6%		
When I see a person with a great body in fitspiration videos, I wonder how I 'match up' with them.	f	24	30	49	38	79	2.46	49.3%
	%	10.9%	13.6%	22.3%	17.3%	35.9%		
I tend to compare my own physical attractiveness to that of models in fitspiration videos	f	23	31	46	41	79	2.45	48.9%
	%	10.5%	14.1%	20.9%	18.6%	35.9%		
I tend to compare my own physical attractiveness to that of models in fitspiration videos,	f	14	45	39	46	76	2.43	48.6%
	%	6.4%	20.5%	17.7%	20.9%	34.5%		
At the beach or athletic events (sports, gym, etc.), I wonder if my body is as attractive as the people I see in fitspiration videos on tiktok,	f	25	20	56	37	82	2.40	48.1%
	%	11.4%	9.1%	25.5%	16.8%	37.3%		
I compare my body to people who have a better body than me after watching fitspiration content.	f	21	26	43	45	85	2.33	46.6%
	%	9.5%	11.8%	19.5%	20.5%	38.6%		
I find myself comparing my appearance with people who are better looking than me after watching fitspiration videos,	f	16	32	39	41	92	2.27	45.4%
	%	7.3%	14.5%	17.7%	18.6%	41.8%		
At parties or other social events, I compare my physical appearance to that of very attractive people I see in fitspiration videos.	f	19	25	45	35	96	2.25	45.1%
	%	8.6%	11.4%	20.5%	15.9%	43.6%		

The data presented in Table No. (10) reveals that university students tend to exhibit low to moderate levels of upward social comparison in response to fitspiration content on TikTok. The highest mean score appears in the statement about comparing oneself to those who are more attractive rather than less so (M = 2.65; R = 53.1%). This suggests a subtle yet present inclination toward upward comparison, especially when prompted by idealized fitness portrayals. Though the percentage does not reflect an overt or dominant behavior, it indicates a mental habit of evaluating the self against higher appearance standards—a tendency frequently reinforced by algorithmic exposure on platforms like TikTok.

Interestingly, statements involving comparisons to celebrities or models (e.g., M = 2.62; R = 52.5%) reinforce this pattern, showing that even though users may not always act on these thoughts, they are cognitively engaged with the process of appearance-based evaluation. The repeated presence of such thoughts across several items points to a recurring cognitive process rather than isolated incidents. This is especially relevant during young adulthood—a stage marked by identity formation and a heightened sensitivity to social approval and aesthetic ideals.

When people compared themselves to others in real-life settings like beaches or social events, their scores were lower (e.g., M = 2.25; R = 45.1%). This suggests a difference in how people compare themselves online versus offline. Students might compare themselves digitally but avoid doing so in person. Or, they might not want to admit to self-critical thoughts that could seem superficial.

Moreover, the overall consistency in scores—most clustering between 2.2 and 2.6 on a 5-point scale— highlight that While extreme self-comparison is rare, moderate comparison is common. Even subtle, repeated comparisons can negatively affect how people see themselves, especially when content highlights specific body types and transformation stories.

In essence, while Table No. (10) may not reflect dramatic levels of upward social comparison, it does expose a nuanced psychological landscape in which appearance-related evaluations are routinely activated, even if not always acknowledged. This has meaningful

implications for understanding how media shapes internalized beauty standards and emotional responses among young adults navigating both digital and social realities.

Drive for thinness.

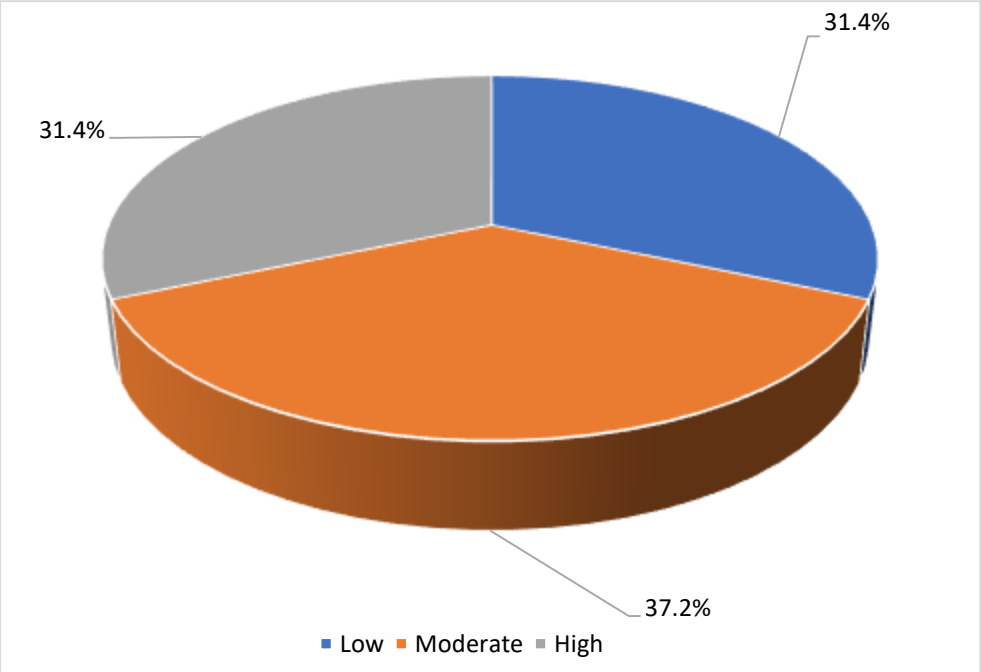

Fig No. (3): Drive for thinness

The data in Figure No. (3) demonstrates a relatively balanced distribution of responses regarding the drive for thinness among university students exposed to fitness content on TikTok. Notably, 31.4% of participants report a high drive for thinness, matched exactly by another 31.4% who report a low level of this drive. This symmetry suggests a polarization within the sample, with a significant portion of students either strongly internalizing thinness ideals or actively resisting them. The largest segment, however, falls into the moderate category (37.2%), which may reflect a state of ambivalence or emerging concern—where thinness is valued but not yet pursued with intensity.

This pattern is especially telling in the context of adolescence and early adulthood, a life stage in which body image becomes closely tied to

social identity and self-worth. The high percentage of students reporting elevated drive for thinness may be a reflection of the cumulative effect of curated fitness content that promotes lean, toned physiques as markers of success, discipline, and attractiveness.

On the other hand, the presence of an equally large group reporting a low drive for thinness should not be dismissed. It may indicate growing body positivity attitudes or critical resistance to unrealistic beauty standards, particularly among students with higher media literacy or those exposed to alternative narratives challenging dominant body ideals. However, the fact that the moderate and high categories together make up nearly 70% of responses suggests that thinness remains a salient aspiration for a considerable portion of this demographic.

Overall, Figure No. (3) underscores the complexity of appearance-related motivations in youth navigating a digital landscape saturated with fitness messaging. The distribution reflects not only personal attitudes toward thinness but also the emotional and psychological negotiations that occur when self-perception collides with algorithmically promoted ideals.

This result aligns with prior research linking fitspiration exposure to a stronger drive for thinness (Pryde & Prichard, 2022; Slater et al., 2017). The promotion of slim body ideals on TikTok contrasts sharply with common lifestyle patterns among Egyptian youth—such as poor diet, low physical activity, and rising obesity rates. This gap between idealized images and everyday realities likely amplifies pressure to be thinner and reinforces body-related concerns in this age group.

Table No. (11)

Drive for thinness (n=220)

Degree Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	No	M	RI
I eat sweets and carbohydrates without	f	66	41	42	37	34	3.31	66.2%
	%	30%	18.6%	19.1%	16.8%	15.5%		

Degree Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	No	M	RI
feeling nervous								
If I gain a pound, I worry that I will keep gaining	f	68	38	36	27	51	3.20	64.1%
	%	30.9%	17.3%	16.4%	12.3%	23.2%		
I am terrified of gaining weight	f	56	38	43	32	51	3.07	61.5%
	%	25.5%	17.3%	19.5%	14.5%	23.2%		
I think about dieting,	f	39	51	47	39	44	3.01	60.2%
	%	17.7%	23.2%	21.4%	17.7%	20%		
I am preoccupied with the desire to be thinner	f	48	42	35	25	70	2.88	57.5%
	%	21.8%	19.1%	15.9%	11.4%	31.8%		
I exaggerate or magnify the importance of weight	f	28	47	48	47	50	2.80	56%
	%	12.7%	21.4%	21.8%	21.4%	22.7%		
I feel extremely guilty after overeating,	f	42	33	49	31	65	2.80	56%
	%	19.1%	15%	22.3%	14.1%	29.5%		

The data in Table No. (11) illustrates a nuanced landscape of students' psychological relationship with body weight and food, particularly in terms of the drive for thinness. The highest mean score was found in the item “I eat sweets and carbohydrates without feeling nervous” (M = 3.31; R = 66.2%), which may, at first glance, suggest a level of comfort with food. However, this result may also be interpreted as a coping mechanism or cognitive dissonance in the face of diet culture—where students assert autonomy over eating while still navigating pressures to conform to thinness ideals.

A closer look at other items reveals a more ambivalent and emotionally charged experience. For example, the statement “If I gain a pound, I worry that I will keep gaining” (M = 3.20; R = 64.1%) highlights an anxiety-driven sensitivity to weight fluctuations. Similarly, “I am

terrified of gaining weight" (M = 3.07; R = 61.5%) underscores a latent fear that may not be visible behaviorally but persists cognitively. These responses suggest that even among university students—who are expected to possess higher media literacy and critical thinking—internalized beauty standards and weight stigma remain highly influential.

Notably, the mean score for "I think about dieting" (M = 3.01; R = 60.2%) further supports the idea that thoughts about food regulation and body control are prevalent. Dieting, while socially normalized, often reflects an internal pressure to achieve or maintain an ideal body type promoted by digital fitness culture. The same can be said for the item "I am preoccupied with the desire to be thinner" (M = 2.88; R = 57.5%), which reveals an underlying fixation that may fluctuate with social context, emotional state, or exposure to fitness content.

Other items such as "I exaggerate or magnify the importance of weight" (M = 2.80; R = 56%) and "I feel extremely guilty after overeating" (M = 2.80; R = 56%) point to psychological distress tied to eating behavior. These figures reflect how food is not merely functional but deeply symbolic—intertwined with self-worth, discipline, and perceived attractiveness. The guilt associated with overeating, in particular, is often a result of internalizing moral judgments about food that dominate fitness discourse on platforms like TikTok.

Altogether, Table No. (11) presents a portrait of youth grappling with conflicted attitudes toward weight and thinness, shaped by both internal motivations and external aesthetic pressures. While not extreme in magnitude, the relatively high means and importance ratings signal that the drive for thinness is not a marginal concern—it is embedded within the daily cognitive and emotional habits of students, subtly influencing how they interpret their bodies and behaviors in relation to cultural ideals.

9. Body dissatisfaction

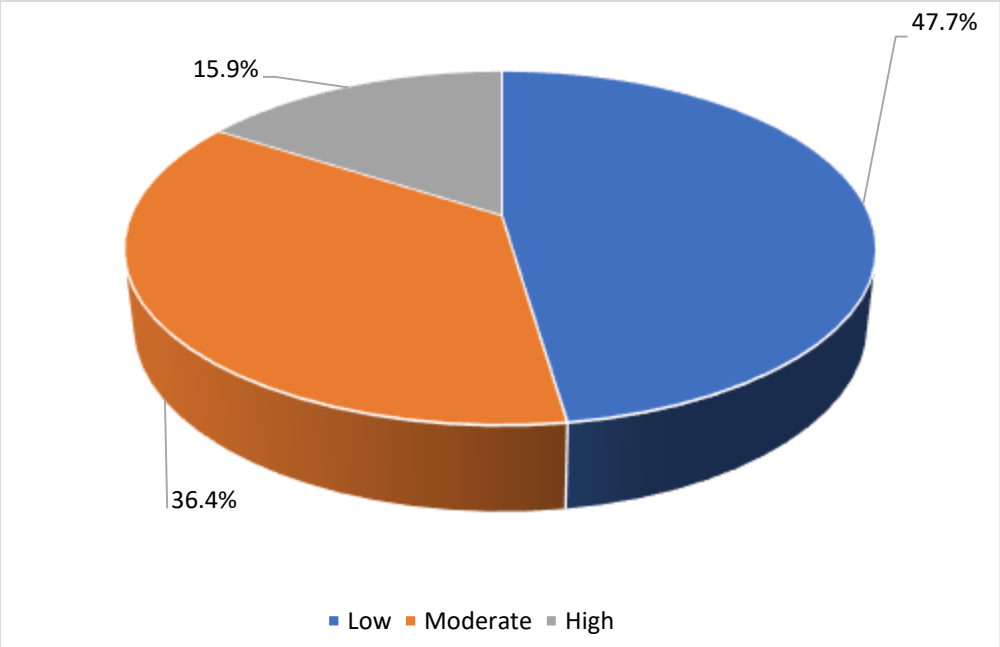

Fig No. (4): Body dissatisfaction:

Figure No. (4) reveals that 47.7% of university students reported low levels of body dissatisfaction, a finding that may initially suggest a relatively healthy or stable body image among nearly half of the sample. However, this result must be interpreted within the broader psychological context of self-reporting and social desirability. Young adults—particularly those pursuing higher education—may possess a degree of self-awareness that discourages open acknowledgment of negative body perceptions, or they may rationalize their dissatisfaction in more socially acceptable terms. Furthermore, body dissatisfaction can manifest in subtle emotional and behavioral ways that are not always fully captured through direct measurement.

A further 36.4% of respondents identified with moderate body dissatisfaction, indicating that a significant proportion of students experience fluctuating or situational concerns about their appearance. This moderate group may reflect individuals who are exposed regularly to idealized body content—such as TikTok fitness videos—but who are still negotiating their internal responses, sometimes resisting and at

other times internalizing those messages. The algorithm's constant delivery of visually perfected bodies and transformation narratives can make even momentary self-doubt more persistent, particularly when tied to personal aspirations for improvement, belonging, or admiration.

Although the high body dissatisfaction group represents a smaller share at 15.9%, its significance cannot be underestimated. These individuals are likely to be more emotionally affected by content that emphasizes thinness, muscle tone, and physical transformation—hallmarks of TikTok's fitness culture. For them, repeated exposure to such content can reinforce feelings of inadequacy, magnify insecurities, and fuel disordered attitudes toward eating, exercise, or body monitoring. In connection with earlier findings on drive for thinness and upward social comparison, this group may be particularly vulnerable to developing more severe psychological consequences over time.

Therefore, Figure No. (4) should not be viewed as a sign of general immunity to body-related pressures, but rather as a reflection of how digital fitness content contributes to a spectrum of body image concerns—from latent dissatisfaction to more pronounced emotional distress. The near-equal prominence of the moderate group suggests that body image remains an unstable domain for many youth, shaped continuously by the shifting standards and comparison cues embedded in the TikTok environment.

These findings align with the study by Mink and Szymanski (2022), which identified that young adults typically experience moderate body dissatisfaction linked to their TikTok usage, with variability in intensity across individuals.

Table No. (12)

Body dissatisfaction (n=220)

Degree Statements		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M	RI
My weight influenced how I	F	33	44	43	44	56	2.79	55.8%
	%	15%	20%	19.5%	20%	25.5%		

Degree Statements		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M	RI
think about (judge) myself as a person								
My shape influenced how I think about (judge) myself as a person	F	26	43	46	43	62	2.67	53.5%
	%	11.8%	19.5%	20.9%	19.5%	28.2%		
It has upset me if I had been asked to weigh myself once a week	F	29	34	56	33	68	2.65	53%
	%	13.2%	15.5%	25.5%	15%	30.9%		
I am dissatisfied with my weight	F	32	34	40	48	66	2.63	52.5%
	%	14.5%	15.5%	18.2%	21.8%	30%		
I feel uncomfortable about others seeing my shape or figure (for example, in communal changing rooms, when swimming, or wearing tight clothes)	F	33	30	34	39	84	2.50	49.9%
	%	15%	13.6%	15.5%	17.7%	38.2%		
I am dissatisfied with my shape	F	21	22	35	43	99	2.20	43.9%
	%	9.5%	10%	15.9%	19.5%	45%		
I feel uncomfortable seeing my body (for example, seeing your shape in the mirror, in a shop window reflection, while undressing or taking a bath or shower)	F	17	20	47	40	96	2.19	43.8%
	%	7.7%	9.1%	21.4%	18.2%	43.6%		

The findings from Table No. (11) provide insight into the degrees of body dissatisfaction experienced by university students, reflecting a spectrum of emotional responses tied to body weight and shape. The highest mean score was found for the statement "My weight influenced how I think about (judge) myself as a person" (M = 2.79; R = 55.8%), indicating that for a considerable segment of the sample, body weight is an important part of self-evaluation. Similarly, the second-highest item—"My shape influenced how I think about (judge) myself" (M = 2.67; R = 53.5%)—reinforces this trend, highlighting the centrality of physical appearance in students' construction of self-worth.

While these scores suggest only moderate dissatisfaction, they are significant in the context of youth exposure to fitspiration content on TikTok, which often promotes narrow and idealized body standards. When platforms present an overwhelming volume of aesthetic content linked to success, attractiveness, or discipline, it becomes increasingly likely for individuals to internalize these associations and turn them into self-judgment mechanisms. The data thus reflects how social media environments do not only shape external aspirations, but also internalize value systems around body image.

Moreover, the item “It has upset me if I had been asked to weigh myself once a week” (M = 2.65; R = 53%) adds an emotional dimension to students’ relationship with body monitoring. This discomfort could stem from deeper anxieties about losing control over one's appearance, or from prior negative experiences with weight-based feedback or social pressure. Along with, with “I am dissatisfied with my weight” (M = 2.63; R = 52.5%), it is clear that for many students, weight is not a neutral metric—it carries emotional and evaluative weight.

Lower-scoring items, such as discomfort about being seen by others (M = 2.50; R = 49.9%) or dissatisfaction with one's shape (M = 2.20; R = 43.9%), suggest that not all forms of body dissatisfaction are openly expressed or consciously felt. Cultural norms, individual resilience, or differing thresholds for body concerns may contribute to these results. However, it is important to recognize that lower means do not necessarily imply absence of concern—they may reflect denial, normalization, or a masking of insecurities.

The lowest-scoring item, "I feel uncomfortable seeing my body" (M = 2.19; R = 43.8%), indicates a potential detachment or emotional dissonance. This suggests individuals may not explicitly express discomfort, but still carry underlying dissatisfaction. Overall, responses in Table No. (11) show a population navigating ambivalence towards their bodies, influenced by cultural exposure, digital norms, and developmental self-perception. While moderate dissatisfaction levels are not alarming in isolation, they warrant attention given their connection to upward social comparison and the observed drive for thinness in this study.

Hypotheses Testing

The study proposed a linear relationship between following fitspiration videos disseminated via TikTok and the emergence of body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness among late adolescents. The model further proposed that this linear relationship would be mediated by social comparison with exposure leading to upward social comparison among users, eventually resulting in body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness.

H_1: There is a positive relationship between the degree of engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and upward social comparison.

Table No. (13)

The relationship between Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and upward social comparison

R	Sig.
0.374**	0.000
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level	

The results presented in Table No. (13) demonstrate a statistically significant positive relationship between the degree of engagement with fitness content on TikTok and upward social comparison tendencies, as indicated by a p-value of 0.000, which is well below the conventional 0.01 threshold. This confirms that the observed relationship is, by and large, unlikely to be due to chance and therefore holds statistical credibility within the studied sample.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.374) reflects a low positive correlation, suggesting that as university students increase their engagement with fitness-related content—such as watching workout videos, following fitness influencers, or interacting with motivational health posts—they are more likely to engage in upward social comparisons. They tend to compare themselves to individuals they perceive as more attractive or physically superior, often leading to self-evaluative thought processes. This finding aligns with existing psychological literature that underscores how immersive, repetitive exposure to idealized media figures—especially on visually driven

platforms like TikTok—can intensify self-monitoring and social comparison tendencies.

This correlation is especially salient in the context of emerging adulthood, a life stage marked by identity formation and heightened sensitivity to appearance-based norms. The TikTok algorithm, which continuously curates and amplifies aesthetically pleasing content based on user preferences, may further reinforce these comparison behaviors by creating echo chambers of aspirational body ideals that might be difficult to attain. Consequently, even if students are primarily engaging with fitness content for inspiration or health motivation, they may inadvertently find themselves trapped in cycles of comparison, particularly as visual cues and user-generated success stories dominate the platform's content landscape.

In conclusion, the findings confirm the validity of the first hypothesis (H1), affirming that a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship exists between the degree of engagement with fitness content on TikTok and the tendency to engage in upward social comparison.

H_2: There is a positive relationship between upward social comparison tendencies and body dissatisfaction.

Table No. (14)

The relationship between upward social comparison and body dissatisfaction

R	Sig.
0.706**	0.000
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level	

The results presented in Table No. (14) reveal a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between upward social comparison and body dissatisfaction among university students. With a p-value of 0.000, the relationship is highly significant at the 0.01 level, confirming that the association is not due to random chance and can be confidently interpreted as meaningful within the current research sample.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.706) indicates a strong and direct relationship, meaning that higher levels of upward social comparison—where individuals evaluate themselves against others

perceived as more attractive or fit—are strongly associated with increased levels of dissatisfaction with one's own body. This is a particularly important finding given the psychological impact such comparisons can have on self-esteem and body image, especially during late adolescence and early adulthood when appearance-related concerns are heightened and self-concept is still developing.

This strong correlation aligns with well-established theoretical frameworks such as Social Comparison Theory and Objectification Theory, which emphasize that repeated exposure to idealized bodies, especially via social media platforms like TikTok, encourages users to evaluate their own physical appearance through a comparative lens. As students engage in more upward comparisons, they may perceive greater discrepancies between their actual and ideal selves, fostering negative emotions, reduced body satisfaction, and, in some cases, disordered eating tendencies or internalized appearance norms.

Furthermore, this finding reflects the broader cultural and algorithmic dynamics of TikTok, which often prioritizes content showcasing aesthetic transformation, fitness achievements, or unattainable body standards. As a result, users who habitually compare themselves to such content are at a significantly higher risk of internalizing body-related dissatisfaction, particularly when the comparison targets are influencers or fitness figures who represent narrow ideals of beauty and fitness that are, by and large, unattainable.

In summary, the evidence strongly supports the second hypothesis (H2), confirming that there is a statistically significant and robust positive relationship between upward social comparison and body dissatisfaction among university students.

H_3: There is a positive relationship between upward social comparison and the drive for thinness.

Table No. (15)

The relationship between upward social comparison and the drive for thinness

R	Sig.
0.477**	0.000
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level	

The results shown in Table No. (15) indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between upward social comparison and the drive for thinness, with a p-value of 0.000, which falls well below the 0.01 significance threshold. This confirms that the association between the two variables is not due to chance and can be considered reliable within the scope of this study.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.477) reflects a moderately strong positive correlation, suggesting that individuals who frequently engage in upward comparisons—evaluating themselves against more attractive or fit individuals, especially in the context of TikTok's visual content—are more likely to report a stronger drive for thinness. This drive is characterized by persistent concerns about weight gain, preoccupation with dieting, and an intense desire to be slimmer, often motivated by perceived body ideals.

This finding is consistent with psychological and sociocultural models that argue media-driven comparisons play a central role in shaping appearance-related motivations. On platforms like TikTok, where fitness and beauty influencers dominate algorithmic recommendations, users are not only exposed to idealized bodies but also to transformation narratives that equate thinness with discipline, success, and desirability. As students compare themselves upwardly to these curated standards, they may begin to internalize thinness as a goal, leading to heightened dieting behaviors and weight-focused self-assessment.

Moreover, the observed relationship is particularly relevant for university-aged individuals, a demographic marked by ongoing identity formation and heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation and social visibility. In such a context, upward social comparisons do not simply inform how individuals view themselves—they also shape what they strive to become, making the drive for thinness both a psychological outcome and a behavioral orientation reinforced by repeated comparison.

In conclusion, the analysis supports the third hypothesis (H3), confirming that a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship exists between upward social comparison and the drive for thinness among university students.

H_4: There is a positive relationship between Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and body dissatisfaction.

Table No. (16)

The relationship between Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and body dissatisfaction

R	Sig.
0.433**	0.000
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level	

The findings in Table No. (16) reveal a statistically significant positive relationship between the degree of engagement with fitness content on TikTok and body dissatisfaction, as indicated by the p-value of 0.000, which is well below the 0.01 level of significance. This confirms that the observed relationship is meaningful and not a result of random variation in the sample.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.433) indicates a moderate positive correlation, suggesting that students who are more actively engaged with fitness-related content—such as following fitness influencers, watching workout or diet videos, and interacting with motivational health messages—are more likely to experience dissatisfaction with their bodies. This reflects a growing body of evidence linking social media engagement, especially with appearance-centric content, to negative body image outcomes.

This relationship can be interpreted in light of the content typically consumed on TikTok, which frequently showcases idealized physiques, transformation journeys, and restrictive health narratives. When students immerse themselves in such content, the exposure may subtly shift their internal standards of beauty and fitness, leading them to negatively evaluate their own bodies. The interactive and algorithm-driven nature of TikTok reinforces this exposure, often intensifying the effect through continuous and personalized content loops.

In a developmental context, university students represent a group highly susceptible to appearance-based pressures due to increased social comparisons, transitions in self-identity, and exposure to diverse peer and media environments. As they engage with highly curated fitness content, the likelihood of internalizing unattainable body ideals

increases, contributing to dissatisfaction with one's shape, weight, or physical appearance more broadly.

In summary, the statistical evidence supports the fourth hypothesis (H4), affirming that there is a significant and moderately positive relationship between the degree of engagement with fitness content on TikTok and body dissatisfaction among university students.

H_5: There is a positive relationship between Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and drive for thinness.

Table No. (17)

The relationship between Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and drive for thinness

R	Sig.
0.210**	0.002
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level	

As presented in Table No. (17), the relationship between the degree of engagement with fitness content on TikTok and the drive for thinness is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.002, which is below the 0.01 threshold. This level of significance indicates that the observed association is unlikely to be due to random chance and can be considered a valid finding within the context of the current study.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.210) reveals a weak but positive correlation, suggesting that as students increase their engagement with fitness content—by watching, following, or interacting with health and body-related videos—they show a corresponding rise in their psychological drive for thinness. While the strength of this relationship is not particularly high, its significance nonetheless points to a meaningful pattern, especially when viewed in combination with the broader psychosocial factors that characterize late adolescence and early adulthood.

This association can be interpreted as part of a broader media influence process, where frequent exposure to idealized fitness narratives, transformation imagery, and disciplined body aesthetics fosters subtle internalization of thinness as a desirable norm. Even when engagement is passive—such as simply watching without intent to emulate—the consistent framing of fitness success in terms of slimness or physical

transformation may act as a cue that reinforces preoccupations with weight control and body modification.

The relatively weak strength of the correlation could reflect the moderating role of individual differences such as body image resilience, critical media literacy, or levels of self-esteem. Not all users internalize media messages equally, and some may engage with fitness content for health-related motives rather than aesthetic ones. Nevertheless, the presence of a statistically significant relationship indicates that higher engagement is associated, to some extent, with stronger desires to attain a thinner body image.

In conclusion, the analysis supports the fifth hypothesis (H5), verifying that there is a statistically significant, albeit weak, positive relationship between the degree of engagement with fitness content on TikTok and the drive for thinness among university students.

H_6: Upward social comparison mediates the relationship between the Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and both of drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction.

Table No. (18)

The effect of upward social comparison on the relationship between the Degree of Engagement with Fitness Content on TikTok and both of drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction

	Partial correlation	Sig.
Drive for thinness	0.202	0.003
Body dissatisfaction	-0.023	0.733

Table No. (18) presents the results of a mediation analysis examining whether upward social comparison serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between degree of engagement with fitness content on TikTok and two outcome variables: drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction. The analysis reveals contrasting outcomes for these two pathways.

In the case of drive for thinness, the partial correlation remains statistically significant at r = 0.202 with a p-value of 0.003, even after controlling for upward social comparison. This indicates that while upward social comparison may play a role in the relationship, it does not fully mediate the effect of engagement on drive for thinness. The

continued significance of the relationship after partialling out the mediator suggests that other pathways—possibly including direct exposure to fitness ideals or personal aspirations—may also contribute to the motivation to be thin. This outcome is consistent with the idea that the drive for thinness can be influenced by both comparative processes and internalized cultural norms that glorify slimness, often independently reinforced through fitness content.

Conversely, when examining body dissatisfaction, the partial correlation drops to r = -0.023 with a non-significant p-value of 0.733. This finding is critical because it suggests that once the effect of upward social comparison is accounted for, the relationship between engagement with fitness content and body dissatisfaction disappears entirely. In statistical and conceptual terms, this supports full mediation, meaning that upward social comparison is the key mechanism through which engagement with fitness content influences body dissatisfaction. It implies that students are not simply dissatisfied with their bodies as a result of seeing fitness content per se, but rather because they are comparing themselves unfavorably to the idealized bodies portrayed in that content. This reinforces the theoretical role of comparative cognitive processes in the development of negative body image, particularly within algorithmically driven environments like TikTok that amplify curated visual perfection

In conclusion, the analysis provides partial support for the sixth hypothesis (H6). Upward social comparison fully mediates the relationship between engagement with fitness content and body dissatisfaction, but it does not fully mediate the relationship between engagement and the drive for thinness, where a direct effect still persists.

Discussion

The findings from this study reveal significant patterns of TikTok engagement, time investment, content consumption, and psychosocial impacts among university students in Egyptian society. Specifically, the data indicates a pervasive daily engagement with TikTok, with 51.8% of surveyed Egyptian university students reporting habitual browsing. This high prevalence underscores the platform's deep integration into

the daily routines of this demographic within the Egyptian context, aligning with existing literature that highlights the global appeal and potentially addictive nature of TikTok among young adults (Xie and Gallo, 2024).

Further analysis of usage duration demonstrates a substantial portion of Egyptian university students engaging in extended daily use. Notably, 24.5% spend between 2 to 3 hours, and 23.2% spend 4 hours or more on the platform, categorizing nearly half of the respondents (47.7%) as heavy users. These figures are consistent with international statistics, such as those reported by the Gallup Institute for Family Studies and Gallup (Rothwell et al., 2023), which indicate that teenagers globally spend an average of more than 4.8 hours daily on TikTok. This parallel suggests that Egyptian Generation Z exhibits similar high-intensity usage patterns as their global counterparts. The design features inherent to TikTok, including infinite scrolling and algorithmically curated feeds, have been identified as critical contributors to enhanced user retention and an elevated risk of behavioral addiction (Qin et al., 2022). These mechanisms likely play a role in sustaining the observed heavy usage among the surveyed Egyptian students, emphasizing the need to understand their psychological impact.

Regarding content consumption, nearly half of the university students in the sample (48.6%) reported a moderate level of engagement with fitness content on TikTok. This suggests that while fitness content holds a noticeable appeal, it is not uniformly dominant across all user feeds, indicating a balance between intentional following and algorithmic exposure through the "For You" page. This aligns with O'Reilly et al. (2021), who suggest that the short, engaging format of TikTok fitness videos enhances accessibility and motivation, contributing to moderate-to-high involvement in fitness activities within this demographic.

The study also identified influential sources of fitness information on TikTok among Egyptian university students. Gym trainers (37.3%) and fitness influencers (36.4%) emerged as the most significant sources, followed by life coaches (28.6%) and specialized doctors (26.8%). In contrast, sport players had minimal influence (0.9%). This pattern is consistent with recent findings that young adults increasingly favor fitness influencers and relatable figures on TikTok, valuing role models

who resonate with their lifestyles and fitness levels (De Brabandere et al., 2025; Durau et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the data indicates a strong preference among Egyptian youth for very short videos on TikTok, with 34.1% viewing content for less than a minute and 44.5% for one to two minutes, culminating in nearly 79% of respondents favoring brief viewing durations. This preference for concise content is consistent with research suggesting a reduced attention span among young users (Cole et al., 2025), which TikTok's short-form video format effectively accommodates by enabling quick, repeated exposure to diverse content within brief timeframes.

Contrary to some previous studies suggesting high levels of social comparison among Generation Z due to fitspiration content on TikTok (e.g., Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Fardouly et al., 2023), the present data indicates that only 18.6% of the Egyptian sample report a high level of social comparison, while the majority (54%) indicate low levels. This discrepancy challenges the assumption that intense social comparison is widespread in this cohort and may reflect a reluctance among some individuals to admit such feelings due to stigma or social desirability bias. Alternatively, it may suggest that many in Generation Z interpret social comparison differently, not necessarily as a negative experience. Supporting this view, recent research by Barry et al. (2017) found that while social media can facilitate comparison, not all users experience significant negative emotional impact, highlighting variability in how social comparison is felt and reported across youth populations. Thus, the experience of social comparison in Egyptian Generation Z appears more heterogeneous than previously assumed, necessitating more nuanced investigation into their subjective perceptions and reporting behaviors.

Finally, the data concerning the drive for thinness among university students exposed to fitness content on TikTok demonstrates a balanced distribution. Notably, 31.4% of participants reported a high drive for thinness, equally matched by another 31.4% who reported a low level. The largest segment (37.2%) fell into the moderate category, suggesting a nuanced relationship with thinness ideals. This pattern may be influenced by the pervasive nature of fitspiration media, which

promotes "slimmer is better" narratives that often conflict with traditional Egyptian cultural values and lifestyle factors contributing to higher obesity rates. The discrepancy between cultural realities and promoted body ideals likely exacerbates feelings of drive for thinness within this age group in Egypt.

It is important to note that the sample demonstrated a stronger drive for thinness than overall body dissatisfaction. This suggests that while not all individuals may feel broadly unhappy with their body, many are motivated by specific societal ideals centered on thinness. The drive for thinness is often more narrowly focused and culturally reinforced, particularly through social media platforms like TikTok, which frequently showcase slender body types as a standard of attractiveness and success. This targeted ideal can foster a more pervasive and internalized motivation to achieve thinness, even among those who do not report high general dissatisfaction with their body. Consequently, the drive for thinness may operate independently or precede broader feelings of body dissatisfaction, highlighting the nuanced ways social media influences body image concerns within the Egyptian student population. The proposed structural model attempted to examine the relationship between following fitspiration or fitspo contents on TikTok, on the one hand, and the emergence of body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness tendencies on the other. The study further predicted that social comparison would mediate the presumed relationship between the study variables.

Statistical analysis proved no direct correlation between the intensity of exposure to fitspiration content and social comparison tendencies among the study sample. While it might be held accountable to propose a positive correlation between the aforementioned variables, previous research provided support for the current findings. For instance, O'Connor et al. (2024) failed to prove any significant relationship between problematic TikTok use and upward physical appearance comparison. According to O'Connor et al. (2024), TikTok videos are more difficult to edit, eventually exposing users to more realistic and natural content, mitigating the adverse effect of upward social comparison. To sum, it is rather the engagement or involvement - through the allocation of cognitive and emotional resources- with the

content that is likely to act as a catalyst for social comparison, eventually resulting in appearance dissatisfaction and thinness inclination.

The first hypothesis was set forth to examine how certain patterns of exposure would lead to social comparison tendencies, proposing that greater engagement with these contents would trigger social comparison among the studied sample of emerging adults. Statistical analysis provided full support for this hypothesis. These findings align with existing research evidence that relate following fitspiration content to the emergence of social comparison tendencies, as Ariana et al. (2024) stated that engagement with video-based activity and appearance motivation resulted in upward appearance comparison.

The second and third proposed hypotheses predicted a positive relationship between upward social comparison tendencies and body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. Statistical analysis provided full support for the research assumptions, findings that resonated with a plethora of existing research evidence. For instance, Campbell (2022) stated that engagement in appearance-related social comparisons resulted in body image disturbance. This same finding can be extended regarding the drive for thinness. Thin ideals curated over TikTok through fitspiration videos trigger social comparison tendencies among users, eventually driving them to pursue the depicted largely unattainable thin figures; this finding is particularly true given the fact that appearance comparison tendencies are at their maximum among the chosen age category of adolescence.

The study further proposed that heightened engagement within TikTok fitspiration videos would eventually result in both body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. Statistical analysis provided full support for both postulations, accepting both H4 and H5. These aforementioned findings have been repeatedly supported in existing literature and proven valid across various social media platforms. Cohen (2020) found that exposure to appearance-focused social media was a significant predictor of body image concerns. In other terms, greater engagement in photo activities on Facebook, following appearance-focused accounts on Instagram, and greater investment in ‘selfie’ activities were all associated with body image concerns and eating disorders among

users. Similarly, Jerónimo and Carraça (2022)'s systematic review reported that exposure to "fitspiration" increased individuals' body dissatisfaction, negative mood, and more importantly, physical appearance comparisons, especially in younger populations. The review stated that following fistpiration content instigated individuals to pursue unrealistic body goals, with such exposure further associated with greater internalization for body ideals, which in turn is reflected in a greater tendency toward physical appearance social comparisons. This eventually resulted in greater body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Of similar stances, Griffiths et al. (2024) reported that exposure to TikTok exacerbated eating disorders through the platform's algorithm. Users' liking behavior contributed to the likelihood of the algorithm delivering a similar type of videos. Users with eating disorders were more inclined to liking dieting and toxic eating disorder videos. With "liking" behavior constituting a pattern of active engagement, this suggests that active engagement with dieting content is associated with exacerbating eating disorder symptoms among vulnerable users.

The last hypothesis examined the role of appearance comparison tendencies in mediating the relationship between engagement with fitspiration videos and body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness tendencies. It was predicted that for such effects to significantly occur, individuals would engage in a process of self-evaluation and comparison against the depicted TikTok bodily ideals. Such comparison would eventually result in a diminished sense of self-appreciation and body satisfaction, further triggering a drive for thinness. Statistical analysis provided partial support for the proposed hypothesis (H6) with appearance comparison fully mediating the relationship between engagement with TikTok videos and body dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, no support was provided regarding the mediating role of social comparison between engagement and drive for thinness. Previous research evidence has firmly established the mediating role of appearance comparison tendencies in exacerbating body dissatisfaction tendencies and even eating disorders. Dignard (2017) reported that viewing fitspiration and thinspiration resulted in lower body satisfaction and appearance self-esteem. Findings indicated that the effects of fitspiration and thinspiration on body satisfaction and appearance self-esteem were mediated by state appearance comparison.

Individuals exposed to fitspiration content were more inclined to engage in appearance comparisons, a finding that held true particularly among female users. Serlin (2020) reported that viewing Fitspiration social media resulted in a decline in an individual's state body satisfaction and appreciation. Most women portrayed in Fitspiration videos are thin, toned, highly sexualized, and objectified, rendering users more vulnerable to comparing themselves to these figures, which might lead to more negative feelings. Afana et al. (2021) reported that social comparison mediated the relationship between usage of image-based social media platforms (i.e. Instagram) and body image concerns. Similarly, Granhof (2024) found that the consumption of TikTok influences body image negatively. The more individuals consume fitness content on TikTok, the more negative body image they have. This was a direct result of younger generations' appearance comparison tendencies driven by extensive consumption of the various social media platforms, which promote highly idealistic and unachievable figures. With the same token, Pruett (2024) indicated that TikTok consumption was positively associated with indicators of body dissatisfaction. Mediation analyses established that thin-ideal internalization and upward appearance comparison act as significant mediators in the relationship between TikTok use and body dissatisfaction.

As per the drive for thinness, previous research has proved that exposure to fitspiration content resulted in eating disorders among women, apart from engagement in appearance comparisons. Beauty standards curated through various media and modern cultural norms frequently personify beauty through slim figures. Other research evidence has too stated that fitness videos did not trigger thinness motivation among users; it was rather thinspiration videos that triggered this effect. Stoneking (2018) reported that participants who viewed thinspiration images experienced a significant decrease in body image satisfaction which is often perceived as a contributing factor to the development of eating disorders. In their two-wave study, Martin et al. (2023) stated that there was a direct and positive relationship of thinspiration and fitspo exposure with body dissatisfaction and all disordered eating urges (i.e., restrictive eating, compensatory exercise, and binge-eating/purging). The findings suggest that women's disordered eating urges are only triggered or exacerbated by viewing

either thinspiration or fitspo images on social media as a result of these women's engagement in upward appearance comparisons (i.e., evaluate themselves disparagingly compared to depicted body ideals). On the other hand, the proposed mediation models were not supported in the time-lagged analyses; such that upward appearance comparisons did not mediate the effects of thinspiration and fitspo exposure on urges to engage in restrictive eating among the study sample.

Another plausible justification for the current finding can be attributed to the nature of the TikTok influencer followed by the study sample. The majority of the current study sample followed fitness trainers who, according to previous research evidence, trigger disordered eating behavior among followers regardless of whether or not they engage in appearance comparison. Bocci Benucci et al. (2024) indicated that following nutrition and fitness accounts (compared to entertainment accounts) and spending more time daily on social networks positively predicted eating disorder symptoms and body dissatisfaction.

Conclusion

This study investigated the dynamics of TikTok engagement, content consumption, and their psychosocial impacts among Gen Z. The findings reveal that TikTok is deeply integrated into the daily lives of this demographic, with many students exhibiting heavy usage patterns similar to global trends. The platform's design features contribute to heightened retention and potential behavioral addiction. Results proved a moderate level of engagement with fitness content, balanced between intentional following and algorithmic exposure, and identified gym trainers and fitness influencers as primary sources of fitness information, reflecting a preference for relatable figures among young adults.

Contrary to assumptions of widespread intense social comparison, a majority of the sample reported low levels, suggesting a more heterogeneous experience or differing interpretations of social comparison within this cohort. However, the data revealed a stronger drive for thinness than overall body dissatisfaction, highlighting a complex relationship with body ideals that may be influenced by the

conflict between pervasive fitspiration narratives and traditional cultural values.

Our hypothesis testing yielded several key insights into the proposed relationships. While no direct correlation was found between the intensity of following fitspiration content and social comparison tendencies, the study provided full support for the notion that greater engagement with TikTok content acts as a trigger for social comparison among emerging adults. Furthermore, the anticipated positive relationship between upward social comparison tendencies and both body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness was fully supported, consistent with established literature.

The role of appearance comparison as a mediator was partially supported; it fully mediated the relationship between engagement with TikTok videos and body dissatisfaction but not the drive for thinness. In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the specific context of TikTok's influence on Egyptian university students, revealing patterns of usage, content preference, and body image concerns that both align with and challenge global findings. The findings emphasize the need for a nuanced understanding of social media's impact, particularly regarding the distinction between general body dissatisfaction and a culturally reinforced drive for thinness.

Limitation and future recommendation:

Though the current work yields significant findings, nevertheless it bears a couple of limitations. The study was conducted on late adolescents who are heavy users of social media platforms particularly TikTok. These individuals are significantly vulnerable toward appearance comparison that result in multiple adverse outcomes including body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Had the study been conducted among a more diverse sample, this could have further manifested the ample adversaries resulting from this pattern of consumption. Conducting a comparison between early and late adolescents would have thrived the work. It is thus recommended that future work could be conducted encompassing a more diverse sample in terms of age category.

Further, while multiple evidence confirms the adverse impact of fitspiration content on females, recent work has stated that such effects are not exclusive among females only; in other terms, males are not immune to this influence. Consequently, it is recommended that future work could explore such gender impact particularly from a cultural standpoint that has frequently confined body image concerns upon females.

Reliance on self-reported measures can introduce bias, as participants may not accurately assess their body image or motivation. Individuals are likely to answer in a socially desirable manner; a fact that was evident through individuals' lack of expressing their social comparison tendencies. Social desirability bias may lead participants to underreport negative feelings about their body. It is thus recommended to conduct research that explores the long term effects of consuming these video centric contents rather than exploring short term effects only as body image and self-esteem can fluctuate over time.

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