

TikTok's Influence on Generation Z Female's Comparative Behavior

By

Brookelynn Dinkler

M.A. Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Communication in the School of Communication and the Arts at Liberty University,
Lynchburg, Virginia

Author Note

Brookelynn Christine Dinkler

I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to

Brookelynn Christine Dinkler.

Approvals

This Master's Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from
School of Communication and the Arts at Liberty University.

John Dunkle, Ph. D.
Thesis Chair

Marie Mallory, Ph. D.
Committee Member

Sheri Parmelee, Ph. D.
Committee Member

Date

Dedication

This research is dedicated to the future generations of women who begin to doubt their intrinsic value. May you grow and learn to be kind to yourself and understand the Imago Dei in which you have been created. I pray you remember the words spoken by your Creator and written in stone in Genesis 1:27, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

This research is dedicated to the women of past generations who have so tirelessly aimed to meet the fleeting and unattainable standards that have seemed to embed themselves in the minds of society as the definition of value. I hope you too have come to see that success and living is freedom from these comparisons and joy in realizing human failure and victory in Christ.

Acknowledgements

There are many people I wish to extend gratitude to. I first want to thank my heavenly Father. It is His grace and strength that has been the source of my inspiration and resilience. I am profoundly grateful for His divine guidance throughout this entire project.

Secondly, I gratefully acknowledge the invaluable guidance and support provided by Dr. John Dunkle who has walked with me through every step of this writing and research process. Dr. Dunkle has shown a contagious passion and expertise for research that has encouraged me immensely. This project would not have been completed without his guidance and readiness to meet my anxiousness with words of encouragement. I have become a better researcher, writer, theorist, student, teacher, and human as his student over the past two years.

Next, I would like to thank my committee member Dr. Marie Mallory, who has continuously inspired me as she has led the Department of Communication with such grace, passion for research and education, and genuine care for every individual. I would also like to thank my committee member Dr. Sheri Parmelee for providing valuable feedback that helped build this project into what it is. The advice and expertise of my committee have been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of my research.

Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to the people who have supported this project from a distance. A special thanks to my parents for their unwavering love, encouragement, and understanding during this academic journey. Thank you to Dr. Betsy Adelizzi, who has been so quick to offer advice, answer questions, and encouragement. Lastly, I want to thank my peers whose camaraderie, shared experiences, and encouragement have made the process of crafting this thesis both enriching and memorable.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to address TikTok's role in the comparative behaviors among Generation Z females. This study specifically evaluated the communication of society's perception of beauty standards and how it resonates with and influences TikTok users. A qualitative approach was taken to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of participants and fill the gap in qualitative media effects research. The research question being addressed was: How has TikTok influenced society's idea of physical beauty and body image concerns among Generation Z females? Through the lens of social comparison theory, the research found that the application TikTok itself plays a reinforcement role in communicating physical beauty standards and creates more opportunities for upward comparisons and therefore negative body image concerns among Generation Z females. Findings also show that content surrounding the physicality of an individual, like fitness and fashion content, leads to more upward comparisons and therefore negative body image concerns. Additional findings also include the positive mental health effects of TikTok and user lifestyle comparisons.

Keywords: TikTok, Generation Z, body image, beauty standards, upward comparisons

Table of Contents

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	8
<i>Chapter I: Introduction</i>	9
Rationale for Study.....	9
Background of the Study	13
The Problem/ Research Question	17
Limitations.....	19
Professional Significance	20
<i>Chapter II: Literature Review</i>	22
Related Literature	22
Generation Z.....	22
Social Media.....	24
TikTok	27
TikTok Controversary and Legalities.....	31
Media Effects.....	39
Physical Beauty Standards	45
Theoretical Overview	50
Social Comparison Theory	50
Uses and Gratification Theory.....	53
<i>Chapter III: Methodology</i>	57
Research Question & Design	57
Setting & Instrumentation	59
Participants	59
Data Organization & Analysis	60
<i>Chapter IV: Data Analysis & Results</i>	61
Demographics.....	61
Thematic Codes.....	64
Context of Use.....	69
Types of Comparisons	73

Types of Content	90
Virtual Community (VC) TikTok use for Creativity (TUC) TikTok Controversy (TC)	115
No influence/ Positive Experiences (NI).....	116
Summary	128
<i>Chapter V: DISCUSSION</i>	129
Discussion & Summary of Findings	129
Additional Findings	130
Limitations.....	134
Future Research.....	135
Conclusion.....	137
<i>References</i>	140
<i>APPENDIX A</i>	153

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 4. 1 Participant age Demographics	62
Figure 4. 3 Participant ethnicity Demographics.....	63
Figure 4. 4 Participant time spent on TikTok each day	64
Table 1: Codes and Themes	64
Table 2: Frequency of Codes and Themes.....	68
Table 3: Bored (BD) Data.....	69
Table 4: Bedtime (BT) Data	71
Table 5: Downward Comparisons (DC) Data.....	74
Table 6: Upward Comparisons (UC) Data.....	76
Table 7: Materialistic/ Lifestyle Comparisons (ML) Data	79
Table 8: Stranger Comparisons (SC) Data.....	84
Table 9: Peer Comparisons (PC) Data	87
Table 10: Fitness (FN) Data.....	91
Table 11: Fashion (FH) Data	95
Table 12: Depression/ Sadness (DP) Data	97
Table 13: Jealousy (JL) Data	100
Table 14: Attention Span (AS) Data.....	103
Table 15: Information Overload (IO) Data.....	104
Table 16: Nutrition/ Eating Habits (EH) Data	107
Table 17: Self Worth Criticism (SWC) Data.....	109
Table 18: Direct Effect on Body Image (DE) Data	112
Table 19: No Influence (NI) Data.....	117
Table 20: Positive Experiences (NI) Data	118
Table 21: Filters (BF) Data.....	124
Table 22: Aesthetics (AG) Data.....	127

Chapter I: Introduction

Social media plays a crucial role in communicating to Generation Z. “The use of social media by Gen Z is building high interest in researchers, decision makers & marketing/ service organizations as they believe it is influencing people’s behavior in different spheres” (Yadav & Rai, 2017, p. 110). Generation Z has grown up in unison with social media. Both Generation Z and social media have grown and changed at the very same time. Its symbiotic influence is significant. While Generation Z has highlighted the importance of mental health and positive body image, there is also a pattern to carve stories and opinions against the grain of society. This generation is ambitious, values justice and fairness, and appreciates creativity and personalization (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018, p. 49). Like no generation before, Generation Z is also one of the most concerned with physical and mental well-being (Ameen, Cheah, & Kumar, 2022, p. 2111). While social media is a technology for connecting to a greater community, society also receives influence on an individual level. Part of what is accepted and communicated to the social media user is the physical beauty standards established by society. Social media is one of the primary forms of connection a person has to society at this moment in time. Physical beauty standards, in general, have evolved and changed over the generations. Whether society accepts or works in opposition to these beauty standards has also changed. This study has taken a qualitative approach to understand how powerful social media, specifically TikTok, has influenced society’s perception of body image among Generation Z females.

Rationale for Study

Clampitt (2018) defines social media as “an electronic form of communication that is governed by the rules of platform providers; it allows users to share images and text within their selected communities” (p. 4). Clampitt’s definition of social media highlights the fact that social

media relies on technological means of communication and outlines communicative parameters. In addition, anybody with access to technology can use social media, and images and text can be shared with various sizes of specific communities (Clampitt, 2018, p. 8). If social media continues to develop at the rate it has, it will continue to have an exponential influence on the social behaviors of future generations (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). The internet and email connected individuals to society on a level of speed and accessibility that individuals had not accessed before its invention. As platforms like Myspace, Facebook, and X (formally Twitter) developed, they paved the way for faster and more significant universal connections. Now, with Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok added to the picture, the accessibility and influence of multimedia connection and communication have never been easier.

Prakash Yadav and Rai (2017), in studying Generation Z and their social media usage, wrote, “This generation is a vigorous contributor, high consumer of online content...they have a strong gravitational bond for online communication that they prefer to participate and remain connected via technology available at fingertips” (p. 111). While interpersonal communication will remain relevant to study, research on multimedia communication will continue to increase and evolve as different media outlets develop. Regarding Generation Z, this is particularly important to learn because this generation was born into social media. “The first social media site to reach a million monthly active users was Myspace – it achieved this milestone around 2004. This is arguably the beginning of social media as we know it” (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019, para. 6). Today, social media makes up a significant fraction of multimedia communication. What is communicated, and how does this impact society's behavior and thoughts? This study sought to answer questions concerning a pattern that plagues the comparative nature of humans throughout

history. A previous study on the influence social media has on the body image of Generation Z consumers writes,

Generation Z has been classified as the least confident generation in comparison with previous generations, causing its members anxiety and leading them to experience increasing pressure due to the rise of social media, which can make problems like bullying or body image issues more intense than they were in the past. (Chappet, 2019, as cited in Ameen, Cheah, & Kumar, 2022, p. 2112)

Research has found a correlation between social media use and the psychological effects it leads to when used excessively (Ameen et al., 2022). According to a 2022 research article, "...trust in social media celebrities and addictive use of social media can affect these women's body image, purchase behavior, and self-esteem" (Ameen et al., p. 2111). To gain a greater understanding, research about social media's communicative intricacies and individual responses is necessary for meeting the psychosomatic well-being of individuals of Generation Z. The individual must gain awareness and understanding on an intrapersonal level of the influence social media possesses by communicating beauty standards and how this may influence behavior. In addition, on a professional level, this research contributes to the study of mass media communication and the lengths of its socio-psychological influence. As the field of multi and mass-media communication grows, so does the role that research can play in understanding the motives and intentions behind the messages and how they are received and processed through technology.

According to the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies, there were 4.9 billion people, which is 63% of the 7.84 billion people in the world who were active internet users in 2021 (ITU, Facts

and Figures, 2021, p. 1). This data means that well over half of the world population in 2021 had some kind of online presence, whether through social media or any means of technology.

Because social media is one of the first modes of connection to society among Generation Z, companies have altered their way of marketing and appealing to such large audiences. A study regarding news outlets' adaption to TikTok concluded that,

We observe uncommon media practices – such as funny and everyday videos or challenges – together with adaptations of more classic formats – such as news or interview fragments. Sometimes, the content moves away from journalism to approach young audiences in their natural habitat. They do not literally dance the news, but they position the brand and show work behind the scenes in a causal and musical atmosphere that seems appropriate for the TikTok audience. (Vazquez-Herrero et al., 2022, p. 1729)

Although this is relevant among many organizations, this study specifically covered beauty standards communicated through society. According to Ameen, Cheah, and Kumar (2022), “The rise of influencer marketing, particularly targeting younger demographics, proves that word of mouth on social media plays a significant part in shaping the preferences of these young consumers” (p. 2115). Companies have utilized social media platforms and “influencers” to communicate an ideal standard of beauty. According to Phillips & Halder (2019), these possibly unrealistic standards target the female population, often leading to unhealthy mental and physical habits. Because Generation Z is a significant presence on certain social media websites, it is no surprise that it influences their self-esteem, confidence, and definition of beauty. Research on this topic will contribute to the system of marketing and what appeals to the target audience of Generation Z. The implications of these findings have the potential to influence young

consumers by creating more awareness and desire to carry out further research on the influence such a sizeable communicative platform has on this generation.

Background of the Study

Generation Z includes anyone born between 1996 and 2012 (Scwieger & Ladwig, 2018). This generation was born into the world of social media and technology. According to Yadav and Rai (2017), “Gen Z is the first to have Internet technology so readily available, and they have been exposed to an unprecedented amount of technology in their upbringing, courtesy of the web revolution that occurred throughout the 1990s” (p. 111). As with every generation, monumental influences have positive and negative effects on the generation. Generation Y is the digital generation; the introduction of television marks Baby Boomers, Generation X saw personal computers, and Generation Z is the first to grow up with smartphones at their fingertips. As they mature, each generation develops and builds certain shared qualities, work ethics, attitudes, and learning capabilities based on their socioeconomic class, culture, and geographic locations (Yadav & Rai, 2017, p. 111). What Generation Z surpasses in their ability to create, develop, and connect over technology, they lack in their interpersonal communication engagement skills. Ladwig & Schweiger (2018) write,

Gen Zers have never known a world in which they could not instantly connect and have information and communication channels immediately at their fingertips. Thus, many in this generation prefer to socialize online rather than face-to-face, a change which is both positively and negatively affecting society. (p. 46)

This generational phenomenon could have been enhanced by the influence of COVID-19 during their educational and formative years. The world going virtual for a year could have contributed to the preference to communicate and engage with society through a screen rather than a face.

With Generation Z identified, the concept of social media needs a definition to articulate the study accurately. Although a couple of different definitions proposed by researchers will be further evaluated in this study, there are two criteria these definitions have in common. The first is that social media takes place electronically. The second is a space to create and share content among a community of users. The beginning of social media as we know it is arguably MySpace, the first social media site to reach a million active users in 2004 (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019, para. 6). It is fascinating how quickly a message, when communicated on a social media platform, can influence the social behaviors of the consumers. Ultimately, this has been observed since the introduction of social media. Ortiz-Ospina (2019) writes, “Something that is today part of the everyday life of one-third of the world population, was unthinkable less than a generation ago” (para. 39). Today, Facebook remains the most popular platform with sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok following behind (We Are Social et al., 2023). Ortiz-Ospina (2019) continues to note, “Social media platforms like Facebook reach one-in-three people in the world. In most rich countries, the proportion of young people using social networks exceeds 90%” (para. 6). As less developed countries begin to gain access to technology and smart devices, the activity, usage, and influence of social networking sites will increase. Global access to social networking sites is not an inherently bad thing. On the contrary, this provides an avenue for worldwide connection and communication that we have not witnessed in previous generations. Although, like almost any new invention, there is an opportunity cost. In this case, it prompts the question of whether the negative impacts of society on society outweigh the positive contributions.

It is worth considering that it is not the concept of social media that poses a risk to society but the people behind the platform. The idea of an “influencer” is a new title and occupation that

would not have been associated with social media less than a generation ago. The title “influencer” is not reserved for political and celebrity figures that influence their fans, but it is more closely associated with social media users with a large following. An “influencer” does not necessarily occupy ample space in pop culture; instead, their job is solely dedicated to making brand deals, advertising, and opening their lives to their following. According to Ameen, Cheah, and Kumar (2022), “The rise of influencer marketing, particularly targeting younger demographics, proves that word of mouth on social media plays a significant part in shaping the preferences of these young consumers” (p. 2115). Beauty preferences, in particular, are now being defined and communicated through social media pictures and influences. This raises the question of whether beauty standards communicated through social media from such large influencers play a role in Generation Z’s generational anxiety and low self-esteem. From where should physical beauty standards stem? From a Christian worldview, beauty standards derive from Genesis 1. From the beginning, humans were created as Image Bearers to the Creator. Buddhists regard beauty not for material things but for virtuous inward characteristics (Cooper, 2017). Indian aesthetics are more interested in the emotional experiences associated with beauty rather than a Western idolization of what is seen (Higgins, 2017). Despite the geographic location, beliefs, and cultural differences, there is no argument that societal physical and aesthetic beauty standards have evolved since the beginning of time. Partha Mitter (2017) writes, “All societies lay down clear criteria for standards of physical beauty which are often asserted to be self-evident and universal” (p. 79). For example, the concept of beauty in India has transformed from a spiritual association to a focus on physical attraction, much like in the West (Pande, 2017). Society responds to these ideals by doing whatever it can to fit this mold that has been socially constructed. Media plays a role in this by idolizing these desired traits. For

example, Eva Kit Wah Man (2017), in discussing the evolution of beauty among women in China, writes,

International fashion magazines like Vogue, Elle, and Marie Claire – in their Chinese versions -are no doubt shaping the female beauty standards of the country. They are directing Chinese women to dress and carry themselves in internationally fashionable ways. (p. 117)

There seems to be a pattern of specific public figures, “influencers,” and celebrities that adopt these traits, and then society follows suit.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a social media trend of short, choreographed dances swept the world. The platform this took place on, TikTok, was created in 2016 and surpassed applications (apps) like WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube in popularity in 2018 (Dirir, 2022, p. 4). Soon, many businesses, organizations, and celebrities joined the app to promote products, influence, and market to younger audiences. TikTok reported that in 2021, more than 1 billion people around the world use TikTok every month (*Thanks a billion*, 2021, para. 1). Social networking platforms are a powerful source of influence to this generation because of the digitalization of Generation Z. According to Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project, 33% of TikTok users have reported accessing their regular news consumption from this app (2022, para. 4). It makes sense that many businesses are utilizing TikTok now to market to younger audiences because of how powerful of a communicator it is to this generation. In a study by Dirir (2022) on the influence TikTok has on Generation Z, he reports that 70.8% of his participants found immense trust and credibility in their favorite influencers (p. 8). Regarding Generation Z consumers, Dirir (2022) writes, “Generation Z...which statistically represents 20.2% of the world population today, and that’s a large size of the target population if any company wants to

sell its product or service” (p. 3). This app has found its popularity through the utilization of short looped videos that users can soundtrack to a vast selection of music or unique sounds to promote comedic relief, lifestyle, or dance (Stahl & Literat, 2022, p. 5). As of October 2022, TikTok is available in 150 countries, with Generation Z making up 60% of its users (Doyle, 2022, p. 11). TikTok can now make videos up to three minutes in length and feed the user content related to their interests and hobbies. The “ForYou” capability is unique to TikTok in that the app considers videos that the user has liked, shared, and spent time watching, and it creates a feed with similar videos. The app has influenced social media sites like Instagram, where it is expected to find originally made TikToks shared as reels. The app only requires an attention span of a couple of seconds, is customized to the interests and liking of the user, and uses video graphics and entertaining elements that satisfy the creative and fast-paced categorized mentality of Generation Z (Dirir, 2022, p. 5). TikTok is one of the leading mass media communicators to Generation Z today. Therefore, this generation can be both positively and negatively influenced.

The Problem/ Research Question

Beauty standards have evolved dramatically over the generations. As TikTok rises in popularity, its influence on Generation Z’s beauty and identity is also highly likely to increase. Throughout recent history, people have changed their appearance to fit the mold set by society. In the current era, this mold is most dramatically set and communicated over technology since this is Generation Z’s preferred avenue for connection (Yadav & Rai, 2017, p. 111). This prompts researchers to question whether society seeking to fit the physical beauty standards established by society should be tolerated.

An ethical dilemma, as described by Corporate Finance Institute (2022), “is offering a client a worse product for your own profit or utilizing inside knowledge for your own profit” (para. 22). In this circumstance, on one side of social media, it is seen that Generation Z consumers receive messages that feed poor mental health and well-being practices. On the other side, businesses and influencers are maintaining profit through unattainable messages of beauty and value. These messages are indirectly communicated through pictures and products that promise a result. This phenomenon has been happening for generations and can be predicted to continue. The problem is, according to Phillips and Halder (2019) and previous research, unrealistic images are being created via applications and shared as ideal further enhancing unhealthy habits and body dissatisfaction for consumers (p. 112). Researchers Seekis, Bradley, and Duffy (2020) write about celebrities promoting unrealistic beauty standards, “...It follows that users who are exposed to these images and who desire both to emulate these standards and to be seen as fashionable may be vulnerable to body image concerns” (p. 379). In addition, as less developed countries gain access to social networking sites like TikTok, the benefits and risks, like its influence on mental health, will permeate. While this issue is relevant to both males and females, this study will seek to contribute to the larger conversation at hand and focus on the media effects of TikTok content on females' comparative behavior. Social media is a straightforward connection to airbrushed, face-tuned, photoshopped messages that can change the behavioral and belief patterns of the consumer. Just like any medium of communication, social media also can distort and use messages for gain. In this case, it has always been at the risk of the consumer and will continue to be if this pattern persists (Seekis et al., 2020).

This study sought to explain and understand the connection between body image and social media and the phenomenon of multimedia messages influencing cognitive behavior.

Through the lens of social comparison theory, this study has gained a deeper insight into TikTok's role in communicating beauty standards. This research aimed to identify how social media can influence behavior based on messages. This study has answered the following research question:

RQ 1: How has TikTok influenced society's idea of physical beauty and body image concerns among Generation Z females?

This study has provided a deeper insight into Generation Z's motives and behavioral patterns as they are being fed messages indirectly through TikTok.

Limitations

A few limitations are essential to consider in this study, such as the benefits of social networking sites and those in society that do not choose to communicate on such platforms. While it does consider the positive contributions of social media, the direction of this study did not focus on the many benefits and tools social networking sites bring to the table. Global connection and correspondence have never been so easily accessible. This tool has been an incredible resource for businesses, families, and individuals. Social media has widened the room for creative and artistic dialogue by allowing a space for creators, entrepreneurs, and businesses to connect. In addition, it has provided a means of income for some. The title of an “influencer” has become popular since the emergence of social media. An “influencer” is an individual looking to showcase their lifestyle to their large following and, as a result, receive a profit (Phillips & Halder, 2019, p. 106). Their income is usually made through partnerships and brand deals. Like any form of communication, risks are involved based on the intent and motives of the messages. While this study highlighted messages that influence behavior at the user’s risk, it does not discount the countless benefits social networking sites have contributed to society.

In addition, this study focused on Generation Z consumers. Generation Z is usually only identified with technological advancement and social media consumption. In most cases, there are exceptions to the norms studied. Some individuals do not interact or communicate over social networking sites, specifically TikTok. For this study, there was a focus on the social media site TikTok and participants who regularly interact with this application.

Professional Significance

Social media and communication mediums will continue to evolve as technology advances. Understanding how messages communicated over new platforms like TikTok alter human behavior will benefit the field of communication, businesses as message senders, and consumers as message receivers. As mass media communication grows, so will the need to research its influences and capacity. This study contributes to the influence mass media communication has on an intrapersonal level. This is especially true in comprehending how one context of communication can influence another. In addition, communication through technology is constantly growing. With virtual reality now introduced and global interaction at our fingertips, messages are being sent and received like never before. Today, messages are quicker, can be edited, photoshopped, and even sent out on a more accessible platform than ever. Generation Z is utilizing technological mass media communication, unlike any previous generation. Therefore, this project will provide insight into understanding further human communication behavior and patterns.

This study attempted to identify a pattern of cognitive and behavioral influences of businesses', organizations', or "influencers'" communication of idealized beauty through social media. As the consumers receive these messages, they either profit from the sender and validate their influence or look the other way. The dilemma is that too many people are taking this risk

further, fueling the poor mental and physical well-being that plagues Generation Z. This study will contribute to the understanding and awareness of both the receiver and sender in this circumstance. The sender (businesses, organizations, “influencers”) will hopefully understand the lengths of their communicative influence on society. Psychologist V. Diller (2011) records that there has already been pushback for beauty companies to advertise against what has historically been done to maintain perfect physical beauty standards (para. 3). Also, this study benefits the consumers’ abilities to identify this dilemma in their own life and take whatever means necessary to put a halt to the intrapersonal conflict this dilemma possesses. The next chapter will continue by reviewing the previous sufficient literature to understand the direction and importance of the study outcomes.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Chapter II discusses the previous and current research regarding the research topic. This literature review discusses media effects, communication theory, and social media research. The discussion and analysis of prior literature helped construct appropriate codes and themes expected in the research data.

Related Literature

Generation Z

To best communicate with the next generation, studying and understanding the motives and heart of the up-and-coming population is necessary. As with each generation, there are general strengths and weaknesses that a generation possesses due to the state of the world and its influence on society. Generation Z, in particular, is marked by technology being introduced to them early on in life. The Millennial Generation (born between 1981 and 1996) came to know social networking sites and technology later in life, while Gen Z has never known a life apart from social media. Shwieger and Ladwig (2018) consider multiple studies on Generation Z to highlight its unique characteristics when preparing and equipping students as they enter the workforce. Their research (2018) identifies the context in which Generation Z has developed its positive and negative characteristics (Shwieger & Ladwig).

These individuals born between 1996 and 2012 have grown up in a world with political tension, violence, societal instability, and the means to connect globally at their fingertips (Shwieger & Ladwig, 2018, p. 46). This means their connection to technology has never been so accessible and efficient. This access to search engines gave these individuals the incentive to seek information on their own and the ability to seek new skills frequently and more efficiently (Shwieger & Ladwig, pp. 46-47). These attributes of self-sufficiency and creativity have been

embedded into their societal upbringing. Platforms like YouTube and Google give fingertip access to unanswered questions and sought-after skills. Because of this, it is reported that Generation Z students are more likely to take the nontraditional route of seeking out their specific field of interest through online school and entering the workforce (Shwieger & Ladwig, p. 47). With any great invention and the positive contribution it brings to society, there are also risks involved.

Because media technology has always been so readily available and accessible for Generation Z, it may be the most comfortable method of communication for these individuals. While this is efficient, it does include behavioral impacts. Yadav and Rai (2017) conducted a research collection in *The Global Journal of Enterprise Information Systems* to best understand how social media influences the individual and Generation Z population. Yadav and Rai write, “Generation Z are having a strong ‘virtual bonding,’ and it helps youngsters to break out from emotional and psychological struggles they face offline” (p. 111). Communicating virtually is easy, efficient, and thrives off the same independence that motivates the self-sufficiency of this generation. A Gen Z individual feels more comfortable connecting with others virtually because this has been programmed into the society in which they have developed. Unfortunately, this does pose some adverse side effects. Yadav and Rai find that there not only can be less control over personal information and the desire for popularity, but also excessive use of social media is influencing “all basic aspects of individual-level outcomes like psychosomatic, sentimental and physical well-being and societal progress” (p. 112). While technology is pushing society along within the realm of connection efficiency, Yadav and Rai shed light on the implications on an individual level. All of these implications seem to have the excessive use of social media in common.

To gain a deeper understanding and logistics of real-world problems, Ortiz-Ospina gathers data regarding social media's presence in our world today. In an unweighted record, it is recorded that 90% of people aged 16-24 utilized social networks across a selection of countries in 2014 (OECD, Society at a Glance, 2014). In addition, "Social media platforms like Facebook reach one-in-three people in the world" (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019, para. 1). Though Ortiz-Ospina's collection of data is shocking and telling of the state at which Generation Z is consumed with social media, it also contributes to the prediction this generational phenomenon has on future generations. Yes, the rise he writes about pertains to the creation and duration of social media and its future implications. As countries continue to develop, access to technology and social networking sites will only grow, increasing its implications. "Something that is today part of the everyday life of one-third of the world population, was unthinkable less than a generation ago" (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019, para. 39). The presence of social media sites will likely continue to expand and develop. Future generations will face the dilemma of balancing both positive and negative implications. Studies that provide depth on the cognitive and behavioral side effects of social networking sites are essential to prepare future generations to face this dilemma.

Social Media

According to We Are Social, DataReportal, and Meltwater, as of January 2023, Facebook had 2,958 million users, Instagram had 2,000 million users, TikTok had 1,051 million users, and Pinterest sat at 291 million users. Al-Menayes conducted a study in 2015 that analyzed the motivations behind people's use of social media. Results indicate that the longer someone experiences social media, the more likely they will use the site for personal unity and entertainment (Al-Menayes, 2015, p. 48). Al-Menayes also analyzed users' motivation to use social media using the uses and gratifications theory. Through this, Al-Menayes (2015) expands

on certain gratifications like the ability to connect over large distances, popularity linked to a certain number of followers, the ability to control their communication, and the ability to establish relationships with like-minded communities (p. 44). Social media provides excellent benefits and contributions to multi-media connection and marketing. Ameen, Cheah, and Kumar (2022) studied how augmented reality and the use of artificial intelligence with beauty brands influence the purchasing behavior of Generation Z female consumers. In this study, they write, “Beauty brands such as Mac, Sephora, and L’Oreal have developed software applications that allow consumers to try on make-up virtually” (Ammen et al., p. 2111). The findings of this study showed how augmented reality directly influences buyer behavior and self-esteem (Ammen et al., p. 2111). An avenue businesses and organizations tend to take to build buyer trust is through trusted social media influencers. In this same study, Ameen, Cheah, and Kuman write, “The rise of influencer marketing, particularly targeting younger demographics, proves that word of mouth on social media plays a significant part in shaping the preferences of these young consumers” (p. 2115).

Social networking can be challenging to define, given the variety of platforms. Many researchers have proposed different definitions of social media. Yadav and Rai (2018) define social media as “any electronic service through which Internet users can create and share a variety of contents over the Internet” (p. 111). Social media has found itself in the social entertainment sphere of influence and within academics and business endeavors. It has broken the barriers to connecting and virtually socializing with family and friends. Social media can be a portfolio for a creative designer, a business opportunity, and a source of income for many. Clampitt (2018) defines social media as “an electronic form of communication that is governed by the rules of platform providers; it allows users to share images and text within their selected

communities” (p. 4). Clappitt (2018) organized social media under five specific criteria. First, social media takes place over technology; therefore, it is an electric form of communication (p. 4). Second, Clappitt notes that social media is governed by the rules and parameters of the platform (p. 4). This means there are criteria and limits for specific posts on different platforms. On Instagram, one cannot post more than ten photos at a time, and X (formally known as Twitter) has a 280-character limit. Next, Clappitt (2018) writes that anyone and everyone has access to communicate on social media, and platforms are not reserved for a specific type of person. In addition, to share images and texts over social media, users can form communities of various sizes and interests (Clappitt, 2018). Knowing this definition and formula for social media will help evaluate the different types of mediums and what they offer. On many other platforms, the opportunities to connect are endless. In a cross-cultural study on the pattern of social media use, body image, and psychological well-being, Lee et al. (2014) found,

Social media permits people to produce and create their own messages and images while providing the opportunity for extensive dissemination, just like traditional mass media.

However, social media messages can be created quickly and can be altered and responded to almost instantaneously through comments and editing. (p. 1346)

This study concluded that exposure to images that display society's idea of perfect beauty standards could be unavoidable due to the hundreds of pictures communicated through mass media on any given day. Repeated exposure to these images and a high likelihood of social comparison can lead to body dissatisfaction and a broken perspective of physical beauty standards (Lee et al., 2018, p. 1344).

TikTok

Facebook drives the current research regarding media effects due to its popularity in previous generations. While Facebook has been the focus of prior research regarding social media communication, there is less research on newer platforms like TikTok concerning the influence on the mental health of its consumers. TikTok has become a huge platform for businesses and marketers to target younger audiences. TikTok is currently available in 150 different countries and has been downloaded over 200 million times in the United States (Doyle, 2022, para. 1) TikTok released an announcement in 2021 that said over 1 billion people are actively using the platform each month (*Thanks a billion!*, 2021, para. 1). In addition, Pew Research Center's Journalism Project (2022) posited that 33% of TikTok users have said they regularly get their news from this application (para. 4). TikTok has proven to be an influential global medium of communication, especially among Generation Z. According to a study by Dirir (2022) on the impact of TikTok on Generation Z's buying behaviors, over half of TikTok's users that are of Generation Z represent 20.2% of the world population today, meaning this is a large target population to sell a product or service (p. 3). This study also found that 70% of its participants attributed high credibility to their favorite TikTok influencers when considering buying and purchasing new products (Dirir, 2022, p. 8). This is just one study on how TikTok has been used by business and marketing strategies. While there is a multitude of research regarding TikTok being used as a business and marketing strategy, research is lacking on the influence TikTok has on the user's body image concerns. In a Quantitative study on media sharing networks' effectiveness in growing small businesses, researchers Tonja Von Oehsen & Daniela Soto Betancourt (2021) found that using a combination of trending sounds and hashtags on TikTok will help push content to a broader range of audiences (p.33). These marketing tactics

are something that small businesses could use to their advantage to promote their product or service to a larger audience. In another case study in 2021, researchers found that the application TikTok can be very effective for product promotion among young people (Pieter, Massie, & Saerang). This same study was specifically focused on the youth's intention to buy products and concluded that "they feel helped because TIK TOK application can make it easier for them to recognize, know, and determine their intention to buy products" (Pieter, Massies, & Saerang, 2021, p. 18). Furthermore, researcher Parichat Jaipong (2023) analyzed TikTok as a business model and strategy and found that

Brands may reach millions of users with challenges since hashtags are discoverable. The creator Marketplace on TikTok lets marketers establish marketing campaigns, view influencer stats, and interact with top influencers. Authentic content, challenges, influencer marketing, and TikTok commercials can boost sales and brand recognition. (p. 1)

In analyzing TikTok's strengths, Jaipong (2023) highlighted many young users with the power to spend, the app's convenience, the activity and characteristics of the app, the high market share, and the advanced algorithms and technologies of TikTok (p. 6). A large trend on TikTok is the number of challenges that surface over the application. These challenges can be related to anything and tend to spread very quickly over the social media platform. Researchers in 2020 sought to identify what motivated consumers to engage with these challenges and how businesses could utilize challenges to promote their specific product or service through the uses and gratifications theory. They found that entertainment is the key motivator for consumer participation and suggest marketers utilize challenges to reach a greater audience (Ahlse, Nilsson & Sandstrom, 2020, pp. 51-52). All of these studies have acknowledged the gap in research

regarding TikTok in general due to its newness. Because of this research gap, this study focuses on the communicative influences of TikTok.

TikTok was created in 2016 in China, expanded in 2018, and rose to popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Vazquez-Herrero et al., 2022, p. 1721). Now large businesses and corporations are joining TikTok to communicate their messages to younger audiences. They are finding ways to adapt their information to meet the trends and interests of Generation Z. Vazquez-Herrero, Negreira- Rey and Lopez-Garcia (2022) analyzed the communication of news media and TikTok through content analysis. Their findings for news organizations note that “they do not literally dance the news, but they position the brand and show the work behind the scenes in a casual and musical atmosphere that seems appropriate for the TikTok audience” (Vazquez-Herrero et al., p. 1729). The way this app is developed satisfies Generation Z's fast-paced and creative mentality (Dirir, 2022, p. 5). News media outlets are met with the task of communicating information across generations effectively. Generation Boomer and the Silent/Greatest Generation may be more inclined to receive media with which they are most familiar, the newspaper. On the other hand, news outlets have utilized social media platforms to communicate messages in order to meet the needs and communication preferences of younger generations. Ultimately, this highlights how powerful a communicator social media can be.

In addition to the research concerning TikTok itself, there is a gap in qualitative research regarding media effects. Jennings (2022) sought to mend this gap through her qualitative study regarding college-aged women and TikTok's influence on body image. Jennings's conclusions read that some women said videos meant to constructively promote a healthy lifestyle drove them to question their own eating habits and promote disordered eating thoughts (p. 16). In addition, Jennings maintains, “After a while, some participants could no longer watch “What I

eat in a Day Videos” on TikTok and practiced levels of avoiding the content” (p. 16). While Jennings’ study contributes to the qualitative research regarding social media effects and body image through interviews, this study sought data through a slightly different qualitative methodological approach. Though TikTok has made efforts to ban content that promotes disordered eating, this has not removed the possibility that this can be communicated (TikTok Legal Privacy, 2020).

García, Daly, and Sánchez-Cabezudo (2016) take an extensive look at the different types of social media influencers. They preface the findings by explaining how social media analysis can be useful in interpreting the influential phenomena of the transmission of opinions and beliefs (Garcia et al., p. 27). A large avenue in which this is done is through social media influencers. “Social media influencers (SMIs) can be defined as a new type of independent actor who are able to shape audience attitudes through the use of social media channels in competition and coexistence with professional media” (Garcia et al., 2016, p. 27). Naturally, celebrities tend to have a larger follower count, which makes them as prime candidates for brand deals. When female consumers see celebrities whom they associate positive feelings with, this builds their trust in the product they are buying, which fuels their level of self-esteem (Ammen et al., 2022, p.2115). Popular celebrity opinions tend to hold societal influence. The only difference in this generation is the quick access to the opinion, and greater audience reaches on behalf of the influencer. While this is a great tool for marketers, businesses, and social media influencers to utilize, users must be careful of the negative effect this may have. Phillips and Halder (2019) contribute to *The Advances in Sciences and Humanities Journal* with their research on how social media has influenced the way society perceives itself by writing,

A growing trend amongst these social media influencers is showcasing their lifestyle which include their diet and exercise routines, which can give the impression that in order to look like one's favorite celebrity one must of the same things that are being shown.

(Phillips & Halder, p.106)

This phenomenon is rooted in comparison which leads to the poor self-esteem, body image, and negative cognitive and behavioral side effects of Generation Z and their use of social media today.

TikTok Controversary and Legalities

Over the past five years, TikTok and its CEO, Shou Zi Chew, have received significant backlash from European and United States governments through lawsuits trying to ban the application from inside national borders. Many of these efforts have succeeded but failed to restrict the use of the application on an individual level. TikTok has been an especially hot topic of debate in 2023 following its rise and popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew testified in front of Congress on March 23rd, 2023, in response to the FBI's launch of investigation on the application for data and privacy concerns. However, the social network faced allegations back in 2019 when it was named Musical.ly for the illegal collection of personal data from children, which violated the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (Federal Trade Commission, 2019, para. 1). In a joint statement from the Federal Trade Commission (2019), "Agency staff uncovered disturbing practices, including collecting and exposing the location and other sensitive data of young children. In our view, these practices reflected the company's willingness to pursue growth even at the expense of endangering children" (para. 1). The social networking site ended up paying \$5.7 million in settlement (Federal Trade Commission, 2019, para. 1). Continuing this timeline, in 2020, 21 separate

federal lawsuits were filed, which were eventually combined into one, for the improper collection of personal data. While disagreeing with the allegations, TikTok finally agreed to a \$92 million settlement to compensate impacted users and avoid litigation (Heiligenstein, 2023, para. 27). All of the allegations made on TikTok from the United States, in particular, seem to come down to concerns regarding TikTok's parent company, ByteDance. Roger Chen and Rui Ma (2022) write in Harvard Business Review,

At just 10 years old, ByteDance, the most valuable startup in the world, has shattered records for growth. In 2021, with 1.9 billion monthly active users in 150 countries and an employee base of over 110,000, the company recorded an astonishing \$58 billion in revenues. (para. 1)

The Chinese-owned company and owner of TikTok has become a powerful force in the world of social media technology and was set for an internal investigation in 2022 for the misuse of American data to track Forbes journalists. In an exclusive by Emily Baker-White (2022), she writes,

An internal investigation by ByteDance, the parent company of video-sharing platform TikTok, found that employees tracked multiple journalists covering the company, improperly gaining access to their IP addresses and user data in an attempt to identify whether they had been in the same locales as ByteDance employees. (para. 1)

Many fear that the Chinese government could force ByteDance into revealing user data if forced. The investigation in 2022 revealed that ByteDance does indeed have access to personal data and put many at unease, knowing their data could be tracked if those in control desired. The social media app's CEO stood in front of Congress for five hours, defending the integrity of the

application. In TikTok CEO Chew's (2023) written statement of testimony before Congress, he writes,

Let me state this unequivocally: ByteDance is not an agent of China or any other country...Rather, our approach has been to work transparently and cooperatively with the U.S. government and Oracle to design robust solutions to address concerns about TikTok's heritage. (p.10)

In response to national security concerns and to restore trust in the American people, TikTok developed Project Texas (Perault & Sacks, 2023, para. 6). TikTok's statement on Project Texas is summarized by the intent to make every American TikTok user feel safe and secure that their data is free from outside influence (TikTok, n.d., para. 2). TikTok argues,

All-access to protected U.S. user data and the systems that power TikTok in the U.S. will be monitored and tightly controlled by TikTok USDS. USDS leaders and employees will report to an independent board, not to TikTok or ByteDance executives. This structure is designed to insulate USDS and its employees from any outside pressure to grant unauthorized access to user data or systems. (para. 11)

Whether this plan is sufficient to maintain and keep U.S. data safe continues to be debated and investigated. USDS (United States Data Security), established by TikTok in July of 2022, will be governed by an independent board of directors nominated by TikTok and reviewed by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS). The United States Data Security team will then report to CFIUS (Perault & Sacks, 2023, para. 13). According to TikTok, the most recent progression toward this plan is as of January 2023, their first dedicated transparency center went online in Columbia, Maryland, allowing Oracle (the platform that will monitor data flow)

engineers to begin testing TikTok source code (TikTok, n.d., para. 1). Whether this project will ensure the safety and security of all United States data continues to be up to debate among the public.

Previously, executive movements directed towards TikTok and its parent company have been carried out. President Donald Trump unsuccessfully sought to ban TikTok on a national level in 2020 by prohibiting any transactions with ByteDance and its subsidiaries (Trump, 2020, para. 7). President Biden signed and approved a bill to ban TikTok from all federal government devices in response to U.S. data collection and national security concerns (Bhuiyan, 2022, para. 1). This movement from Biden moved state governors to call on their state institutions to ban TikTok on government devices and networks. Many universities across the U.S. have released statements restricting TikTok access from its wireless network. Governor of Texas Greg Abbott released a directive to State Agency Heads on December 7th, 2022 that called for a ban of TikTok on all government-issued devices. An excerpt from his statement reads, “Because of these threats, effective immediately, every state agency in Texas shall ban its officers and employees from downloading or using TikTok on any of its government-issued devices. This TikTok ban extends to all state-issued cell phones, laptops, tablets, desktop computers, and other devices capable of internet connectivity” (Abbott, 2022, pp.1-2). In response, The University of Texas released a statement noticing students and faculty that TikTok has now been blocked from all devices connected to the Universities wireless network (UT Austin, 2023, para. 2). Similarly, The Iowa Board of Regents called on all institutions that fall under their jurisdiction to ban access to the application from their network (Board of Regents, State of Iowa, 2023, para. 2). In compliance with the Governor Kevin Stitt’s executive order for the state of Oklahoma to remove TikTok from government networks and devices, many Oklahoma Universities like Oklahoma University, Langston University, and Oklahoma State University complied (KOCO Staff, 2023, para. 3). According to the Montana

University System Commissioner's Directive, all 16 institutions that fall under the Montana University System must block access to the application on wired or wireless network and must remove the application from all university owned devices (Christian, 2023, para. 2). Montana is a state that has made progressive legal measures to ban the application statewide. According to the 2023 Montana Legislature, Montana issued a bill effective January 1st, 2024. If upheld, mobile application stores will be fined \$10,000 for either the operation or the distribution of the application for each day it is in violation (Montana Legislative Services, 2023). This bill was met with great opposition by both users and TikTok itself. Many TikTok users disagreed with this act of legislation and thought it was against their First Amendment rights; therefore, they sued the State of Montana. TikTok users filed a lawsuit against the state of Montana, and TikTok itself filed a lawsuit in hopes to block the Montana ban. In the court filing, they stated their legal action is due to the singling out of the platform despite all other social media, a violation of First Amendment rights, federal preemption, and a violation of the commerce clause stated in the constitution (TikTok v Montana, 2023, pp. 5-6). The American Civil Liberties Union issued a coalition letter to the Montana House of Representatives expressing their concern and urging Congress members to oppose the bill and that their First Amendment Rights are being violated if the ban on TikTok is upheld (ACLU, 2023, p. 1). Furthermore, 16 organizations issued a coalition letter to members of Congress expressing their concern about the censorship of internet users in response to legislative movements to ban TikTok on a national level. Marco Rubio issued bipartisan legislation to ban TikTok from operating within United States borders in 2022 and a more recent bill to withhold federal funds from individuals or entities with partnerships with the application (Rubio, 2023, para. 2).

Montana is not the first state to oppose using TikTok within state borders. Indiana sued the platform in December of 2022 and has since filed an amended lawsuit against the platform in 2023 (Austin, 2023, para. 1). In addition, Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin, after filing lawsuits against both the parent companies of TikTok and Facebook, and Instagram in 2023 says,

We have to hold Big Tech companies accountable for pushing addictive platforms on our kids and exposing them to a world of inappropriate, damaging content... We have watched over the past decade as one social media company after another has exploited our kids for profit and escaped government oversight...TikTok is deceiving the public regarding the harmful content it is putting in the hands of our kids, and it is deceiving the public about its ties to the Chinese Communist Party. (Griffin, 2023, para. 2-6)

Even though TikTok's data privacy is a significant concern in United States legislation, this same discussion is happening worldwide.

Dozens of countries are placing bans on TikTok. India is one of the first and most drastic bans against the application. In 2020, the government of India declared a national order for the blocking of TikTok and 59 other Chinese-owned applications (TikTok India on X, 2020, para. 1). Although the ban restricted further use of the app nationwide, it did not highlight the deletion of data. Therefore, it is still a concern whether ByteDance still has access to millions of previous Indian user data. The Afghan government has also banned TikTok nationwide because it is misleading younger generations. Spokesperson Inamullah Samangani released a statement on X (formally known as Twitter) in 2022,

The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology is obliged to block the game PUBG and the application called Tik Tok., which causes the young generation to

go astray. In the same way, prevent those channels that publish immoral materials and programs as much as possible. (Samangani, 2022, para. 1)

In addition, in February of 2023, without concrete evidence that data had been compromised, The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat released a statement announcing the ban of TikTok on all government-issued mobile devices (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2023, para. 1). The European Union not only banned the use of TikTok on corporate devices but also on personal devices that are affiliated with the Commission for all staff (European Commission, 2023, para.1). Similar to Project Texas, TikTok has issued Project Clover that will secure European data locally. According to TikTok, Project Clover will establish data center locations in Ireland and Norway, where they will be operated by a third-party service provider which will begin storing data in 2023 and continue into 2024 (TikTok, 2023, para.13-14). Following suit with the U.S. and the European Union, the U.K. banned the social media app on all government-issued phones in March of 2023 (Criddle & Cameron-Chileshe, 2023, para. 1). Following the ban on TikTok on government-issued devices, TikTok was involved in a significant entanglement with the protection of up to 1.4 million UK children's data (Information Commissioner's Office, 2023, para. 6-7). The ICO has issued a £12,700,000 fine to TikTok Information Technologies UK Limited and TikTok Inc. The ICO released a statement saying,

UK data protection law says that organizations that use personal data when offering information society services to children under 13 must have consent from their parents or carers. TikTok failed to do that, even though it ought to have been aware that those under 13 were using its platform. TikTok also failed to carry out adequate checks to identify and remove underage children from its platform. (Information Commissioner's Office, 2023, para. 6-7)

Although only a few have been mentioned, TikTok has seen a ban to some capacity, whether it be public sector or government devices, in more than a dozen countries worldwide (Fischer, 2023, para. 1-2).

The CEO of TikTok has not been shy about defending the integrity of the application. In the United States' most recent investigation of TikTok, Chew (2023) addresses myths regarding the security of TikTok. The first is that TikTok is not beholden to the Chinese government and is unavailable to mainland China (p. 9). Chew continues to address the data-sharing concerns with the Chinese government. Chew writes,

TikTok has never shared, or received a request to share, U.S. user data with the Chinese government. Nor would TikTok honor such a request if one were ever made. Indeed, a 2021 report from Citizen Lab, an internationally renowned security research laboratory, found that there was no overt data transmission by TikTok to the Chinese government and that TikTok did not contact any servers within China. (Chew, 2023, p. 9)

In addition, Chew continues to say that their parent company, Bytedance, was founded by Chinese entrepreneurs but has since grown into a global enterprise and is not owned or controlled by any government or state entity (Chew, 2023, p. 9).

As TikTok continues to be investigated by various government agencies, its popularity continues to grow. There seems to be a pattern of moves from the West in erring on the side of caution in protecting national security and distancing themselves from TikTok and its parent company ByteDance. As tensions rise, younger generations are speaking out against TikTok bans, for example, the group of users that sued the state of Montana previously mentioned. The rising popularity of TikTok with younger generations can create further pushback if TikTok sees censorship on a U.S. national scale.

Media Effects

Research regarding media effects is extensive and is impossible to cover in its entirety in this literature review. The current literature consists of an extensive list of studies on media's cognitive and behavioral influence. Mass media effect research has been widely discussed in the fields of psychology and sociology, but has its roots within the field of communication. Media Effect research became a prominent focus of study after the introduction of television at the end of the 1950s (Valkenburg, Peter & Walther, 2016, p. 317). A 2007 content analysis of media effects literature found that,

The focus of researchers has become more specialized or even fragmented. Media scholars are producing an amorphous mass of individual studies rather than constructing a field with unifying theories and methods that focus scholars' attention. There is no dominant method used by mass media effects researchers; instead, there is a wide range of methods that cover just about every social science method. (Potter & Riddle, 2007, p. 100)

While this content analysis was written in 2007 and leaves a considerable time frame for new research, it remains true. Media effects is a comprehensive term that can cover a variety of different media and the different effects it can have on individuals, groups, or societies. In a more recent article from 2017, authors Neuendorf and Jeffres discuss the history and current state of media effect scholarship while agreeing with the broad direction of this field of research. Neuendorf and Jeffres write,

Across media and across time, a number of topics have stood as robust areas of concern for scholars, critics, politicians, and the general population: violence; sexual behaviors;

frightening media content; gender, racial, and ethnic stereotyping; pornography; and advertising. (p. 10)

There has been a heightened focus on social media and media's effects that, in part, have already been discussed in this literature review. Still, even within social media, different platforms pose different effects. Historically, when mass media communication avenues were limited, both the gatekeepers and audiences were at large (Neundorf & Jeffres, 2017, p. 1). With the introduction of new technologies, the boundaries within these technologies and audiences merge, introducing new ways to theorize and make sense of these forms of communication (Neundorf & Jeffres, 2017, p. 1).

Potter & Riddle (2007) continue their discussion by highlighting the lack of theory used in discussing the history of media effects research. More recently, this has changed course with the introduction of media effects studies through the lens of agenda-setting theory, social learning theory, uses and gratification theory, social cognitive theory, and framing theory, to name a few. For example, Pajares, Prestin, Chen, and Nabi (2009) write, "Given the powerful social influence of media models, scholars have [not only] drawn from social cognitive theory to explain unintentional effects of the media" (p. 289). Neundorf & Jeffres (2017) also acknowledge the significant theories that have contributed to this area of research and attribute social cognitive theory as playing a prominent role in the 1950s and 1960s about television violence and its impact on children (p. 7). The study of violence in media and how this influences aggressive behavior still make up a large area of media effects research. Continuing this discussion of theory, the spiral of silence is a theory that has not been discussed much but poses excellent potential for studying new media. When a person has a minority opinion, they may feel persuaded to stay silent out of fear of isolation, which according to Neundorf & Jeffres

(2017), has just recently been applied to social media studies (p. 8). This study evaluated the effects of social media through the lens of social comparison theory. Social comparison theory has historically been very seldom used in media effect research until recently, but it carries great potential. This is especially true considering this study focuses on a social media platform that exaggerates photo and video content rather than written content.

Even with the broad field of media effect research, there is a debate regarding social change. Mehraj, Bhat, and Mehra (2014) summarize this debate well in their review of media and society from a sociological perspective. Their article describes the dichotomy of society adopting new realities communicated through specific media or whether these media simply reinforce what is already present in society (p. 58). This is something Mehraj, Bhat, and Mehra believe is historically challenging to test and is most likely a cause of the various methodologies used to study media effects. This is relevant to this study as content consumers are being fed images and videos that could be real or manipulated to show an enhanced product or version of itself. This manipulation of images is not necessarily a new reality, but something companies and marketers do to reinforce the beauty standards established in societies. False advertisements, and how they affect women, is a large area of recent media effect research.

With the introduction of social media in the early 2000s, there has been a shift in focusing on how these social networking media sites affect the individual. Social media has played a prominent role in the psychological effects of media on society. Despite living in a trend where brands are utilizing diverse size models, Qian Huang, Wei Peng & Soyeon Ahn (2021) found evidence that the industry's advertisement of unrealistically skinny and athletic models have adverse effects on both female and male consumers (p.480). In addition, in their meta-analysis of media and body image, Huang et al. (2021) concluded that media that lacks

obtrusively commercial purposes (social networking sites) or television and music videos may produce more significant levels of negative body image concerns (p. 478). Users have control over the content they produce on platforms, allowing them to alter and edit their photos.

Transforming, editing, and shaping one's body to seem thinner or more athletic is not uncommon on social media.

Many advertisement agencies, celebrities, and users have been called out for doing this in photo and written advertisements because of the effects it could have on consumers. In late 2011, Procter and Gamble, the owners of CoverGirl, released an advertisement with Taylor Swift showcasing their Nature Luxe Mousse Mascara (Case #5400). In fine print, at the bottom of this advertisement, it was written: "lashes enhanced in post-production." (Case #5400). After receiving backlash from consumers and comments from the National Advertising Division that it was dishonest, Procter and Gamble agreed to retract the advertisement (Case #5400, 2011). The Federal Trade Commission, whose intent is to protect American consumers, has determined that a representation, omission, or practice is deceptive if it is likely to Mislead customers and affect consumers' behavior or decisions about the product or service (Federal Trade Commission, 2023, p. 2). The FTC has been responsible for legal action against companies like L'Oreal for misleading consumers about their products. In 2014, the Federal Trade Commission sued L'Oreal USA, Inc. for deceptive advertisement on their Lancome Genifique and L'Oreal Paris Youth Code skincare products. Included in these advertisements were phrases like, "See visibly younger skin in just seven days," "Crack the code to younger acting skin," and others about how the products are clinically proven to activate certain genes (Federal Trade Commission, 2014, para. 3-5). L'Oreal USA Inc. could not scientifically support these advertised claims and decided to settle with the FTC in a settlement that prohibits them from making such claims in the future

(Federal Trade Commission, 2014, para. 7). One of the many cases the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) involved a specific UK influencer promoting a self-application tanning product called “Skinny Tan.” This influencer posted a picture highlighting the product while using an Instagram filter to enhance the darkness of her skin. The ASA ruled that the advertisement was misleading, exaggerating the results of the product, and violated their CAP codes (ASA & CAS, 2021, para. 12). This is one example of a commonplace occurrence that is not always called out or noticed by consumers over social media. The National Advertising Division saw a focus of cases in 2022 concerning misleading endorsements in advertisements over social media and released a statement in their 2022 Annual report saying,

The advertising industry should take note and adopt a more aggressive approach to curtailing these misleading advertising practices. Companies should avoid using these practices in their own advertising and, when identified, they should challenge a competitor’s misleading advertising practices at BBB National Programs. Challenging advertising that distorts the marketplace helps create a level playing field for businesses to compete and builds consumer trust more broadly. (NAD Annual Report, 2022, p. 6)

Distorted photos not only break the trust between consumers and companies but negatively affect body image satisfaction. Kleemans et al. (2018) studied media psychology and, from their research collection, recorded that the manipulation of appearance on Instagram photos can have negative consequences for the body satisfaction of girls who are more prone to social comparisons (p. 103). This study also notes that the test subjects often could not identify the manipulated photos from the real ones. Kleemans et al. write, “The fact that girls believed that the presented Instagram photos showed a representative view of reality and did not notice

reshaping of the bodies very well reinforces these concerns” (p. 103). In Lee’s (2014) cross-cultural study on social media use and body image in both the United States and Korea, the author found that when individuals are more satisfied with their bodies, they ultimately have higher psychological well-being (p. 1354). Therefore, Lee (2014) suggests educating young people to critically evaluate messages and images about bodies so it does not produce adverse cognitive effects but the tools to build a healthy body image (p. 1344). In Huang et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis, they, too, call for critical action to be taken. Huang, Peng, and Ahn call on parents and pediatricians to implement necessary interventions to prevent youth from engaging in negative body image behaviors like harmful dieting (p. 480).

A unique study was conducted by Smahelova, Drtilova, Smahel, and Vevelicek (2020) on internet usage by women in an eating disorder recovery. They found using social media could have positive and negative cognitive effects on the individual. Some included in this study that sharing their recovery photos on social networking sites and engaging in comparison with healthy body images helped with their motivation in the recovery process (Smahelova et al., 2020). On the other hand, through their analysis, the researchers found that sharing images could pose a retreat in the recovery process. Social media sites make connecting with specific communities of similar contexts and interests very easy. Some respondents reported that they compared themselves to both thinner, healthier bodies and disordered bodies, which, in some cases, supported their eating disorder symptoms (Smahelova et al., 2020). While social media poses great benefits to help their recovery process and find motivation, it would be wise for individuals in recovery to avoid specialized platforms primarily used to support the illness (Smahelova, 2020).

As media continues to evolve and become more powerful in its ability to communicate effectively and efficiently in sending and receiving content, further and different scholarship directions are necessary. While media effect research is vast, it is historically rooted in the field of communication. According to Patti Valkenburg, Jochen Peter, and Joseph Walther (2016) regarding media effect research, "...its object of study, media and technology, is a moving target, a phenomenon that is continuously subject to change while we try to understand it" (p. 331). Different media technologies are developing rapidly, so new avenues and directions exist to engage in media effects research. As recorded through the studies discussed, these remarkable and innovative social networking platforms also have the potential for dangerous effects on society and should be studied thoroughly. As Neunendorf and Jeffres (2017) write,

In attending to this call, we might fruitfully view the full history of media effects scholarship not as discrete eras but as cumulative, with each era providing incremental additions to the sophistication and complexity of theorizing and researching mass media effects. (2017, p.11)

Physical Beauty Standards

Society establishing physical beauty standards has been a phenomenon that has not ceased for decades. Body image concerns, self-esteem, and found beauty standards have been socially established yet fluctuated throughout history. While these beauty standards seem to emulate what beauty means to society, this would mean society's idea of beauty changes frequently. In a study seeking to educate females in India on the correlation between social media and body image, Haque (2020) outlines the evolution of beauty standard changes by writing,

Historically, the Han dynasty, Chinese people favored the ideal body with ultra-femininity. During the Italian Renaissance, full body, light hair, and light skin all were thought of as superior indications of beauty... While the corset continued to be fashionable till the 18th century, it shortened, became more conical, and consequently began to emphasize the waist... As the 20th century ascended the ideal of femininity was depicted in a drastic slimming figure. From the S-corseted Gibson Girl to the liberating 'flapper' the idealized image paved the way to more prim and informal body image. With the emergence of the supermodel era athletic body was celebrated, as this era also saw an emergence of anorexia, thought by some experts to be caused by a widespread obsession with exercise. (pp. 6-7)

History has shown this change in beauty standards will not cease. Yet, society still strives to emulate these standards, which ultimately wreaks havoc on the individual's body image and self-esteem when they are unable to reach this idolized "perfection." This portrayal of ideal physical beauty standards is not a strictly generational or geographical phenomenon but has consistently been prevalent throughout history (Haque, 2020, pp. 6-7). The only difference now is how globalized these ideal body images are communicated through media. With the introduction of mass media, western idolized body types began to be adopted and prized in more Eastern cultures. Pande (2017) writes

The world saw in 1994 the crowns of Miss World and Miss Universe being bestowed on long-legged, slim beauties from India. Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai were different from the stereotypical Indian women, and they became the new role models for their generation. (p. 100)

What is physically prized and sought to emulate among women has shifted and changed throughout history. A negative view of self and body image arises when this standard seems unattainable. Phillips and Halder (2019) define body image as “the way that we view ourselves and our own bodies and this may be sometimes in relation to another person” (p. 106). When body image is discussed, it usually has a negative connotation involved. Generation Z has developed a desire to work against the grain of society. While the media still promotes unattainable standards for beauty, Generation Z has spoken against this pattern and standard. There is a sense of rebellion regarding physical beauty standards in this generation, but with the mass number of media portraying these messages, its influence permeates.

Haque (2020) concludes that “According to the hypothesis it absolutely was found that women’s body image satisfaction is influenced by the consumption of appearance-related content” (2020, p. 24). To further emphasize this correlation between physical content consumption and body image issues, Bell (2016) studied female college students and their media usage and perception of self-image in a study done at Bridgewater State University. In that study, Bell concludes that these participants are most interested in viewing aspects of physical appearance like makeup, clothing, and attractiveness, which could ultimately lead to being more prone to comparison (Bell, 2016, p. 29). Communicating ideal beauty standards and physical attractiveness to consumers can negatively affect the individual's well-being. In *The Physical Attractiveness Phenomena* by Patzer (1985), it is written that while people reject the idea of physical attractiveness for personal inferences, it is found that it does play a degree into which we make inferences regarding social power, intelligence, liking, expertise, and prestige (p. 256). Whether conscious of its influence or not, a person’s perception of attractiveness has a cognitive

and behavioral impact on their body image. Through Phillips and Halder's (2019) mixed-method study on the link between social media and female body image in Tobago, they concluded

The media have often put forward a standard of beauty that is unattainable through videos, images, articles and advertisements. These beauty standards target the female population, pushing upon them an image that society has passed off as ideal. This unattainable beauty standard has often led to persons practicing unhealthy habits. Even though a vast majority of these standards are created via applications such as Photoshop and does not really exist, these images are put forward as though they are real. (p. 112)

While research shows that females in Tobago do not conform to these false messages, additional research has contributed to the claim that images portraying unattainable beauty standards promote dissatisfaction among women (Phillips & Halder, 2019, p. 112). Not only has Generation Z been defined as the least confident generation thus far, but social media is predictably a significant cause of this generation's sense of low confidence and anxiety (Chappet, 2019, para. 12). In addition, a study done in association with Bloomsburg University concerning idealized advertising, social comparison, and negative self-worth resulted in the conclusion that "One-third of the women surveyed, were dissatisfied with their own physical attractiveness when comparing themselves to the ideal social and physical images that models in advertisements represent" (Baird et al., 2015, p. 10). While the research on body image as it pertains to men is less prevalent, it is still a pattern that should be discussed.

According to a review of *Body Image Concerns Among Men and its Consequences*, men find talking about body image concerns undesirable, which could contribute to the lack of research (Rao et al., 2020, p. 321). *The Influence of Social Comparisons on Body Image in Men: A Scoping Review* also contributes to the conclusion that the pursuit of meeting these levels of

male attractiveness derives from the internalization of what has been portrayed in the media. “Studies experimentally manipulating viewing of media content all shared similar findings; viewing of mainstream media elicited more upward comparisons resulting in adverse outcomes associated with body image” (Pagano et al., 2021, p. 33). While this study focuses on the communication of body image through social media as directed toward women, it does not disregard the need for further research on the male response to body image concerns. The manipulation of behavior and thought to meet established physical beauty standards is a phenomenon that takes place across genders.

Marketing agencies have learned how to utilize these phenomena for profit. Bloch and Richins (1992) write, “Millions of promotion dollars are spent each year to persuade consumers that each of the myriad of adornment goods will fulfill their needs for attractiveness and enhance feelings of well-being” (p. 4). Marketing agencies have learned how to increase consumer satisfaction. When consumer expectations are met, consumers can experience buyer satisfaction but could also experience adverse cognitive side effects. For example, YSL cosmetics, whose audience is generally older women, use younger models that highlight wrinkle-free skin, which portrays a false idea of perfection (Bloch & Richins, 1992, p. 11). These ideas of perfection can create unrealistic targets of social comparison, which explains why specific marketing strategies harm the consumer's well-being. When social media is viewed in its entirety, its presence does not decrease the issues associated with body image and self-esteem. On the contrary, when users see images with a socially positive and fashionable connotation, they desire to emulate these standards, which ultimately have cognitive and behavioral influences (Seekis et al., 2020, p. 379). This study also explains that the importance placed on likes and comments can negatively affect body image (Seekis et al., 2020, p. 44). It is not only the photos being used that influence

society's body image concerns but also the constructions of social media itself. Whether considering images or popularity, social media networks attract upward comparisons. Through social comparison, the individual engages in either satisfaction or dissatisfaction of self. When marketing agencies are promoting airbrushed products and consumers have a dissatisfied comparison, this ultimately negatively influences their self-esteem and body image perception. The power of social media communication is invasive to Generation Z when considering social comparison theory and uses and gratification theory. Social comparison theory, in particular, can provide insight into the motives behind the cognitive behaviors associated with social media.

Theoretical Overview

Social Comparison Theory

While social comparison theory was published in 1954 by Leon Festinger, it quickly lost momentum due to Festinger's development of cognitive dissonance theory. Social comparison theory met its revival in the 60s due to a focus on the self in psychology (Goethals, 1986, p. 261). In the 1970s, attribution theory influenced evaluating abilities in our performances and others (Goethals, 1986, p. 267). Social comparison theory seeks to understand the motives for why individuals engage in social comparisons and what these comparisons look like. Social comparison theory has been used extensively to research the link between social media and negative body image thought processes and actions. One study in 2011 found that "As a woman's thoughts about appearance become increasingly more distorted and dysfunctional, her behavioral response to a comparison target is to engage in increased examination, even scrutiny, of her body" (Ridolfi, 2011, p. 502). Social comparison theory contends that, as individuals are uncertain about traits they possess, they engage in either upward or downward comparisons to gain information on their status (Festinger, 1954). As discussed by Goethals (1986) in his

extensive outline of the history of social comparison theory, “The original presentation of social comparison theory did not discuss self-esteem or overall self-evaluation, although it is clear that self-esteem is implicated in opinion and ability evaluation” (p. 267). People have a fundamental need to maintain stable and accurate views of self. Therefore, they should be inclined to seek informative feedback about their characteristics and abilities. Festinger (1954) postulated that,

While opinions and abilities may, at first glance, seem to be quite different things, there is a close functional tie between them. They act together in the manner in which they affect behavior. A person’s cognition (his opinions and beliefs) about the situation in which he exists and his appraisals of what he is capable of doing (his evaluation of his abilities) will together have bearing on his behavior. (p. 1)

Because Generation Z is a generation that has been marked and patterned with poor mental health, low confidence, and high use of social media, it makes sense that this theory would be used to spark further research in understanding the cognitive development of Generation Z. Its strength in heurism is fundamental because this study does focus on an individual’s practical daily experience.

Upward comparisons are when individuals compare with those of superiority to the individual to gain motivation for self-improvement. While this may be the motivation, the outcome can be a negative cognitive influence. In the previously mentioned study of appearance-related content on social media and body image of college women in India, Haque (2020) concluded that “Young adult women who actively engaged with the image-based social media of attractive peers (upward social comparison targets) would have a more negative body image” (p. 24). In comparison, Ridolfi’s (2011) study resulted in the status that “As a woman’s thoughts about appearance become increasingly more distorted and dysfunctional, her behavioral response

to a comparison target is to engage in an increased examination, even scrutiny, of her body” (p. 502). While there are examples of upward comparisons that reflect a healthy result of motivation, this study focuses on the negative influence of upward comparisons. For instance, fitness enthusiasts can receive encouragement from following fitness influencers on social media platforms. While feeling motivated to work out, they can scrutinize their appearance or abilities compared to those of a superior fitness level.

Downward comparisons are usually used to improve one’s self-esteem by comparing to someone perceived as inferior to the observer (Ridolfi, 2011, p. 492). Downward comparisons could look like a person seeking affirmation of their appearance or abilities, so they resort to specific social media profiles they perceive as inferior in skills and physical attributes. In Cruisius, Corcoran, and Miissweiler’s (2022) review of the theory, research, and application, they write that people may seek to maintain a positive self-image by comparing themselves to others who are worse off. “Even failures might suddenly appear to be a success in comparison with other people who performed even worse” (Cruisius et a., p. 4).

Social comparison theory is specifically applicable to this study regarding social media’s communication of physical beauty standards to Generation Z. There has been a lot of previous research done relating the connection of poor body image to comparisons made to photos online of what seems to be society’s standard of a perfect figure. In addition to what has already been discussed in this review of literature, a study on public perceptions of photoshopped images found that “When a photo in an ad was manipulated in more extreme ways, the findings suggest that it would not only contribute to setting up an unrealistic expectation for the standard of beauty but also create a sense of skepticism directly toward the advertisers” (Ahn, 2019, p. 90). A participant in this study also mentioned the possibility that young girls who have poor body

images can be more susceptible to manipulated images, resulting in even more negative body image concerns, which the researcher then resorts to social comparison theory to support (Ahn, 2019, p. 89). Whether the comparisons are made with physical pictures of one's figure or the type of lifestyle, the connection between negative body image thought processes and media comparisons can be inferred. This study utilized social comparison theory to understand better how social media influences the behavior of its consumers in the negative. Specifically, the researcher focuses on social media's negative influences on females' body image and behavior. Social media is a powerful communicator. The development of social media looks like it will not cease. Therefore, understanding its influence and permeance on our society's thought and behavioral processes is necessary to have a greater grasp on this powerful communication tool.

Uses and Gratification Theory

A large part of audience analysis is understanding the motives and satisfactions that audiences are met with. As technology advances and the introduction of new media outlets increases, motivations, and gratifications become two of the most crucial elements in understanding the audience's relationship with media (Weiyan, 2015, p. 75). Uses and gratification theory has roots as early as the 1940s and became more developed as traditional media sources were introduced into society (Tanta et al., 2014, p. 86). Theorists began to study the relationship between the audience and media outlets like television, newspapers, and radio. During this time, researchers gained more insight into the social and psychological variables that audiences received through social gratification patterns (Weiyan, 2015, p. 72). This theory developed further during the 1970s-1980s when researchers began to intently study audience motivations and media use to gratify social and psychological needs (Weiyan, 2015, p.72). This theory has brought the specific audience members' experience to play a more prominent role in

the interaction. Blumler and Katz received the most credit for developing this theory in 1974.

“The main advantage of the uses and gratification approach is that it gives an insight to motivation for consuming a particular media content, which complements the findings about the interaction between the media and its users” (Tanta et al., 2014, p. 88). This theory comes from the sociocultural tradition and was built on an empirical and positivistic approach. Stemming from a sociocultural tradition and building on an empirical approach makes this theory applicable to help understand the individual experience of media users. Uses and gratifications theory has led to new and relevant research as different forms of media and technology have been introduced. Therefore, this theory has substantial heuristic value and utility. Ruggiero (2000) argues in the uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century, “any attempt to speculate on the future direction of mass communication theory must seriously include the U&G approach” (p. 3).

Uses and gratification theory helps answer the question, why do people engage with specific media platforms, and what needs are met as a result? Ruggiero (2000) continues to examine the concept of needs, which in psychology is considered the bedrock in some of the psychologies' most critical theoretical frameworks (p. 27). At its core, uses and gratification theory identifies the motivations behind an individual's interaction with media and what is gained through satisfying needs. In Weiyan's (2015) analysis of the theory, he writes that the aim of the theory “is to understand how, why, and with what purpose people use the media in their everyday lives” (2015, p. 71). The introduction of new technology paved the way for a research revival to understand users' individual experiences with mass media. Tanta et al. records that prominent theorists Katz, Blumler, and Gureitch introduced five basic assumptions of the theory:

1. The audience is active, and its media use is goal-oriented; 2. the initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience member; 3. the media compete with other resources for need satisfaction; 4. people have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use; 5. value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience. (Tanta et al., 2014, p. 87, as cited in Kunczik & Zipfel, 2006, p. 190)

Since social media was introduced at the beginning of the 21st century, tracing messages, observing, and recording communication over technology has become more accessible (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 28). Tanta, Mihovilovic, and Sablic (2014) conducted a study to test if the uses and gratification theory, in addition to previous research, is adequate in understanding the motivations and behaviors of social network users, more specifically, Facebook users. Their results, although older, confirmed their hypothesis that adolescents use Facebook mainly to interact and socialize with their community of friends (Tanta et al., 2014, p. 101). Adolescents' gratification through Facebook was met by their desire to be integrated and for social interaction, which meets two of the needs outlined by Katz, Guevitch, and Haas (Tanta et al., 2014, p. 91). Uses and gratifications can be related to the five human needs groups: cognitive, affective, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and escapism (Katz et al., 1973). Personal identity was gratified with their ability to maintain active interaction over Facebook, and integration and social interaction were met through their ability to stay connected over the platform. What has yet to be further researched is how specific platforms meet specific needs. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) write in some of their original work, "findings are still typically presented to show that certain bodies of content serve certain functions or that one medium is deemed better at satisfying certain needs than another" (p. 515). While this was

written in 1973, before the introduction of social media and about more traditional media, its relevance still permeates. Although new social media networking sites are being introduced frequently, individuals will log onto different sites for specific needs.

Whereas the uses and gratification theory would be beneficial to utilize to identify the patterns of motivation for users and what gratifications they seek for specific platforms, The social comparison theory seems to be the most relevant to this study. The uses and gratification theory has been used in previous media effect and body image research but not nearly as extensively as social comparison theory. Previous research has pointed to social comparison theory being a pivotal contributor to body image concerns in social media users. To both build off of and contribute to the current literature, social comparison theory is the most influential theory in utility, scope, and testability. This study took a qualitative approach in using Social Comparison Theory to answer the Research Question.

Chapter III: Methodology

Chapter III will discuss how this research is designed and the reasoning behind its construction. Specifically, this chapter will outline the design, setting & instrumentation, participant qualifications, and data analysis methods used.

Research Question & Design

The Research Question this study answered is:

RQ 1: How has TikTok influenced society's idea of physical beauty as it pertains to body image concerns among Generation Z females?

This study was rooted in media effects and how powerful a communicator social media is to Generation Z. Previous research has shown that media effects research most commonly takes a quantitative approach. This study took a qualitative approach because of the lack of data regarding the research topic and the ability to capture the attitudes, feelings, and motives behind the participants most effectively. The reasons for taking a qualitative approach include creating room for participants to answer with vulnerability and without pressure, having a larger participant pool to draw from, and contributing to the depth and breadth of social media effects research.

Pew Research Center's Senior Survey Advisor Keeter (2020) wrote,

...The social interaction inherent in a telephone or in-person interview may also exert subtle pressures on respondents that affect how they answer questions. Respondents may feel a need to present themselves in a more positive light to an interviewer, leading to an overstatement of socially desirable behaviors and attitudes and an understatement of opinions and behaviors they fear would elicit disapproval from another person. (para. 13)

Therefore, this study utilized surveys to eliminate the pressure respondents feel to present themselves in a certain way. Generation Z has become accustomed to communicating through a screen. According to Schweiger (2018), because Generation Z individuals have grown up with social media, many prefer to communicate through technology rather than face-to-face interactions (p. 46). By taking a survey online, Generation Z participants will feel more comfortable, safe, and willing to communicate freely than in a formal face-to-face interview. Protecting participant identity and allowing participants to complete an online qualitative survey will generate vulnerability in their answers and experiences.

In addition, most previous media effects studies have been carried out with quantitative methodology. Therefore, this choice of methodology provided an alternative perspective that could yield new data regarding the effects of social media and body image concerns. This study intended to gather more profound indications on how TikTok communicates and contributes to the cognitive makeup of Generation Z. This can be difficult to analyze without the written experiences of the individuals and only considering numerical data.

Not only do surveys generate vulnerability, but they also allow for a more significant number of participant involvement. Online surveys can be less time-consuming and less of a commitment for the participant. Generation Z also has a fast-paced mentality (Dirir, 2022, p. 5). Therefore, a research method that is efficient in time but focuses on quality in depth fits the mold for a critical study that includes a target population of Generation Z participants. The protection of identity is included in the use of surveys. Therefore, more individuals are more likely to be open to volunteering for participation.

Setting & Instrumentation

The survey was distributed to the public through a web link, and individuals chose whether to participate. The setting of the study took place over a survey software called “Qualtrics.” Once the researcher gathered all the data, the researcher organized it according to each question. Questions for the survey included TikTok use and what the participants view and engage with on TikTok. In addition, the survey included questions regarding their personal experience with body image satisfaction and their experience with comparison. Questions ranged from demographics to questions asking for descriptions of the participant's thought processes and experiences.

Participants

According to Schwieger and Ladwig (2018), Generation Z is anyone between the ages of 12 and 26 (p. 1). Due to the higher likelihood of younger participants spending more time on TikTok, participants fell in the age category of only 18-26 years old. This study focused on the media effects of body image concerns on Generation Z women. While this study does not disregard the need for further research on males' responses to body image concerns, it seeks to contribute to the larger conversation about body image concerns among females. Therefore, participants were females from the ages of 18-26. In addition, participants in this study had to be active TikTok users. This means they would have had to have the app downloaded and use it regularly. The study strived for 50 total participants and received a total of 56 participants. The identity of each participant was not disclosed, which ensures confidentiality for the participant involved. A convenience sampling method was used for this study. Due to the convenience sampling method, most participants were likely in a college setting. Because of limited access, tools, and money, a convenience type of sampling was used through social media, Facebook

groups, and college campus connections to reach participants who meet the criteria. In summary, the target population of this study was 18-26-year-old females who are active TikTok users.

Data Organization & Analysis

After data was gathered, the findings were organized according to each survey question. This was most effective in finding similarities among each participant's answer. The data was then thematically coded. Examples of these themes could be “upward comparisons,” “downward comparisons,” “TikTok time usage,” and “Body comparison.” These codes were used to form a discussion based on how the findings answered the research question and reinforce whether the findings validate or contradict previous research.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis & Results

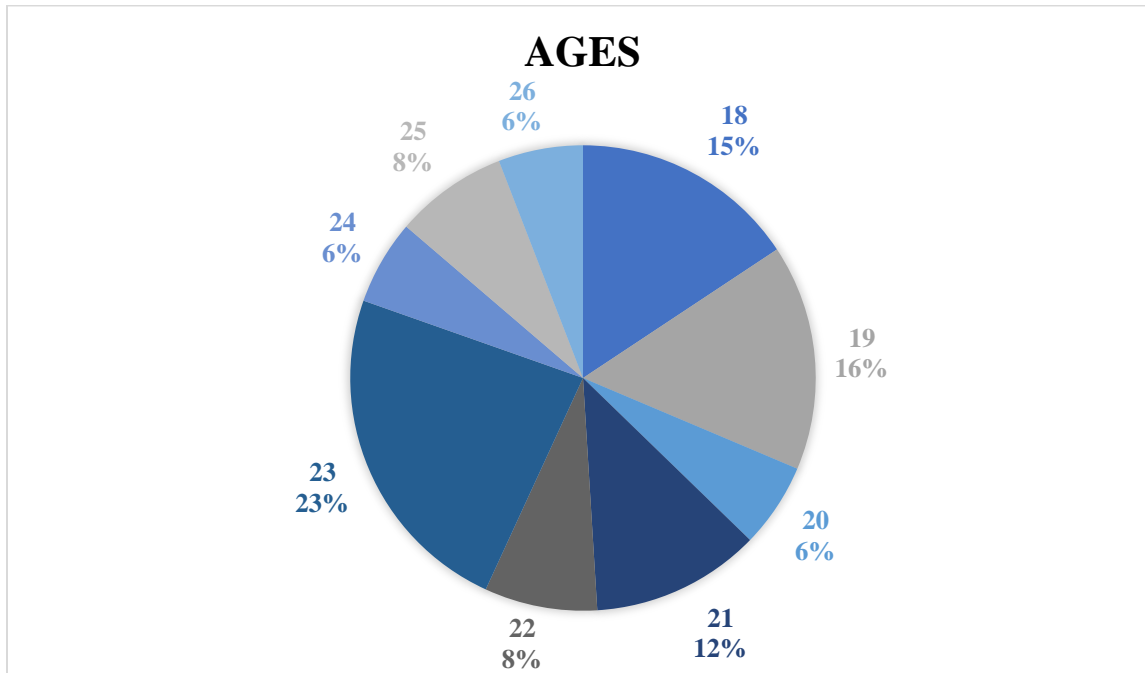
This chapter will discuss the results of the 56 participants who participated in the qualitative survey and analyze their data according to thematic codes. The results of this study provide accurate insight into answering the research question:

RQ 1: How has TikTok influenced society's idea of physical beauty as it pertains to body image concerns among Generation Z females?

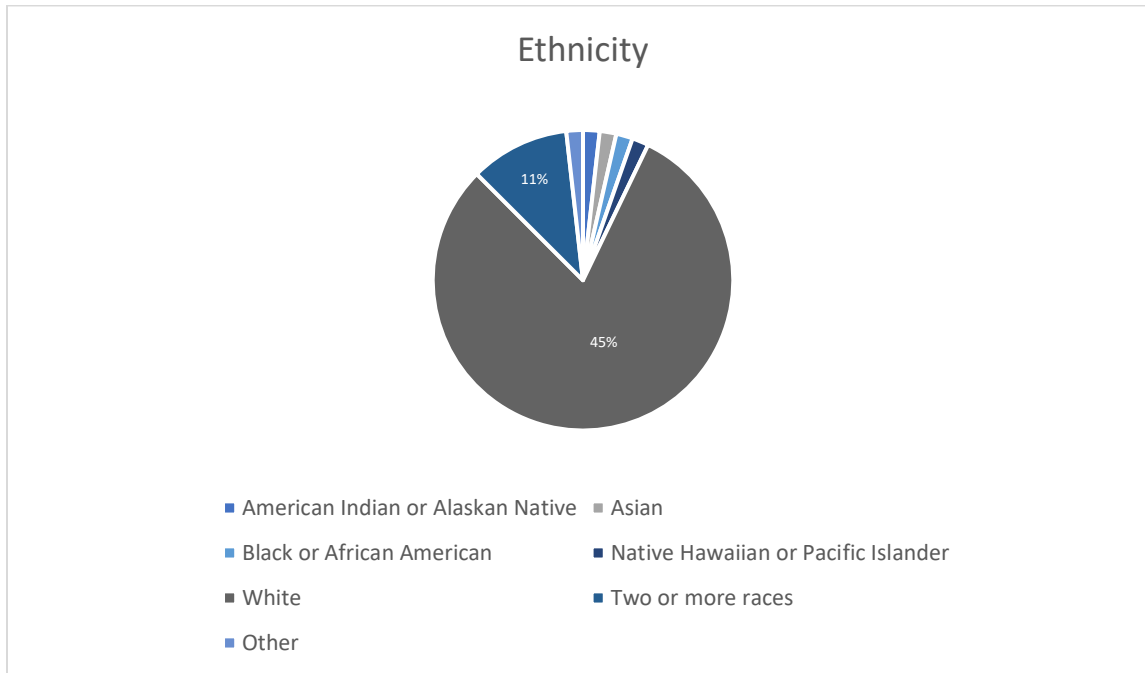
Deductive and inductive methods were used to establish and identify themes among the survey results. This chapter will describe each code and patterns within these codes found among most respondents. It will also highlight critical data as it relates to the research question. Eight themes and then 22 codes within these themes were established before analysis based on previous literature or identified while analyzing survey responses. Through thematic coding methods, data saturation was met after 45 surveys were coded, and an additional 11 surveys were coded to ensure data saturation. Before discussing the individual themes and codes, the demographics of the 56 participants are presented below.

Demographics

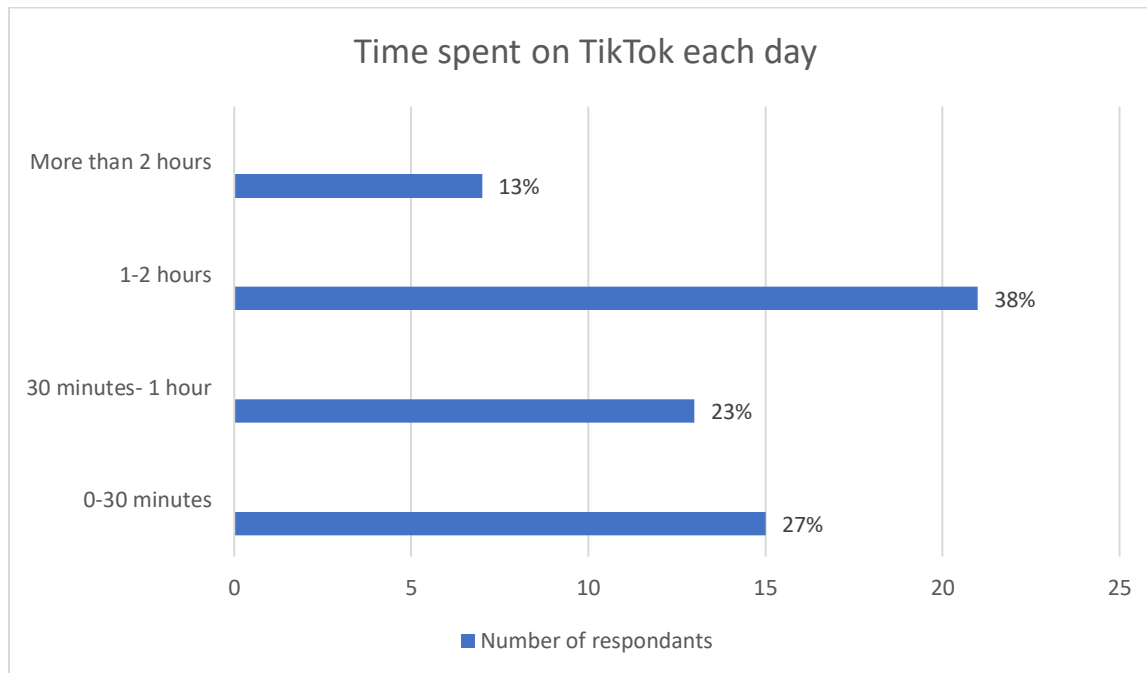
A majority of the respondents were single, never married females from the ages of 18-23. Most of these respondents are from a white ethnic background and spend anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours on TikTok daily. While there are additional demographics, this is the majority of the participants. A more detailed picture of the demographics of the 56 respondents is listed in the following figures.

Figure 4. 1 Participant age demographics

Most respondents fell within the 18-23 age range, making up 80% of the total 56 respondents. Although ages 18-26 is a considerably small age range, it is necessary to examine at a closer value considering the transitional moments that usually occur during these ages. At ages 18-23, many young adults transition into college and quickly leave a college environment. Due to the sampling method used, it was expected that most of the participants would be in a college setting. The demographic data proved this to be correct.

Figure 4. 2 Participant ethnicity demographics

Forty percent of the 56 respondents come from a white ethnic background. Eleven percent of participants stated that they come from an ethnic background of two or more races. As previously stated in the literature review, beauty standards are viewed differently across cultures, but many are beginning to adjust to a more Western idea of beauty (Pande, 2017). Physical body image goals could differ widely across the survey due to different cultural upbringings. Because the majority of the respondents come from a Western ethnic background, most of these beauty standards will likely reflect a Western standard of beauty.

Figure 4. 3 Participant time spent on TikTok each day

Thirty-eight percent of the 56 respondents chose to spend one to two hours of the day on TikTok watching videos that suit their liking. Time spent on the application can be evaluated to see if time on TikTok leads to more significant negative or positive effects.

Thematic Codes

There were 22 codes established before survey analysis and while analyzing results. These codes fall within seven different themes of categories. These themes center around words and phrases used while describing the environment in which the respondents choose to open the application, specific types of comparisons and with whom, particular pieces of content that each respondent enjoys watching, emotions associated with comparisons, and the mental side effects of the participant's experience while using TikTok. These thematic codes were taken from prominent themes mentioned in the literature review and themes that presented themselves based on the participant responses.

The rest of chapter 4 will go through each code, describe how and why it was established, and outline response patterns identified as they relate to the research question. The codes and their corresponding themes are listed in the following table.

Table 1: Codes and Themes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>
<i>Context of Use</i>	Bored (BD) Bedtime (BT)
<i>Types of Comparisons</i>	Downward comparisons (DC) Upward comparisons (UC) Peer comparisons (PC) Stranger comparisons (SC) Materialistic/ Lifestyle comparisons (ML)
<i>Types of Content</i>	Fitness (FN) Fashion (FH)
<i>Mental & Physical Effects</i>	Self worth criticism (SWC) Direct effects on body image (DE) Depression/ Sadness (DP) Jealousy (JL) Attention span (AS) Information overload (IO) Nutrition/ Eating habits (NE)
<i>Reasons for Use</i>	TikTok use for creativity (TTC) Virtual Community (VC)
<i>Beautification</i>	Filters (BF) Aesthetics AG)
<i>TikTok Controversy (TC)</i>	
<i>No Influence/ Positive Experiences</i>	(NI)

The codes were first established and then organized into corresponding themes. These codes were taken from the literature review as essential pieces of data that have already contributed to the field of social media effects, social comparison theory, and everyday lived experiences that have been known to the researcher. The themes and codes identified before analysis include:

1. Context of use
 - a. Bored (BD)
 - b. Bedtime (BT)
2. Types of Comparisons
 - a. Downward Comparisons (DC)
 - b. Upward Comparisons (UC)
 - c. Peer Comparisons (PC)
 - d. Stranger Comparisons (SC)
3. Types of Content
 - a. Fitness (FN)
 - b. Fashion (FH)
4. Mental & Physical Effects
 - a. Nutrition/ Eating Habits (NE)
5. Reasons for Use
 - a. TikTok use for Creativity (TTC)
 - b. Virtual Community (VC)
6. Beautification
 - a. Filters (BF)

- b. Aesthetic goals (AG)
7. TikTok Controversy (TC)
 8. Virtual Community (VC)
 9. TikTok use for Creativity (TUC)

New codes emerged during the thematic coding process as unexpected results continued to appear, and the following codes were developed inductively.

1. Types of Comparisons
 - a. Materialistic/ Lifestyle comparisons (ML)
2. Mental & Physical Effects
 - a. Self worth criticism (SWC)
 - b. Direct effects on body image (DE)
 - c. Depression/ Sadness (DP)
 - d. Jealousy (JL)
 - e. Attention Span (AS)
 - f. Information Overload (IO)
3. No Influence/ Positive Experiences (NI)

Each remark the respondent wrote that either indirectly or directly is associated with a code was marked according to its abbreviation and recorded. The following table outlines how frequently the thematic codes are mentioned by the respondents, directly or indirectly, throughout the analysis of data.

Table 2: Frequency of Codes and Themes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>	
<i>Context of Use</i>	Bored (BD)	9
	Bedtime (BT)	37
<i>Types of Comparisons</i>	Downward comparisons (DC)	4
	Upward comparisons (UC)	46
	Peer comparisons (PC)	36
	Stranger comparisons (SC)	43
	Materialistic/ Lifestyle comparisons (ML)	27
<i>Types of Content</i>	Fitness (FN)	46
	Fashion (FH)	14
<i>Mental & Physical Effects</i>	Self worth criticism (SWC)	46
	Direct effects on body Image (DE)	41
	Depression/ Sadness (DP)	34
	Jealousy (JL)	12
	Attention span (AS)	4
	Information overload (IO)	5
<i>Reasons for Use</i>	Nutrition/ Eating habits (NE)	12
	TikTok use for creativity (TTC)	0
<i>Beautifications</i>	Virtual Community (VC)	0
	Filters (BF)	25
<i>TikTok Controversy (TC)</i>	Aesthetics (AG)	43
		0
<i>No Influence/ Positive Experiences (NI)</i>		70

Context of Use

This theme was established before analysis because the context in which a person approaches social media says a lot about how frequently they use the application, their mental state when using the application, and how in tune with the content they will be due to either the lack of or plethora of distractions available. Using TikTok as a response to boredom and as a bedtime routine is a shared experience known enough by the researcher to expect results with this theme. Respondents were asked:

Survey Question 11: “What are you doing when you usually find yourself opening the app?”

Most instances of these two codes were found in response to this question. The first to be analyzed is boredom.

Bored (BD).

The first set of open-response questions in the survey was intended to understand better the motives and environment in which users engage with the application. The intent was to see if there is a correlation between feelings or a pattern of the environment before opening the app and emotions that may arise while engaging with TikTok. 8 of the 56 respondents expressed that they use TikTok primarily when they experience feelings of boredom.

Table 3: Bored (BD) Data

<i>Bored (BD)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 13	“When I am bored, or taking a break from homework. As it is mindless scrolling and gives me a break from my life and work.”
	Respondent 16	“...noticed a decline in attention span, more prone to boredom, not having original thoughts, decline in self-esteem.”

Respondent 27	“During breaks, eating alone, before bed. This is because I’m bored.”
Respondent 33	“Break from work, any downtime I find when bored.”
Respondent 39	“Usually have a free moment or bored.”
Respondent 40	“Have a spare moment when bored or getting in bed.”
Respondent 41	“Before I go to sleep in bed or when I am extremely bored.”
Respondent 55	“Whenever I am bored.”

These are responses to Survey Question 11, which asks, “What are you doing when you usually find yourself opening the app?” except for respondent 16. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents who mention boredom are referencing an emotion they are feeling when using TikTok. Respondent 16, on the other hand, is answering in response to survey question 13: “Do you believe TikTok may have had any effects on your mental health?” Respondent 16 uses boredom to describe a side effect of TikTok. She says that TikTok enhances her feeling of boredom. The second code under this theme yielded fuller results when users engaged with TikTok.

Bedtime (BT).

Scrolling on social media before bed is common among social media users. Users have finished their daily responsibilities and tasks and have nothing else to do but catch up with friends and see the latest posts. Those more active on social media may be more prone to do this, but this context of use could pose more significant implications because fewer distractions exist. Their sole focus is on whatever is on their screen. For this study, this code proved critical, considering over half of participants mentioned using TikTok either before falling asleep or when just waking up. According to the data, 37 of the 56 respondents wrote that they most often use TikTok in bed before going to sleep or first thing in the morning. Of these 37 respondents, 28

mention explicitly using TikTok right before bed. This is 50% of the total respondents. This means that 50% of respondents mention using TikTok right before bed. The following is a collection of quotes from respondents who have mentioned using TikTok before, while lying in bed, or after waking up.

Table 4: Bedtime (BT) Data

<i>Bedtime (BT)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 3	“Normally when I am getting ready for bed.”
	Respondent 4	“After the kids go to bed. It is my only free time.”
	Respondent 7	“Laying on the couch/ in bed.”
	Respondent 8	“Before bed because I have no other free time in the day.”
	Respondent 9	“Before going to sleep. It is a nice way to de-stress and shut down.”
	Respondent 11	“Before bed once I have put my baby down to sleep.”
	Respondent 12	“Getting ready for bed as decompression time.”
	Respondent 18	“On a break from studying, just waking up or going to bed.”
	Respondent 23	“Laying in bed. It is a form of relaxation to me.”
	Respondent 29	“About to go to sleep in bed.”
	Respondent 30	“Getting ready for bed or break from work. Part of my bedtime routine to unwind.”
	Respondent 36	“Getting ready for bed.”
	Respondent 37	“Usually I use TikTok before bed...”
	Respondent 39	“Falling asleep”
	Respondent 41	“Before I go to sleep in bed.”
	Respondent 43	“Laying in my bed, I guess it’s just habit when I debrief at night.”

Respondent 53 “Laying in bed at night.”

Respondent 56 “Getting ready for bed: to wind down for the day, sometimes I am just having difficulty falling asleep and will scroll for a while to make me tired.”

Although most respondents who mention this code use TikTok before bed, there are a few abnormalities. For example, Respondents 4 and 11 say they use TikTok after putting their children down for bed. Their answers reveal that they are mothers, and their children’s bedtime is when they have the free time to go on TikTok. Their responsibilities are fewer, and time for their entertainment or enjoyment has become available. This idea of ‘free time’ before bed was a familiar response pattern identified within these codes. The purpose behind establishing this code was because there is a lack of urgency to tackle responsibilities when someone is lying in bed before falling asleep. The daily tasks are behind them, creating free time to scroll on social media. Respondent 8 describes the overall tone many respondents reasoned about why they engage with TikTok right before bed. Respondent 8 says, “Before bed because I have no other free time in the day.” Respondent 4 says, “After the kids go to bed. It is my only free time.” While the availability of free time constitutes some respondents' reasoning for using TikTok before bed, there is also a poll of respondents who use TikTok to decompress.

Many survey participants mention that using TikTok before bed helps them destress or relax. For example, respondent nine answered they are more prone to open the application “Before going to sleep. It is a nice way to de-stress and shut down.” Respondent 12 also contributed to this pattern in her response, “Getting ready for bed as decompression time.” Decompression time, in this case, might mean distancing themselves from the realities of the day. Respondent 23 mentioned that using TikTok before bed is a form of relaxation, further

contributing to the positive reinforcement participants gain from TikTok. Respondent 30 notes that TikTok is “Part of my bedtime routine to unwind.” There is a pattern that participants receive positive feedback from TikTok when they use it before bed at the end of their day. Furthermore, respondent 56 states, “Getting ready for bed: to wind down for the day, sometimes I am just having difficulty falling asleep and will scroll for a while to make me tired.” All of these respondents mention using TikTok to meet a mental need, whether to wind down, de-stress, relax, or escape from the realities of their lives. These respondents may be using TikTok because of the free time presented, but based on the results, they are receiving help in return to meet their needs. This could be due to the lack of mental fortitude to interact and the ease of scrolling from video to video. While the repetitive nature of the app makes it easy for users to de-stress and unwind, the implications have been seen to result in comparisons of all sorts, as told by the data.

Types of Comparisons

The set of codes listed under this theme, “Types of Comparisons,” is rooted in the communication theory that drives the evaluation of the survey results. Two types of comparisons define social comparison theory. Downward and upward comparisons elicit different responses from the individual from whom the comparisons stem. Previous research points to upward comparisons, which are more likely to lead to negative views of self. These upward comparisons can be seen through both strangers and peers. Strangers and peer comparisons constitute the following two codes under this theme. A code that emerged was materialistic and lifestyle comparisons. TikTok was found to lead to lifestyle comparisons more frequently than physical comparisons. Although the code “upward comparisons” is what most of the research will be

evaluated and compared with, downward comparisons also provided insight into individuals who have found self-affirmation through identification relatability to those on TikTok.

Downward Comparisons (DC).

As Ridolfi describes, downward comparisons are usually engaged with the motivation to improve one's self-esteem by comparing to someone perceived as inferior to the observer (Ridolfi, 2011). Four of the 56 mention downward comparisons when asked to describe how TikTok influences their body image satisfaction. As a result, three out of these four responses say they receive positive affirmations of their attitude or body image in response to images that invoke downward comparisons.

Table 5: Downward Comparisons (DC) Data

<i>Downward Comparisons</i> (DC)	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 2	"I'm not typically seeing people with 'ideal' bodies during my time on TikTok
	Respondent 13	"Some days I'll find other girls who look like me and make me feel confident and proud of how I look."
	Respondent 18	"TikTok has helped me believe that I'm not an abnormality in things."
	Respondent 56	"Sometimes I see bigger women showing off their outfits is encouraging to me to not be so worried about what other people think."

Respondent 2, who mentioned not seeing an "ideal" body, has the aesthetic goal of a leaner and toned look, which could be what this "ideal body" they are referring to is. To reiterate this ideal body type, respondent 56 mentioned seeing bigger women on TikTok helps her battle against her thoughts on what other people think of her. Respondent 56 also infers that a more toned, leaner woman would be considered an "ideal" body type. These images make her feel she

is not alone or an “abnormality,” as respondent 18 describes. These respondents do not necessarily say that they view these individuals on TikTok as inferior. On the contrary, based on their responses, it can be inferred that they relate to the experiences of people who do not have the ‘ideal’ body types as respondent two describes. While they are not viewing these TikTok images, videos, or people as inferior, it still leads to a similar response of self-affirmation as the dictionary definition of downward comparisons. Respondent 13 says, “I’ll find other girls who look like me and make me feel confident and proud of how I look.” Relatability seems to resonate with this respondent and help build her confidence. Respondent 18 also describes her relatability to people on TikTok who look similar to her. Respondent 56 says women who do not have the “ideal” body type encourage her to think less about what other people think of her. In this case, respondent 56 is more concerned with the confidence of those she sees on TikTok. Downward comparisons in this dataset are more closely associated with identification and relatability, while upward comparisons stay true to the definitions posed by previous scholars.

Upward Comparisons (UC).

Previous literature points to these upward comparisons giving rise to scrutiny over one’s life or physical appearance (Ridolfi, 2011). Even more recent research suggests that “Young adult women who actively engaged with the image-based social media of attractive peers (upward social comparison targets) would have a more negative body image” (Haque, 2020, p. 24). Because this is a study regarding the influence of social media on young women’s beauty standards, it is imperative to consider upward comparisons. How people view their beauty can depend mainly on how they view others. Because of the previous literature, it was expected to get a high response rate on this particular code. Upward comparisons are one of the second-highest codes mentioned throughout the survey results. Twenty-seven of the 56 participants said

engaging in upward comparisons with people who are prettier, more in shape, or live fuller lives on TikTok. Almost half of the respondents have mentioned engaging in upward comparisons. While it was expected to see a high poll of responses from respondents who experience negative feelings towards themselves due to physical comparisons, it was unexpected to see the high volume of responses using comparisons as a positive force of motivation. The table below outlines critical quotes from responses summarizing most comments made regarding upward comparisons.

Table 6: Upward Comparisons (UC) Data

<i>Upward Comparisons</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
<i>(UC)</i>	Respondent 2	“People promoted on TikTok tend to be in shape, pretty and trendy.”
	Respondent 3	“I am obviously much less attractive and athletic than those on TikTok.”
	Respondent 6	“People are putting their ‘best selves’ out there on insta/TikTok and that can cause comparison/perfectionism towards your own body.”
	Respondent 9	“I see people who are more confident than myself.”
	Respondent 23	“I feel like TikTok inspires me to stay motivated and fit. It allows me to see the journey of other people and how they achieve their goals. It also makes me want to look like them as well.” “...it doesn't matter what it is, there's a type of person on TikTok like you or what you want to be.”
	Respondent 25	“TikTok presents a lot of pressure to be "perfect" or "likable". Scrolling through and seeing girls with perfect hair and perfect makeup/ no skin problems definitely cause insecurities.”
	Respondent 37	“When I compare their "perfect" lives to my own, I feel as though I fall short, and I become discontent.”

- Respondent 42 “TikTok causes me to compare my own body to those who are skinnier or can fit into clothes and look good in them.”
- Respondent 43 “I see a lot of people with the body type I want to achieve on TikTok. It makes me a little envious of what they have and reminds me to work harder.”
- Respondent 47 “I only compare when looking for people better than me at something so I can learn from them and be mentored.”
- Respondent 49 “see what works for other people so I feel motivated and good and then I feel good about myself.”

Out of the 27 participants who mentioned upward comparisons, four used these comparisons as a positive force of motivation to change. These four participants do not associate a negative tone toward these upward comparisons but use it to fuel their hunger to achieve a new standard. Respondent 23 says, “I feel like TikTok inspires me to stay motivated and fit. It allows me to see the journey of other people and how they achieved their goals.” Like any social media platform, TikTok is a significant platform for people to share their journeys and progress towards a particular goal. As participants have mentioned watching other people’s journeys, they often refer to fitness videos, as Respondent 23 has. Respondent 27 says, “I only compare when looking for people better than me at something so I can learn from them and be mentored.” This participant uses comparison to fuel their motivation and learn from people who are better than them. There is no negative tone as they write about their experience with comparison. Respondent 29 also mentions they can see how other people achieve their goals, which motivates them to feel good about themselves. While these respondents associate encouraging feelings with upward comparisons, the other 23 participants out of the 27 who mentioned upward comparisons are very familiar with the negative side effects these comparisons carry.

Of the abovementioned respondents, 3, 6, 9, 25, 42, and 43 specifically engage in physical upward comparisons. Respondent 42 says, “TikTok causes me to compare my body to those skinnier or can fit into clothes and look good in them.” It is revealed in this response that the ideal body type, according to this respondent, is to be skinnier or thinner. Respondent 25 mentions seeing girls with perfect hair and skin causes her to fixate on her own insecurities. While this respondent does not mention a specific body type, she still fixates on physicalities. Furthermore, respondents 3 and 9 view those on TikTok as more attractive, athletic, and confident than themselves. These physical upward comparisons lead to the scrutiny of their self. Respondent 37 says, “When I compare their "perfect" lives to my own, I feel as though I fall short and I become discontent.” Although respondent 37 focuses on the lifestyle of the person they are comparing to rather than physical attributes, this also leads to negative self-reflection. While respondent 37 is one of many who fixates on lifestyle or materialistic comparisons as opposed to physical comparisons on TikTok, all of these participants are engaging in comparisons with something they view as superior to themselves.

Materialistic/ Lifestyle comparisons (ML).

This code was not initially expected as responses due to the survey questions being directed toward physical comparisons. This code came about through many respondents commenting on how likely they were to compare lifestyles with those on TikTok. While this study focuses more on physical comparisons, it is crucial to consider unexpected results to further the research field. Many influencers build brands based on their lives, showcasing the best parts of their lives. In other words, they are showcasing a highlight reel of their days. They sometimes review the best products or give product and destination recommendations to

followers. The following is a list of comments from respondents who mentioned materialistic or lifestyle comparisons in their survey responses.

Table 7: Materialistic/ Lifestyle Comparisons (ML) Data

<i>Materialistic/ Lifestyle Comparisons (ML)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 3	Enjoys watching “everyday life videos.”
	Respondent 5	Enjoys watching “lifestyle videos.”
	Respondent 8	“Sometimes I feel sad because I don’t think my life is as glamorous or easy as it could be.”
	Respondent 15	“Sometimes I do find myself comparing my life to those on TikTok & I get a little jealous.” “I find myself jealous of material things on TikTok (Kids, homes, travel, cars).”
	Respondent 19	“The home organization videos make me want things for my home that I do not need.”
	Respondent 22	“I always feel like I don't have the cutest clothing items or décor when I scroll too long It makes me less appreciative for what I own. I feel "lame" if I don't have the trendy makeup, skincare products, etc. “TikTok enhances my likelihood for comparisons because I am constantly seeing people doing their makeup, working out in tight leggings, showing what clothes they bought, big house, etc.:
	Respondent 23	“TikTok makes me more materialistic and often longing for things/ relationships I don’t have because I am always seeing the cool parts of others' lives.”
	Respondent 24	“It's easy to compare yourself to TikTok influencers and feel like you've fallen short- whether that's with your career, with your body image, or relationships.”
	Respondent 26	“Seeing videos of people with dream homes, dream bodies, I've seen a pretty girl and said "I

wish I looked like her" or "If I have that shirt maybe I'll look like her."

"Seeing someone with a perfect body, I wish I looked like them or I wish I had a life like them."

"People show the stuff big brands send them, they show a day in their life and it almost immediately makes me compare, I wish I lived like that, I wish a brand would send me their items for free."

"I wish I had money like them or I wish I had a car like them."

Respondent 29 "TikTok sets an expectation of beauty and materialism which is not realistic."

Respondent 30 "I would say if TikTok did impact me it would be in the comparison game of my life to others."
"Usually comparisons are not about my body but other aspects of life. Makes me ungrateful for the life I have."

"TikTok enhances my likelihood for comparison because it shows you unrealistic and fake lives that look perfect but aren't. Making you think you are doing something wrong or missing out."

Respondent 33 "I compare myself to other people who are at different stages of life at the same age as me, or younger people looking more successful than me already."

"Most likely to compare with influencers because their lives are gonna seem so nice with all the new things and houses and all they do is make videos."

Respondent 37 "I find myself being more cynical than normal, and also being jealous of other's possessions and place in life."

"I am constantly presented with people who are showcasing the best parts of themselves and their lives. When I compare their "perfect" lives to my own, I feel as though I fall short and I become discontent."

- Respondent 39 “I see only the parts of people's lives they want me to see which can be inaccurate.”
- Respondent 49 “TikTok enhances my likelihood of engaging in comparisons sometimes with materialism.”
- Respondent 50 “TikTok enhances my likelihood of engaging in comparison because I see girls on TikTok who are so happy and traveling all the time and wealthy and I know I won't fulfill those dreams.”

This code was mentioned by respondents a total of 27 times. 14 out of the 56 participants said comparisons to lifestyles or worldly possessions. There were no questions on the survey that led to answers suggesting materialistic or lifestyle comparisons. Therefore, the frequency of mentions is surprising. Many of these respondents mention that they enjoy watching “lifestyle videos.” Also, many of these respondents recognize that these lives that are represented all over TikTok are fake, yet they compare their own lives to them anyway. For example, respondent 30 says, “TikTok enhances my likelihood for comparison because it shows you unrealistic and fake lives that look perfect but aren't. Making you think you are doing something wrong or missing out.” “Fear of missing out” is a common fear often observed by those on social networking sites (Gupta & Sharma, 2021, para. 1). This fear is associated with a need to be constantly connected to what is happening with others, which Respondent 30 briefly mentions. Respondent 39 also references the inaccuracy of lives people on TikTok want you to see. This inaccuracy of representation is precisely what organizations like the National Advertising Division, Advertising Standards Authority, and the Committee of Advertising Practice are against. While people on TikTok may not be advertising a specific product and, therefore, are not subject to organizational assessment, the influence of this advertisement remains.

There is a trend on TikTok called “A day in my life.” This is where users will capture short clips and combine them in one large video to invite viewers into their day. Respondent 26

mentioned it is these videos that lead to lifestyle comparisons. This respondent says, “People show the stuff big brands send them, they show a day in their life and it almost immediately makes me compare, I wish I lived like that, I wish a brand would send me their items for free.” This respondent fixates on brands that more closely align with materialistic comparisons. Often, the “influencers” on social media promote or highlight the brands this respondent is referring to. In addition, 8 out of the 14 participants who mentioned materialistic or lifestyle comparisons experience sadness in association with these comparisons. There is also a theme of discontentment or falling short when respondents have mentioned engaging in these comparisons. Respondents 24, 30, 33, 37, and 50 all express feelings of discontent or falling short in life when watching the lives of others play out on TikTok. Not only does this further Haque’s (2020) claim that comparisons with those seen as superior result in negative views of self, but it also reveals that these feelings could be more associated with their lifestyle rather than physicality. The emotions that these respondents are experiencing are more associated with lifestyle discontentment rather than physical discontentment.

In addition, the respondents' answers have a pattern of ungratefulness. Respondent 23 says, “TikTok makes me more materialistic and often longing for things/ relationships I don’t have because I am always seeing the cool parts of others' lives.” The “longing” this respondent describes can also be associated with the “fear of missing out” phenomenon that stems from unmet social relatedness (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Respondent 22 also says, “I always feel like I don't have the cutest clothing items or décor when I scroll too long. It makes me less appreciative for what I own. I feel "lame" if I don't have the trendy makeup.” Respondent 22 identifies that the longer they spend scrolling, the more inclined they are to feel like they are missing out on materialistic things. One respondent suggested that apps like Instagram are more likely to elicit

negative body image concerns, while TikTok leads to more lifestyle comparisons. Respondent 33 says, “Instagram and other apps hurt more with body image because you know most of the people you follow and see them in real life... while on TikTok, you don’t truly know them or what they look like in real life.” This idea of whether users see influencers as authentic or not plays a prominent role in the degree to which comparisons influence the user.

Stranger Comparisons (SC).

When asked if they feel like TikTok enhances their likelihood of engaging in comparisons, respondent 23 wrote, “TikTok is an infinite bank of people who you want to look like, be like, or dress like. It doesn’t matter what it is. There’s a type of person on TikTok like you or what you want to be.” As defined in Chapter 3, influencers use social media to build a brand to promote a lifestyle or product. Often, these influencers will make a profit by promoting certain brands or products. Therefore, when users go to social media for fitness or fashion inspiration, it is inevitable that they come across these influencers. Respondents mentioned stranger comparisons a majority of the time when asked the following two questions:

Survey Question 18: “How would you describe the relationship of people you are most likely to engage in physical comparisons with to yourself?”

Survey Question 21: “Describe how often you engage in comparison with peers of influencers over TikTok? Which do you find yourself comparing to more?”

Below are pulled quotes from respondents as they record their experiences engaging in comparisons with strangers over peers and which of the two questions from above they responded.

Table 8: Stranger Comparisons (SC) Data

<i>Stranger Comparisons</i>	respondent	Respondent Quotes
(SC)	Respondent 1	Q18 “No relation. Probably Influencers.”
	Respondent 5	Q18 “Random people on the Internet”
	Respondent 6	Q18 “More likely with people I have never met.” Q21 “Compares more to Influencers.”
	Respondent 10	Q21 “Some influencers don’t really affect me. Usually, the ones who I respect though I find myself comparing myself to and wishing I was more like
	Respondent 13	Q18 “Most likely to engage in comparisons with strangers and influencers.” Q21 “I definitely compare myself to influencers over peers.”
	Respondent 15	Q18 “Compares to people I see in person but I do not know and people over the internet I do not know.”
	Respondent 17	Q18 “I don’t even know the people I compare myself with.” Q21 “I compare myself to Influencers.”
	Respondent 21	Q18 “Most people I compare my body with are on TikTok as Influencers.” Q21 “Definitely compare myself to "influencers" more. I believe this is because I don't know them in real life and don't know any negative qualities about them.”
	Respondent 24	Q18 “I think comparison happens more frequently with acquaintances of people I don't know well. It's easy to compare yourself to people you don't know bc you just see the surface-level stuff.”

	Q21 “It is easy to get caught up in the "influencers" world that is seen on social media. Creating more opportunities to compare.”
Respondent 28	Q21 “Compares more to “influencers” who I look up to for health and wellness.”
Respondent 37	Q18 “No relationship. I see them online or in person.”
Respondent 42	Q21 “I compare myself more to confident Influencers.”
Respondent 43	Q18 “Little to no relationship with the people I am most likely to engage in physical comparisons with.”
Respondent 52	Q18 “Most likely to engage in physical comparisons with people I do not know.”

Over 50% of respondents compared themselves with strangers more frequently than with peers. Specifically, 30 out of the 56 respondents say they are likelier to engage with people they have never met. Participants were asked to describe the relationship of those with whom they were more likely to engage in comparisons. This study specifically focuses on physical beauty standards. Therefore, question 18 of the survey is critical regarding physical comparisons. According to the data, 19 out of the 56 participants described the relationships with people they are most likely to engage in physical comparisons with as either influencers, strangers, or a complete lack of relationship. There was no mention of “Influencers” in the question, yet some respondents, like respondents 1, 5, 13, 19, 21, 37, and 41, describe these relationships as “influencers” or people they see online. Some respondents mentioned engaging in comparisons with strangers but not necessarily online. Respondent 15 says, “I compare myself to people I see in person, but I do not know,” which removes virtual comparisons from the narrative. Respondent 24 says, “I think comparison happens more frequently with acquaintances of people I don't know well.” Respondent 24 continues to talk about the surface-level relationship of

people you see online, making it easy to compare. There was a theme of disconnect in the data between users and TikTok influencers that led to both comparisons and lack of comparisons. Based on respondents' 21 and 24 answers, they attribute the lack of depth in the relationship to the likelihood of engaging in comparisons. Because it is easy to see everything that is going so well and "perfect" in a stranger's life, it is easy to engage in those comparisons. While this is the case for most participants, some use the surface-level relationship with "influencers" to brush away the idealized "perfection." The tangible reality of their relationships with peers brings a much more 'realness' to the attributes subject to comparison.

Peer Comparisons (PC).

Influencers do not make all of the content on the user's feed. Social media has made it easy to connect with friends and family by sharing photos and videos on a global scale. Because of this, many users might have people they already have a previous relationship with taking up part of their feed. It is essential to consider the relationships of the comparisons users have because this says a lot about whether users are more likely to engage in comparisons due to more or less information about a particular lifestyle or person. This is where the code peer comparisons stem from. There was a lack of previous information on the relationship status of comparisons and if that plays a role in the comparisons made. The same questions from the survey have been used to analyze the results for this specific code.

Survey Question 18: "How would you describe the relationship of people you are most likely to engage in physical comparisons with to yourself?"

Survey Question 21: "Describe how often you engage in comparison with peers of influencers over TikTok? Which do you find yourself comparing to more?"

The following table outlines quotes from individuals who have mentioned the code “peer comparisons” in their survey responses.

Table 9: Peer Comparisons (PC) Data

<i>Peer Comparisons (PC)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 3	Q18 “to mom, sister friend, classmate” Q21 “I compare myself to peers more because I have more contact with them. They feel more 'real' so it makes me feel stupid for not being as good/pretty/smart/athletic.”
	Respondent 7	Q18 “Most likely to engage in comparisons with friends” Q21 “Compares to friends on a daily basis”
	Respondent 8	Q18 “Friends because I feel like they are prettier and I wonder what I can change to be more like them” Q21 “Become more judgemental of peers.”
	Respondent 9	Q21 “ I compare myself to peers more than influencers.”
	Respondent 12	Q18 “Most likely to compare with friends but does not happen often.”
	Respondent 13	Q21 “With peers you've seen them in person, and yeah some may look good all the time, but you get to see the reality of them and not the highlight reels of TikTok only.”
	Respondent 15	Q21 “I would say I have comparison thoughts with peers daily.”
	Respondent 20	Q18 “Most likely to compare with friends It's easy for me to rationalize that an influencer has access to products and lighting and filters and personal trainers. Whereas regular people, that is harder.”
	Respondent 30	Q18 “Most likely to engage in comparisons with friends.” Q21 “Compare myself to peers more often.”
	Respondent 40	Q21 “Peers around me.”
	Respondent 41	Q21 “More likely to compare myself with peers because TikTok is not real and you can close the

	app. But in person, I can think more thoroughly about the comparisons.”
Respondent 43	Q21 “I compare myself to peers because I see them more and they are in real life so I have like actual things to compare.”
Respondent 44	Q18 “People who are very close relationally Q21 “I compare myself to peers more because I know the influencers have had surgeries or they know filters and angles.”
Respondent 50	Q18 “I am best friends with the person I compare myself to.”
Respondent 54	Q21 “More likely to compare with peers because they feel like real people.”
Respondent 56	Q18 “Often engage in comparisons with my thinner friends.” Q21 “I spend more time with peers than on TikTok therefore I find myself comparing to peers more.”

Of the 56 participants, 20 said they are more likely to compare themselves to peers over strangers or “influencers.” The pattern that appeared the most as respondents talked about peer comparisons is the lack of filters with peers, which leads to a tendency to compare more. Some respondents mentioned that with influencers, it is easy to justify their ideal looks, while with peers, there are no filters to justify. Respondent 44 says, “I compare myself to peers more because I know the influencers have had surgeries or they know filters and angles.” There is the idea posed by respondent 44 that the “influencers” she refers to represent a fake reality. The filters, angles, and surgeries do not accurately represent what is real. Many respondents attribute peers to being more “real life” than strangers or “influencers.” Respondent 54 says they are “More likely to compare with peers because they feel like real people.” These peers are more accessible in proximity and interaction. There is no room to attach filters or find certain angles during interpersonal encounters. In addition, respondent 20 says they are “Most likely to

compare with friends. It's easy for me to rationalize that an influencer has access to products and lighting and filters and personal trainers, whereas regular people, that is harder.” Again, these comparisons are also rooted in upward comparisons that result in negative self-reflection as they describe their peer relationships. Respondent 3 says peers “feel more 'real' so it makes me feel stupid for not being as good/pretty/smart/athletic.” This respondent makes it known that the likelihood and influence of comparisons heightens because of how much more “real” peers seem. Respondent 56 says she is likelier to compare with her thinner friends, which affirms the data pattern attributing thinner body types as the collective “ideal” goal. Upward comparison codes are woven throughout the stranger and peer comparison codes. While 20 participants mention engaging in peer comparisons, it is unclear whether they are referring to TikTok or in person.

However, it appears a majority refers to in-person peer comparisons rather than through TikTok. Respondent 30 says it is uncommon to post TikTok videos among her friends; therefore, she primarily engages with influencers. This could be the case for other respondents as well. Respondent 3 says she participates in comparisons with peers more because she “has more contact with them.” Some respondents mention that the idea of interpersonal interactions removes the option to edit photos and videos, which can create more comparison vulnerability. Respondent 13 mentions seeing peers in person and seeing their reality vs. TikTok's highlights. Respondent 31 says, “I compare myself a lot to my peers than TikTok,” inferring that she compares more interpersonally with peers than when she is on TikTok. Respondents 40 and 41 use language that makes it known to the researcher that they are referring to in-person peer comparisons rather than TikTok. They use rhetoric like “peers around me” and “In person...” TikTok is a social media site mainly involving influencer content and funny and trendy videos. It does not tend to be a platform where users engage with close friends and family. This could be

why respondents' answers are more directed towards in-person peer comparisons rather than over TikTok. The type of content respondents engage with plays a significant role in whether they engage in physical comparisons or not.

Types of Content

Different pieces of social media content can influence the cognitive behavior of users; therefore, this theme was pre-established before analyzing the data. Fitness content was expected to be a significant component of what respondents like to watch, and the data proved that assumption correct. Fitness content tends to rely heavily on aesthetics, which is relevant to this study. TikTok is also a place where users can go for fashion tips and inspiration. As users view other people on social media try on and promote certain styles and clothes, this can cause a lot of self-reflection. Fitness content especially proved to be a popular choice of content among the respondents. Respondents answered what type of content they prefer to watch in response to survey question 12:

Survey Question 12: “What kind of videos do you enjoy watching and why?”

Fitness (FN).

It would be counterintuitive to examine body image concerns among females and not consider the fitness industry's influence. Based on the data, fitness and health content have been some of the most shared content respondents engage with over TikTok. Out of the 56 respondents, 27 recorded that they either prefer fitness and health videos or these videos just appear on their feed. Of these 27 people, 16 reference upward comparisons when discussing fitness or health content. This is close to 60% of responses that mention fitness-related content. Below are essential quotes from respondents to consider in analyzing this theme.

Table 10: Fitness (FN) Data

<i>Fitness (FN)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 3	“Sometimes experiences negative body image concerns after watching fitness videos.”
	Respondent 13	“On days I feel confident or have just worked out I’m in such a better mental space and I feel confident and accomplished.”
	Respondent 15	“TikTok is filled with fitness inspiration on my page. I normally am very inspired by watching exercise or lifting videos.”
	Respondent 18	“TikTok makes me feel like I need to lose weight when I do not.”
	Respondent 21	Prefers to watch “Fitness and weight loss videos.” “TikTok enhances my likelihood for comparisons because I am constantly seeing people doing their makeup, working out in tight leggings...”
	Respondent 23	Prefers to watch, “fitness videos” “I usually compare myself to other's fitness journeys.” Body goals stem from, “the desired look I want to achieve with my fitness and healthy eating.”
	Respondent 25	“The fitness industry is becoming very popular on social media. Sometimes it's hard to remember that these influencers have been lifting and counting macros for years AND ALWAYS use perfect lighting for their pictures “I usually compare when fitness videos come up on my FYP.”
	Respondent 27	Prefers to follow, “fitness accounts.” “I follow a lot of running accounts or fitness accounts and wish to look like them.” “Working out triggers body image concerns.”
	Respondent 34	“Only experience negative body image thoughts because I work out and put that pressure on myself.”
	Respondent 37	“I do not follow fitness influencers, but when they do come up I feel as though I should be

	doing more to maintain my body and physical health.”
Respondent 40	“TikTok motivates me to go to the gym.”
Respondent 41	“I get motivated to lose weight from TikTok when I see gym videos or fitness videos.”
Respondent 55	“Body goals stem from girls' fitness TikTok's that come up on my feed.
Respondent 36	“TikTok enhances my likelihood of engaging in comparisons, especially with weight loss videos where people are showing the progress they have made.

Most of these responses (close to 60%) mention fitness content and upward comparisons, often leading to a negative view of self. Interestingly, a few respondents have noted a particular “side” of TikTok that leads to physical comparisons. Respondent 34 says this “side” of TikTok is favored towards “beauty or influencer[s].” Based on a few other respondents, it can be inferred that this “side” of TikTok refers to content associated with physicalities, like fitness and beauty-oriented content. For example, respondent 32 mentions that they are not on that side of TikTok when asked if they experience negative body image concerns. Fitness or health content was not included when asked what their preferred content consumption is. A few respondents, when asked, “Where do your physical body goals stem from?” mentioned the fitness industry. Respondent 55 answered that physical body goals stem from “girls fitness TikToks that come up on my feed.” Fitness TikTok includes educational fitness progress, workout recommendations, and general gym community interactions. Respondent 24 responded, “From the desired look I want to achieve with my fitness and healthy eating.” Respondent 24 does not necessarily reference fitness TikTok content but from personal fitness goals. Similarly, respondent 8 mentioned her goals stem from working as a dancer and in the health and fitness industry. While the data has proven fitness content to shape users' goals, some respondents have also been highly

motivated by the content. Respondent 15 says, “TikTok is filled with fitness inspiration on my page. I normally am very inspired by watching exercise or lifting videos.” As previously mentioned, some participants have mentioned motivation as positive feedback from time spent on TikTok. Respondent 40 also says that TikTok motivates her to go to the gym. Again, this motivation as a response to viewing fitness-related content results from engaging in upward comparisons to better their selves.

Not all the respondents resonate with this motivation. Some respondents seem to say that fitness-related content does lead to more body image concerns of their own. Respondent 3 mentioned negative thoughts about body image mainly occur after watching fitness-related videos. These videos are fixated on physicality and, therefore, could lead to an intense fixation on one’s own body image. Respondent 21 uses language suggesting that she compares herself negatively to people on TikTok who work out in tight leggings. The type of clothing plays a prominent role in her response as she describes the nature of her comparisons. Respondent 27 says working out triggers body image concerns and that she wishes to look like those who run the fitness accounts she follows on TikTok. This respondent describes upward comparisons as she focuses on people she sees as superior in their fitness journey. She also highlights that fitness content contributes to negative thoughts about her body image. Respondent 38 says she is not “doing enough” when approaching fitness influencers. Some respondents say they do compare with fitness-related content but do not specify whether this results in negative self-reflection or positive motivation. Nevertheless, the data show a high likelihood of upward comparisons when users are confronted with fitness-related content. Data also showed that fashion-related content has more to do with the sizing of the clothes rather than the clothes itself.

Fashion (FH).

This thematic code was surprising in its results. Types of clothing trends, outfit styling, and shopping trends are a large field of TikTok content young women resort to for fashion inspiration. According to the data, 11 of the 56 participants enjoy watching fashion-oriented videos. Of these 11 participants, eight have also mentioned engaging in upward comparisons. What was surprising about the data was not necessarily respondents comparing themselves to the specific clothes that people on TikTok own but how people on TikTok look in particular clothes. This is then less of a fashion-oriented comparison and more of a physical body comparison. Again, this upward comparison engagement results in negative views of self. The following is a set of quotes from respondents who focus on fashion-oriented content.

Table 11: Fashion (FH) Data

<i>Fashion (FH)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 7	Enjoys watching fashion videos
	Respondent 9	“Negative body image concerns happen when I am figuring out what to wear on social media.”
	Respondent 10	“There are constant ads for clothes that are slimming. The way people dress can cause negative views of self.”
	Respondent 23	Watches fashion videos “Physical goals stem from wanting to wear certain clothes size”
	Respondent 41	“Comparisons make me want to dress better.”
	Respondent 42	“TikTok causes me to compare my own body to those who are skinnier or can fit into clothes and look good in them.” “I like to compare myself to people who are smaller looking and wear more sweatshirts and skirts.”
	Respondent 51	“I focus a lot on my fashion and people on TikTok look AMAZING in specific clothes.”

Based on respondent 9's response, her motive is inspiration to find something to wear, but when viewing fashion inspiration videos, the outcome is negative body image concerns. Again, these results are centralized around how specific clothes fit others; the respondents compare that to themselves. These comparisons are more concerned with how clothes make a person look. A couple of respondents mentioned how they view clothes that make other people look thinner and then compare themselves to those people if they do not look the same. Respondent 10 attributes advertisements that constantly promote slimming clothes as influencing their body image satisfaction. This is the only time participants in this study mention advertisements. A majority of responses reference fashion content as it relates to TikTok users. Respondent 42 says, "TikTok causes me to compare my own body to those who are skinnier or can fit into clothes and look in them." Based on these responses, the ideal physical goal would be a slimmer or thinner body type, which also correlates to the data found when respondents were asked about their physical body goals. The data also reveal that these users see content that pushes this ideal and are more likely to engage in negative views of self. Fitness content sometimes led to positive feelings of motivation, but that was not the case for fashion content except for one respondent. Respondent 41 says that "comparisons make me want to dress better." On the other hand, Respondent 23 enjoys watching fashion videos and mentions how her physical body goals stem from wanting to wear a particular clothing size, which also resonates with what Respondent 42 had to say. Through analysis, it appears fashion content leads to physical comparisons. The comparisons made with fashion-oriented content seem less about the clothing itself and more about how people over TikTok look in the clothes compared to the user participants.

Mental & Physical Effects

The theme of “Mental and Physical Effects” came from the assumption that social media and all media pose mental and physical influences. This study is explicitly concerned with the cognitive influences of TikTok, but often, the cognitive influences can lead to behavioral changes. The only pre-determined code under this theme was “nutrition/ eating habits.” This is because social media has proven to both positively and negatively influence women with eating disorder habits. It was essential to know if TikTok affects the eating habits of women based on a desire to look a certain way or achieve a standard of beauty. The other six codes: “depression/ sadness,” “jealousy,” “attention span,” “information overload,” “direct effects on body image,” and “self-worth criticism,” were established as these patterns became more apparent through the coding of survey results. Questions 13 and 19 of the survey drove the majority of these responses.

Survey Question 13: “Do you believe TikTok may have had any effects on your mental health?” Why or why not?

Survey Question 19: “Do you feel like these comparisons influence your mood or actions? If so, how?”

Depression/ Sadness (DP).

This code stems from some respondents who mentioned the depressive state that comparisons put them in. Not all respondents go so far as to say it makes them feel depressed, but note it makes them feel sadder. Questions 13 and 19 drove a majority of these responses. The following is a list of quotes from respondents who mentioned the depressive or sad cognitive influence comparisons, or TikTok itself have had on them.

Table 12: Depression/ Sadness (DP) Data

<i>Depression/ Sadness</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
<i>(DP)</i>		
	Respondent 2	Q13 “If I spend too much time on [TikTok] I begin to feel down – lazy, tired, etc..”
	Respondent 3	Q13 “Not doing enough/ not enough/ not pretty enough/ a failure/ guilt.” Q19 “Comparisons makes me feel sad and mad.”
	Respondent 7	Q19 “Comparisons lead to depressive relapses.”
	Respondent 8	Q13 “TikTok leads to sometimes feeling sad because I don’t think my life is as glamorous or easy as it could be” Q19 “Comparisons makes me sad and then grumpy.”
	Respondent 9	Q19 “After comparing myself to others, I feel more sad.”
	Respondent 10	Q19 “If having a bad day comparisons makes me shut down, feel emotional, not want to go places, etc.”
	Respondent 13	Q19 “Comparing myself to strangers on bad body image days results in being in a bad mood/ depressed” “Some of the girls were comparing ourselves to probably have eating disorders, or mental struggles just like we do.”
	Respondent 15	Q19 “When I find myself thinking other people are beautiful, more beautiful than myself, I find myself getting in a bad mood. And I end up wanting to go home and hide. I’m just sad.”
	Respondent 19	Q19 “Comparisons make me feel sad or less worthy of love.”
	Respondent 23	Q19 “Comparisons sometimes makes me sad.”
	Respondent 24	Q19 “Comparisons influence my mood. It’s something that becomes more of an internal fight between yourself-battling between truth and misconceptions.”

Respondent 26 “I am more lonely on TikTok.”

Five of the total respondents mention TikTok, resulting in more negative mental health patterns. Respondent 2 says time on TikTok can lead to feelings of laziness and sadness. Using the application itself does not require much energy. Therefore, a lot of time spent on TikTok could be why some respondents mention feelings of laziness. Respondent 3 says that TikTok makes her feel like she is “Not doing enough/ not enough/ pretty enough/ a failure/ guilty.” These emotions mentioned by respondent 3 give insight into her desire to reach a certain standard. It leads to the conclusion that she deems there is a certain standard that TikTok reminds her of and that she believes she falls short of. Respondent 8 says, “TikTok leads to sometimes feeling sad because I don’t think my life is as glamorous or easy as it could be.” This respondent associates sadness with lifestyle comparisons. Respondent 45 mentions that she is lonelier when on TikTok, which could be attributed to the “fear of missing out” phenomenon occurring over social media, which has already been discussed. This is a unique response, considering that social media is an open-ended space to engage with various communities but still experiencing feelings of loneliness. No more relevant piece of data from this respondent could aid in evaluating this answer further. Still, it does introduce the assumption that TikTok is primarily a social media source for feedback, entertainment, and inspiration rather than engagement. Respondent 46 says that she has had bad mental health her whole life, so TikTok is not changing much, which leads the research to think that TikTok is not positively or negatively influencing her mental state but aiding in maintaining the negative state it was already at. Three out of five of the respondents discussed said they watch fitness or fashion-related content. Respondents addressing the mental side effects of comparisons had a more significant amount of data.

Twenty-three out of the 56 respondents said that engaging in comparisons dampens their mood, makes them feel sad, or puts them in a negative mood. Thirteen out of these 23 specify that these comparisons are upward comparisons. Previous research has shown that upward comparisons lead to more negative emotions toward the self (Haque, 2020). Most of these 23 respondents mention ‘sadness’ as their answer to how these comparisons influence their mood. Three respondents, in particular, describe feelings of depression. Respondent 7 says, “Comparisons lead to depressive relapses.” Respondent 10 says, “If [I am] having a bad day comparisons makes me shut down, feel emotional, [and] not want to go places, etc.,” which emulates depressive characteristics. Respondent 13 says, “Comparing myself to strangers on bad body image days results in being in a bad mood/ depressed.” Like respondent 13, a few respondents also record that how these comparisons make them feel depends on their mental state before these engagements. Respondent 42 says, “TikTok used to influence my body image satisfaction when I was not in a good mental state.” This respondent says not being in a good mental state puts her at risk for the influence TikTok has. Previous research has also suggested that women who are more prone to social comparisons are more likely to experience negative body satisfaction from manipulated media (Kleemans et al., 2018). Respondent 18 also says that how these comparisons influence her mood depends on “my mental state and if it is a bad day.” Like feelings of depression and sadness, the emotion jealousy was a pattern that came from participant responses.

Jealousy (JL).

Jealousy emerged as the data was being analyzed. While it makes sense that when engaging in comparisons, one would naturally feel envious occasionally, it was underestimated how often this would come up from the participants. Jealousy was one of the last codes to be

established, but it plays a vital role in understanding specific emotions that resonate with upward comparisons. There were no specific questions that respondents used “jealousy” as a response to.

It was very sporadically mentioned throughout the data. The following table outlines

respondents' quotes that mention feelings of jealousy.

Table 13: Jealousy (JL) Data

<i>Jealousy (JL)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 3	“With peers and influencers, I tend to get jealous.”
	Respondent 15	“Sometimes I do find myself comparing my life to those on TikTok & I get a little jealous.” “Sometimes when watching girls who have beautiful skin, I am a little jealous.” “When I find myself thinking other people are beautiful, more beautiful than myself getting in a bad mood. I get jealous “I find myself jealous of material things on TikTok (Kids, homes, travel, cars).”
	Respondent 18	“I engage more in comparisons with the people around me because I notice how they look in social settings and become jealous.”
	Respondent 29	“TikTok creates jealousy of those who are naturally thin or those who can put on muscle easily in the gym.”
	Respondent 34	“If I see someone with my body type and they're not coming off as self-conscious I do feel slightly jealous.” “I'm far less likely to feel jealous about a friend and their accomplishments.”
	Respondent 37	“I find myself being more cynical than normal, and also being jealous of other's possessions and place in life.”
	Respondent 43	“I see a lot of people with the body type I want to achieve on TikTok. It makes me a little envious of what they have and reminds me to work harder.”

Respondent 56 “Comparisons sometimes make me jealous or discontent.”

Eight out of the 56 respondents mentioned jealousy in their survey responses. A few specifically say being jealous of other people’s physical attributes. Respondent 15 mentions, “Sometimes when watching girls who have beautiful skin, I am a little jealous,” and getting jealous when watching girls who are overall “more beautiful than myself.” This respondent described an upward comparison and jealousy as a direct result of this comparison. Respondent 33 says, “If I see someone with my body type and they're not coming off as self-conscious I do feel slightly jealous.” Interestingly, this respondent is less concerned with someone's body type but is jealous of how someone feels about it. Respondent 43, conversely, says she gets jealous of people on TikTok who have the body type she wants to achieve. Again, an upward comparison is being described. Respondent 29 says, “TikTok creates jealousy of those who are naturally thin or those who can put on muscle easily in the gym.” Including respondent 29, five out of the eight respondents who mentioned jealousy chose to watch fitness-related content. This fitness-related content could reinforce the aesthetic goals of these respondents, which, according to the data, six of these eight are to reduce body fat and become stronger. In other words, over 50% of the respondents who struggle with jealousy are on fitness TikTok and have goals to either be thinner, leaner, or stronger.

Fifty percent of these respondents also mentioned engaging in materialistic/ lifestyle comparisons or enjoy watching lifestyle videos. Respondent 37 says, “I find myself being more cynical than normal, and also being jealous of other's possessions and place in life.” This respondent mentions that time spent on TikTok enhances her emotions of jealousy and cynicism, which is closely related to downward comparisons. Downward comparisons are made with those

seen as inferior to improve a person's feeling of self. Respondent 15 says, "I find myself jealous of material things on TikTok (Kids, homes, travel, cars)." Most responses mentioning jealousy concern physical attributes and how a person looks. There is still a minority of respondents who say jealousy over materialistic possessions or lifestyles, like respondent 15. Another code the researcher did not expect was the influence of TikTok on user attention span.

Attention Span (AS).

TikTok is a social media site that thrives off short, attention-getting videos. Scrolling to the next video could take less than two seconds. The nature of the application is short videos seeking to inform, educate, or entertain audiences. The influence TikTok has on users' attention span was not previously considered and was one of the last codes to be determined. Four of the 56 respondents mentioned a shorter attention span as a side-effect of TikTok use. Users with a shorter attention span may not be on TikTok as much, so its cognitive influence could be lower. The following are quotes from respondents who have mentioned TikTok leading to a shorter attention span. All these quotes are from answering the survey question:

Survey Question 13: "Do you believe TikTok may have had any effects on your mental health?" Why or why not?

Table 14: Attention Span (AS) Data

<i>Attention Span (AS)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 28	"In regards to paying attention yes. Smaller attention span."
	Respondent 34	"Yes, it's shortened my attention span I think. I like fast and easy information."
	Respondent 35	"Yes- shorter attention span."
	Respondent 42	"Yes, because it can affect your attention span."

These respondents say that TikTok influences their attention span. Two respondents said they spend one to two hours on TikTok daily, while the other two said zero to 30 minutes and 30 minutes to 1 hour. Determining a correlation between time spent on TikTok and attention span is outside the scope of this study. However, according to the respondents, a small pattern in the data found at least some time on TikTok influences user attention span. Respondent 34 says she has grown to like fast and accessible information, which parallels the Generation Z mindset when approaching social media and generational preferences. Dirir (2022) records that Generation Z tends to have a creative and fast-paced mentality. Similar to this code, information overload is a slightly larger pattern in the data.

Information Overload (IO).

TikTok is a never-ending bank of videos, information, and messages. Social media allows people to share opinions and thoughts that can reach large audiences publicly. It is a place to discuss and engage in discourse about anything and everything. There are constantly messages from different points of view being uploaded, which, according to the data, has been overwhelming for a few respondents. Information overload was not previously expected to resonate so much with survey takers. "Information overload" was the last established code in data analysis. David Bawden and Lyn Robinson (2020) seek to define this term by writing,

There is no single generally 2 accepted definition, but it can best be understood as that situation which arises when there is so much relevant and potentially useful information available that it becomes a hindrance rather than a help. (pp. 1-2)

The concept of Information Overload came up when participants responded to the following survey questions:

Survey Question 13: “Do you believe TikTok may have had any effects on your mental health?” Why or why not?

Survey Question 20: “Do you think TikTok enhances your likelihood of engaging in comparisons? Why or why not?”

The following quotes are from respondents who mentioned Information overload as their response to these questions.

Table 15: Information Overload (IO) Data

<i>Information Overload</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
<i>(IO)</i>	Respondent 5	Q13 “It is never-ending and there’s so much it’s overwhelming sometimes which is why I limit my time.”
	Respondent 14	Q20 “Yes, because it is a constant flow of content.”
	Respondent 21	“Q13 There is a large amount of information about many things on TikTok (not all credible) so I often discover new things that are "bad" for me- for example: processed foods, beauty products, coffee, etc. This causes anxiety when trying to decide what to eat and what to buy. This is so different from the way I live I grew up in where we were not bombarded with different information every day.”
	Respondent 23	Q20 “Yes, TikTok is an infinite bank of people who you want to look like, be like, or dress like. It doesn’t matter what it is, there’s a type of person on TikTok like you or what you want to be.”
	Respondent 24	Q13 “It’s an unending realm of mostly edited and unrealistic perceptions of people that make it easy to keep scrolling video to video.”

Five out of the total 56 respondents mention information overload throughout their responses. Respondents 5, 21, and 24 specifically describe information overload as they are talking about the effects TikTok has had on their mental health. Respondent 5 says TikTok can be “overwhelming at times.” Knowing whether she feels this way towards other social media or if TikTok has this unique effect would be beneficial. Respondent 21 says all of the information present causes anxiety as she is processing all of the information. Based on respondent 21’s response, it seems as though she goes to TikTok to get the majority of her information. These participant responses further validate Bawden and Robinson’s (2020) claim that abundant information is a hindrance rather than a help. Like respondent 21, some participants mentioned using TikTok for educational purposes. Respondent 24 talks about how the vast amount of information makes spending more time and scrolling on TikTok easier. While their intent may be to educate themselves, the data shows that an overwhelming flow of information communicating “unrealistic perceptions,” as respondent 24 describes, has negative behavior or physical effects. These effects are either more time spent on the application, feelings of anxiety, a greater likelihood of comparison, or overwhelmingness.

Respondents 14 and 23 mention information overload while answering why TikTok either does or does not enhance their likelihood of engaging in comparisons. Respondent 23 has a profound statement that sheds light on the multitude of data from this study regarding upward comparisons. Respondent 23 says, “TikTok is an infinite bank of people who you want to look like, be like, or dress like. It doesn’t matter what it is, there’s a type of person on TikTok like you or what you want to be.” According to respondents 23 and 14, information overload makes it far easier to engage in upward comparisons. While information was not expected to come out of the

data analysis, the code nutrition/ eating habits was expected but resulted in a slightly smaller pattern of information.

Nutrition/ Eating Habits (EH).

Nutrition and eating habits are important to consider when studying physical comparisons among young women. Social media is a powerful influencer and can influence a person's cognitive thoughts and actions. Comparisons that lead to negative views of self can also lead to an alteration of eating habits. As stated in Chapter 3, those who struggled with eating disorders and compared themselves to both thinner, healthier bodies and disordered bodies in some cases supported their eating disordered symptoms (Smahelova et al., 2020). Therefore, this code was established before data analysis to understand better how physical comparisons and users' idea of beauty standards could influence their eating habits. The following are quotes from respondents who mentioned either nutrition or eating habits.

Table 16: Nutrition/ Eating Habits (EH) Data

<i>Nutrition/ Eating Habits</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
<i>(EH)</i>	Respondent 2	“Occasionally decide to eat better.”
	Respondent 8	“Comparison affects my relationship with food a lot.” “I’ve struggled with food and body image the longer I’m on TikTok.”
	Respondent 10	Most social media platforms promote and thrive on comparison. We’re given images of what is the ‘ideal’ and told we’re not enough if we don’t fit it. Diet culture also runs rampant.”
	Respondent 13	“When I see videos of someone talking about weight or someone showing off their body that I wish I looked like... sometimes it results in binge eating.”

“Physical goals stem from my parents telling me when I was growing up that I needed to work out or start eating healthier “

“I definitely compare myself to influencers over peers... eating as a supermodel...even though you know it's not realistic it still makes you feel like you should also look like that even right after you've eaten a meal.”

Respondent 23	Physical body goals stem from, “the desired look I want to achieve with my fitness and healthy eating.”
Respondent 37	“Comparisons make me upset and consider skipping meals.”
Respondent 55	Experiences negative body image concerns, “When I am watching videos of others having fun or achieving goals while I’m eating or laying in bed.”

Four out of the 56 respondents mentioned that comparisons affect their eating habits. Only two of these respondents reference disordered eating habits. Respondent 37 mentions skipping meals as a response to comparisons. This same respondent says her physical body goals stem from seeing girls on TikTok with “super flat stomachs.” Based on her responses, her desire to look like the girls she sees on TikTok leads to comparisons and disordered eating habits. Respondent 13 mentions binge eating due to seeing fitness or ‘ideal’ beauty content. The National Eating Disorders Association associates (2018) an “extreme concern with body weight and shape” as a symptom of binge eating disorder (para. 8). Based on respondent 13 responses listed in the table, she shows a significant fixation on her body weight and shape. Respondent 8 not only says, “Comparison affects my relationship with food a lot,” but also her body image and relationship with food hurt the longer she is on TikTok. “A relationship with food” can mean many different things. But, in this case, it refers to the balance of enjoying and fueling one’s body with nutritious foods. Sondra Kronber (2021), a founding member of the National Eating

Disorders Association, defines a “healthy relationship with food” as, “relaxed eating, choosing preferences over positions, and practicing balance and flexibility in your eating” (para. 2). The correlation between Respondent 10 mentions diet culture, which is a celebration of the extreme elimination of certain types of foods does not fall within a “healthy relationship with food.” All four of these respondents who mention the disruption of eating habits as a response to comparisons from TikTok describe what Kronber (2021) defines as a poor relationship with food. There are no specific survey questions that these answers are a response to, but they are very sporadically mentioned through respondent’s surveys. Disordered eating habits can follow negative views of self, and a lot of data was gathered on respondents engaging in self-criticism.

Self Worth Criticism (SWC).

The data's second most frequently recorded code is “self-worth criticism.” This code came up as respondents continuously questioned their identity, worth, and the standards set by society. The data found in this code is where respondents called out the standards set by society and their opinions on this phenomenon. This data set is also where all of the respondents question whether they meet this standard of beauty. As mentioned before, upward comparisons can result in a negative view of self. Because this study has many upward comparisons, it makes sense that there would be a “self-criticism” code. This code appeared as a pattern early in the analysis process. There are no specific survey questions that the respondents answered with self-criticism reference. The following are quotes from respondents who have mentioned feelings or thoughts of self-worth criticism.

Table 17: Self Worth Criticism (SWC) Data

<i>Self Worth Criticism</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
<i>(SWC)</i>		

Respondent 3	“Not doing enough/ not enough/ not pretty enough/ a failure/ guilty.” “Physical goals stem from wanting to feel worthy.”
Respondent 6	“People are putting their "best selves" out there on insta/TikTok and that can cause comparison/perfectionism towards your own body.”
Respondent 7	“Negative body image concerns when looking at pictures that I'm in.”
Respondent 8	“Not pretty the way the world sees pretty.” “Feels like friends are prettier than I am and wonder what I can change to be more like them.”
Respondent 9	“Compare my current weight and pictures to how I looked in the past.”
Respondent 10	“We're given images of what is the 'ideal' and told we're not enough if we don't fit.”
Respondent 12	“More about self-criticism and less about comparison.”
Respondent 13	“Some physical goals come from social media and society's standards”
Respondent 14	“Makes me think that I'm not doing anything with my life compared to others.” “I feel less than worthy after comparisons.”
Respondent 15	“Physical body goals stem from society.”
Respondent 24	“TikTok presents a lot of pressure to be "perfect" or "likable". Scrolling through and seeing girls with perfect hair and perfect makeup/ no skin problems definitely causes insecurities. It opens up the door for opportunities to beat yourself up because you don't think you're "good enough"”
Respondent 28	“Physical goals stem from lifting and comparison to my own body at different phases”
Respondent 31	“I have a fear of always being too big or too skinny. I'm either not defined and strong enough or not thin enough.”

- Respondent 33 “I've always wanted to be skinnier my whole life, skinny always appeared to be of value. The skinny girls got the attention, friends, and boys. Always thought if I was skinny I'd finally have that.”
- Respondent 34 “Goals tend to stem from society in general that makes me want to "fit in"
- Respondent 39 “TikTok enhances the likelihood for comparison because you are seeing all the same type of women and if you don't match that type of beauty then you'll feel that you're not beautiful.”
- Respondent 41 Experiences negative body image concerns when “Negative body image concerns when I see a picture of myself that someone else took.”
- Respondent 44 “When I experience negative body image concerns I normally look up what I can do to fix my body.”
- Respondent 50 “Physical body goals stem from society norms.”
- Respondent 54 “You see a lot of unrealistic body types on TikTok.”
“TikTok often talks about what is/isn't desirable.”

Eighteen out of the 56 respondents mentioned a desire to fit a certain standard of beauty or success established by society. This is a crucial pattern identified with the research question in mind. Most respondents discuss this beauty standard as a thinner, more toned figure. Even when respondents do not specifically describe this standard, they claim that the world has established a standard in which they feel negatively about themselves if they do not fit within it. Respondent 8 says she feels “not pretty the way the world sees pretty.” As a response, she looks to herself to see what she can change to fit this idea. How the world sees pretty could be derived from various media messages from many platforms. It seems unlikely that respondent 8 developed this idea just from TikTok. Respondent 10 says, “We’re given images of what is the ‘ideal’ and told we’re

not enough if we don't fit." Respondents have even said that their own physical goals stem from society's idea of beauty. Respondent 13 says, "Some physical goals come from social media and society's standards." Respondent 13's response introduces an interesting question. Is TikTok an accurate representation of society? Respondents 15, 18, 33, 34, 50, and 52 also discuss how their physical body goals stem from society, culture, or social media. All of these respondents associate content on TikTok to represent the entirety of society. This could be due to a correlation between their lived experiences and what they see on TikTok; therefore, TikTok affirms these standards. This also could be due to Yadav and Rai's (2017) claim that "Generation Z having a strong 'virtual bonding'" (p.111) and therefore associates the community presented to them over TikTok as an accurate representation of a majority of society, whether it an accurate representation or not. This evaluation goes to show how influential social media messages are on people's perspectives on what is, in fact, real or not. Most of these respondents who mention society's idea of beauty also have physical goals, which are to be leaner, more toned, or lose weight. Respondent 18 says, "TikTok poses an increased pressure to be prettier or thinner...TikTok makes me feel like I need to lose weight when I do not." The idea of being prettier or thinner affirms the pattern of a thinner body type as "ideal." Respondent 24 also talks about the pressure that TikTok poses to be "perfect" or "likable." Other respondents have physical body goals that stem from comparing themselves, not others.

Respondents have shared that it is less about comparison and more about self-criticism, as Respondent 12 put it. Respondents 7 and 9 both mention negative body image concerns arising when looking at pictures of their current or past selves. Respondent 28 says her physical goals stem from "Comparison to my own body at different phases." This respondent is less concerned and is not influenced by images of other people but only by herself. Furthermore,

respondent 41 mentions that she also experiences negative body image concerns when she sees photos of herself that someone else took. These are exciting statements because these criticisms do not stem from an upward comparison but from pure reflection of themselves.

Eighteen out of the 56 respondents mentioned a desire to fit a standard of beauty or success set by society. Eight of these 18 respondents watch fitness/ health videos, which could be where they get this standard. This code is instrumental in answering the research question because it deals directly with TikTok's and society's idea of physical beauty. The following code discussed is similar but highlights TikTok's direct effect on users' body image.

Direct effect on body image (DE).

This code was not preestablished but was noticed as a pattern early on in the data analysis process. Some respondents very directly described TikTok's effects on their body image concerns. This provided apparent data as to what extent TikTok influences body image concerns among participants. The following is a list of quotes from respondents who included this code in their survey responses.

Table 18: Direct Effect on Body Image (DE) Data

<i>Direct effect on body image (DE)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 3	Q13 "I am not pretty enough."
	Respondent 4	Q13 "TikTok leads to negative body image." Q17 "TikTok influences body image satisfaction the more time spent on TikTok."
	Respondent 5	Q17 "Yes it can become comparative."
	Respondent 8	Q14 "Normally experience negative body image concerns when watching TikTok."

	Q20 "I've struggled with food and body image the longer I'm on TikTok."
Respondent 9	Q17 "Impacts body image satisfaction more negatively than positively bc it causes comparison."
Respondent 13	Q13 "TikTok has changed the way I think about myself and others."
Respondent 16	"TikTok leads to a decline in self-esteem."
Respondent 17	Q14 "When I look at social media and comparing myself to others, I usually experience negative body image concerns."
Respondent 18	Q17 "TikTok makes me feel like I need to lose weight when I do not."
Respondent 21	Q14 "If I am on TikTok too long I start to compare myself to others. I compare my body shape, face, makeup clothes." Q17 "I am more satisfied with my body image when I am off TikTok. "
Respondent 24	"TikTok presents a lot of pressure to be "perfect" or "likable". Scrolling through and seeing girls with perfect hair and perfect makeup/ no skin problems definitely causes insecurities. It opens up the door for opportunities to beat yourself up because you don't think you're "good enough"
Respondent 39	Q14 "Experiences negative body image concerns when looking at other girl's body images on social media." Q17 "The more time I spend on TikTok the more time I have to compare my body to the images I'm seeing."
Respondent 31	"I have a fear of always being too big or too skinny. I'm either not defined and strong enough or not thin enough."
Respondent 44	Q20 "TikTok enhances my likelihood for engaging in comparisons because there are trends like the American girl doll teeth and it just makes you look at yourself and notice a difference."

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Respondent 49 | Q20 “TikTok enhances my likelihood of engaging in comparisons sometimes with beauty standards.” |
| Respondent 52 | Q17 “TikTok influenced body image satisfaction because of the heavily edited videos that provide unrealistic ideals for my body.” |

When mentioning TikTok’s effects on user body image, many respondents said this in response to the survey question:

Survey Question 17: “Do you feel like time on TikTok influences your body image satisfaction?”

Seventeen out of the 56 respondents mentioned that TikTok has a direct negative effect on their own body image concerns. This does not include the respondents who don’t mention body image but say TikTok yields more comparisons. Respondent 4 says, “TikTok influences body image satisfaction the more time spent on TikTok.” According to this respondent's answer, time on TikTok plays a significant factor in its influence. Respondents 8, 39, and 44 all say that they experience negative body image concerns when they are on TikTok or social media in general. Respondent 39 says, “The more time I spend on TikTok the more time I have to compare my body to the images I’m seeing.” Again, time spent on TikTok contributes to the number of comparisons made. Of course, suppose respondents are experiencing negative body image concerns when watching videos or images on TikTok. In that case, these images must fit this societal standard discussed in the previous code discussion. Ten out of the 17 respondents who directly mention experiencing negative body image concerns from TikTok are watching fitness and health videos. These images and videos could be the toned, lean, slim standard previously mentioned by many respondents’ aesthetic goals. Respondent 21 says, “I am more satisfied with my body image when I am off TikTok.” This leads the researcher to believe that

TikTok makes the respondent feel more negatively about her body image. Respondents 4, 21, and 39 all say that the more time they spend on TikTok, the more negatively they feel regarding their body image. This further validates the pattern that more time contributes to TikTok's stronger negative influence on female body image concerns. While the set of data discussed specifically references negative body image concerns in association with TikTok, 44 out of the 56 participants have said that they do experience negative body image concerns at least occasionally.

This code is important when approaching the research question because it gives insight as to what extent TikTok influences negative body images for this participant poll. The data has shown that TikTok poses many mental effects to users. Still, the cognitive influence this study seeks to understand is the communication of beauty standards and the processing of these beauty standards from users. The following themes discussed were expected to be in the data set but had no mention.

Virtual Community (VC) TikTok use for Creativity (TUC) TikTok Controversy (TC)

Social media is a unique space to connect and communicate with individuals from various communities, backgrounds, or beliefs. Previous research has found that the motives for individuals to engage with specific social media sites stem from the ability to connect over large distances, popularity linked to a certain number of followers, the ability to control their communication, and the ability to establish relationships with like-minded communities (Jamal-Menayes, 2015). Based on this assessment, respondents were expected to mention their desire to connect with users of similar communities, which is how the theme of virtual community was established. None of the respondents mentioned using TikTok to engage with a specific

community or for a feeling of belonging. Similarly, no respondents said making TikTok's or using it creatively.

How TikTok is developed satisfies Generation Z's fast, fast-paced, and creative mentality (Dirir, 2022). Many businesses and news sites utilize TikTok to reach a larger, younger audience. TikTok is full of humorous and niche content. Therefore, it was expected that respondents would also engage in making TikToks, whether for a smaller community of friends or larger audiences. While these themes were established before analyzing the data, none of the respondents mentioned creating their TikToks. Respondent 29 notes that it is not common to post TikTok among her friends. In addition, TikTok has not been perceived highly in response to their various legal engagements.

It is no secret that TikTok has been the subject of many data breach legal cases. In 2023, the United States FBI launched an investigation into the company and its parent company. The application has been banned in multiple countries and from federal devices in numerous countries. TikTok has even been banned from various university campuses' wireless networks; the state of Montana passed a bill that will ban application stores from making TikTok available for download starting in January 2024. It was expected that respondents might have something to say about the legalities of TikTok and take part in the controversial discussion sweeping the nation. Still, no response of the sort was recorded. On the contrary, many respondents spoke extremely highly of the application.

No influence/ Positive Experiences (NI)

Most of the literature discussed pertained to negative cognitive or behavioral influences of TikTok. Therefore, the data was expected to reiterate previous literature. It was surprising to see the amount of positive rhetoric used to describe the effects of TikTok. This theme far

surpassed other codes in its frequency mentioned, with 70 respondents saying either a lack of influence or a positive experience with the social media site. This theme was one of the first indicative themes to be established because of the high response rate from the beginning of the analysis. The first table below outlines respondents' indifference or lack of influence to TikTok, while the following table outlines a positive experience with TikTok. Both of these are under the same theme because they contrast the idea of social media having more negative side effects than positive.

Table 19: No Influence (NI) Data

<i>No Influence (NI)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 1	Very rarely will make comparisons over TikTok
	Respondent 2	TikTok does not influence body image satisfaction
	Respondent 3	Experiences negative body image concerns but, "not necessarily from TikTok."
	Respondent 12	Does not experience negative body image concerns. "I am confident in the fluidity that comes with weight fluctuations in life."
	Respondent 24	"Helps the day go by faster by filling in time that I might be doing nothing else."
	Respondent 25	"TikTok has no side effects on my mental health." "Comparisons do not influence my mood or actions."
	Respondent 32	"Time on TikTok does not influence body image satisfaction."
	Respondent 46	"I have had bad mental health my whole life so TikTok is not changing much." "TikTok does not influence my body image satisfaction- I only get edits and comedy videos."

“TikTok does not enhance my likelihood of engaging in comparisons.”

Respondent 53 “TikTok does not influence my body image satisfaction.”
 “TikTok does not enhance my likelihood of engaging in comparisons.”

Eleven out of the 56 respondents spoke either indifferently or were very frank in saying TikTok does not influence their body image or body image satisfaction. This could be for a variety of reasons. Respondent 46 says, “TikTok does not influence my body image satisfaction- I only get edits and comedy videos.” This could be due to the kind of content that respondents are watching. A high ratio of respondents mentioned that they enjoy watching comedy videos, which are less likely to communicate body image factors or beauty standards. Respondent 46 also says, “I have had bad mental health my whole life so TikTok is not changing much.” This contradicts previous respondents who mention poor mental health puts them at risk for comparisons or negative mental health effects of TikTok. Respondent 3 says they do experience negative body image concerns but not specifically from TikTok. Many respondents talked about in-person comparisons rather than virtual peer comparisons, which contribute to the study’s additional findings, but not necessarily the research question being answered. The next set of data describes the positive feedback users receive from TikTok.

Table 20: Positive Experiences (NI) Data

<i>Positive Experiences</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
<i>(NI)</i>		
	Respondent 6	“Looking for a mental break when on TikTok.”
	Respondent 7	“TikTok has a positive effect- mostly watches funny videos so it helps me relax.”

- “Most of the creators on my fyp are body-positive and or/ relatable.”
- Respondent 9 “It is a nice way to de-stress and shut down.”
- Respondent 12 “TikTok used as a decompression time.”
 “TikTok has taught me how to dress my body shape, and it has led to increased confidence.”
 “TikTok has taught me to be more confident by teaching me how to style my body type.”
- Respondent 15 “I normally am very inspired by TikTok and after watching for 30 minutes or less, I get a burst of energy to do something. I’m very motivated by watching others live.”
 “TikTok is filled with fitness inspiration on my page. I normally am very inspired by watching exercise or lifting videos.”
- Respondent 18 “TikTok has helped me believe that I’m not an abnormality in things.”
- Respondent 19 “I need something mindless to decompress.”
 Does not experience negative body image concerns. “I stay away from videos that would make me experience that.”
 “The content I follow tends to be more genuine.”
- Respondent 20 “I think I like the distraction from the quiet.”
 “TikTok can also help. I see lots of videos about how to style different body types, or easy workouts to do with no equipment.”
- Respondent 22 “TikTok does not have any effects on my mental health because I use it for wedding planning and recipes.”
 “TikTok enhances your body image satisfaction because I see a lot of videos on body positivity and taking the pressure off your clothes.”
- Respondent 23 “TikTok is a form of relaxation to me.”
 “I feel like TikTok inspires me to stay motivated and fit. It allows me to see the journey of other people and how they achieved their goals.”
- Respondent 27 “TikTok can also help me calm down during anxious nights.”
- Respondent 30 “Part of my bedtime routine to unwind.”

- “TikTok does not influence my body image satisfaction because I don't usually watch videos about fitness or beauty.”
- Respondent 31 “TikTok is mindless.”
“It is a too easy way for me to zone out when I'm overwhelmed.”
- Respondent 33 “TikTok is more of an escapist and positive place to get your mind off of comparison especially cause you can engage in certain videos and then your feed alters to what you like.”
- Respondent 34 “TikTok is good for convenience - I don't need to go searching for entertainment - The algorithm is good at guessing what I want to watch.”
“I do not struggle with negative body image concerns. I don't watch videos of women doing their makeup or worrying about how they look.”
“TikTok does not enhance my likelihood of engaging in comparisons because my algorithm is not favored towards beauty or "influencer" side. When I see these videos I am more likely to engage in comparison.”
- Respondent 35 “Watches TikTok after work to unwind
“Videos watch to shut my brain off.”
- Respondent 37 “It is quicker than starting a show and there's always new content.”
“I usually do not see the content that triggers negative body image.”
- Respondent 38 “TikTok does not influence my body image satisfaction all the time- sometimes it makes you feel better.”
- Respondent 40 “TikTok does not influence my body image satisfaction but motivates me to go to the gym.”
“Comparisons affect me by wanting to be better and more motivated.”
- Respondent 44 “It is something I can do mindlessly (TikTok)”
“[I] Use TikTok to educate me.”
- Respondent 47 TikTok does not influence body image satisfaction – “I get knowledge and motivation

	from it but I do not think differently about myself..”
Respondent 49	Is inspired by TikTok “Comparisons motivate me.” “Sometimes comparisons lead to motivation and inspiration.”
Respondent 50	“ I think it [TikTok] will help me relax.”

Twenty-four out of the 56 respondents find TikTok to be a positive escape for inspiration, education, clarity of mind, or motivation to improve themselves. Some respondents mentioned that TikTok is helpful in de-stressing their day. According to the data, this usually looks like scrolling through TikTok before bed because it is a mindless activity that does not require much brain power. TikTok is in the form of short, content-customizable videos, making it a fair entertainment choice. Some respondents use this form of entertainment to escape from “real life” struggles and remove themselves from the stressors present throughout the day. They attribute time on TikTok as a nice activity and a way to relax. Respondent 9 says, “It is a nice way to de-stress and shut down.” The term “shut down” used here is interesting because it reveals that time on TikTok does not require anything. Users receive entertainment, and in return, they can “shut down” from any responsibilities necessary. Respondents 13 and 19 mention that it is a place to decompress, which can also be attributed back to being a place that does not require much energy and distancing themselves from the stress factors presented throughout the day. Respondent 27 says, “TikTok can help me calm down during anxious nights.” Based on these responses, it appears that TikTok has a very positive cognitive influence on these respondents. Respondent 23 mentions that TikTok is not only a form of relaxation but a place to be inspired by other people's journeys. Data has already shown that some respondents feel motivated and inspired to reach new goals from TikTok, especially regarding fitness content. Respondent 47

says they use TikTok for both knowledge and motivation. Respondent 44 also says they use TikTok for education. Many respondents have also found TikTok to enhance their styling.

A few respondents specifically mentioned that TikTok has helped them style their clothes for their specific body types. Therefore, it aids in enhancing their body image satisfaction. Respondent 12 says, “TikTok has taught me to be more confident by teaching me how to style my body type.” Based on this response, not only has TikTok helped enhance her confidence, but it has also educated her on how to style herself. Respondent 20 also says, “I see lots of videos about how to style different body types.” Fashion education is a small pattern that arose from the data. Respondents 7 and 22 mention that they see videos focused on body positivity, which takes the pressure off what clothes to wear. These respondents have received positive feedback from TikTok regarding body image concerns. Some respondents have also mentioned that there is a type of content that leads to negative body image concerns or comparisons, which is why they have positive experiences because they choose to avoid it.

Based on respondents’ responses, a specific type of content is associated with negative TikTok experiences. The respondents who have had positive experiences have mentioned that they do not associate with particular content. Respondent 7 says, “Most of the creators on my FYP [For you page] are body positive and/ or relatable.” Previous data discussed has found that relatability is a significant factor in positive TikTok feedback. Respondent 19 says that she tends to stay away from videos that would make her experience negative body image concerns. She says she follows “more genuine” accounts. “More genuine” could also mean more relatable, as it closely relates to everyday interpersonal encounters. Respondent 30 says, “I don’t usually watch videos about fitness or beauty,” which does not influence her body image satisfaction. This response confirms the pattern in data that participants are aware of a particular genre of content

that contributes to body image concerns. Respondent 34 says, “I don't watch videos of women doing their makeup or worrying about how they look...My algorithm is not favored towards beauty or [the] ‘influencer’ side.” Content that focuses on attractiveness, beauty, and physicalities seems to lead to more body image concerns. Lastly, respondent 37 says she avoids content that triggers negative body image thoughts, inferring that there is a specific type of content that triggers this. Based on the data, content that fixates on physical attributes or lifestyles is more likely to lead to comparisons and negative self-perceptions. A type of content also leads to a positive view of self. The pattern identified from responses is unfiltered, genuine, and educational content, yields more positive TikTok experiences. The next theme discusses specific lengths users will take to beautify themselves across social media.

Beautification

This theme has everything related to the enhancement of beauty, the use of filters, and the physical body goals of the respondents. Both things are used to enhance the beauty of an individual to be more in line with society's idea of beauty. Filters can be used to change the physical looks of an individual. Aesthetic goals are necessary to understand because this gives the researcher information on what the respondents see as desirable.

Filters (BF).

Many social media users and advertisement agencies have grown too familiar with manipulating or altering photos to enhance particular looks. Chapter 3 goes through specific cases in which organizations or people have been called out for posting images that do not reflect reality. Previous research has found that the manipulation of appearance on social media photos can negatively affect girls' who are more prone to social comparisons body satisfaction (Kleemans et al., 2018, p. 103). This notion led the researcher to pre-establish this code before

analysis. Any response related to filters or the mention of unrealistic standards was recorded under this code. The following is a list of quotes from respondents who acknowledged this in their survey responses.

Table 21: Filters (BF) Data

<i>Filters (BF)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 7	“I know how unattainable photoshopped and social media are.”
	Respondent 13	“I definitely compare myself to influencers over peers. I think it's something about the way they manipulate the camera and the editing”
	Respondent 20	“Most likely to compare with friends It's easy for me to rationalize that an influencer has access to products and lighting and filters and personal trainers. Whereas regular people, that is harder.”
	Respondent 24	“TikTok is an unending realm of mostly edited and unrealistic perceptions of people that make it easy to keep scrolling video to video.”
	Respondent 25	“It's hard to remember that these influencers have been lifting and counting macros for years AND ALWAYS use perfect lighting for their pictures.” “TikTok sometimes enhances my likelihood of engaging in comparisons but then I remember how much influencers edit their videos.” “I do my best to remind myself that looking that "good" takes time and effort...and video editing.”
	Respondent 30	“I know influencers aren't real life so I can block them out. TikTok enhances my likelihood for comparison because it shows you unrealistic and fake lives that look perfect but aren't.”
	Respondent 33	“I remind myself everyone has their struggles and things you see online can always be edited without us knowing.”
	Respondent 40	“Oftentimes stuff online isn't as accurate so it does not affect me as in-person comparisons.”

Respondent 41	“More likely to compare myself with peers because TikTok is not real and you can close the app..”
Respondent 44	“I compare myself to peers more because I know the influencers have had surgeries or they know filters and angles.”
Respondent 48	Do not compare to others over social media because “It is all fake.”
Respondent 52	TikTok influences her body image satisfaction because of the, “heavily edited videos that provide unrealistic ideals for my body.”
Respondent 54	“More likely to compare with peers because they feel more like real people.”

Fifteen of the 56 respondents acknowledge the reality of interpersonal encounters over TikTok videos. Many respondents mention that because they are aware that TikTok is included in the social media world of edited, unrealistic, and fake perceptions of reality, its comparative influence affects them less. Respondent 7 says, “I know how unattainable Photoshop and social media are.” Because this respondent is aware of how unattainable these images are due to Photoshop, it influences her less. Respondent 20 also says, “It is easy for me to rationalize that an influencer has access to products and lighting and filters and personal trainers,” pushing respondent 20 to also engage in comparisons among her friends. Most of these respondents mention that TikTok is not a representative of real life and is filled with edited videos that do not portray actual reality and is, therefore, more likely to engage in peer comparisons because “they feel more like real people,” as respondent 54 says. On the other hand, some say that this space of edited and filtered content makes engaging with comparisons over media easier.

Respondent 13 says, “I definitely compare myself to influencers over peers. I think it’s something about how they manipulate the camera and the editing.” This participant attributes the visualization alterations as the reason why it is easier to engage in comparisons with influencers

over peers. This is interesting, considering some participants say they can rationalize the appearance of influencers, knowing they strive to find the perfect angles and showcase the best moments of their lives and, therefore, are less likely to compare themselves with a false reality. Respondent 33 says TikTok does enhance their likelihood for comparison because “it shows you unrealistic and fake lives that look perfect but aren’t.” Again, this participant is very aware of the fake representations portrayed through TikTok but still finds herself engaging in comparisons. Respondent 52 says it is the heavily edited videos that “provide unrealistic ideals for my body,” that influence her body image satisfaction. Each of these respondents describes it as a false reality or editing that leads to comparison. Most respondents are aware that images and videos can be edited, but their influence still seems to permeate as respondents describe from where their aesthetic goals stem.

Aesthetics (AG).

What is desirable and considered beautiful differentiates greatly cross-culturally and across generations and has been prevalent throughout history (Haque, 2020). The physical goals of the respondents are necessary to understand because this helps the researcher gain a more accurate picture of what is considered beautiful or desirable for Generation Z females. The majority of responses in this code were found when respondents answered the survey question:

Survey Question 16: Can you describe any physical body goals you may have? If so, from where do these goals stem?

The data discussed already show some respondents mentioning that these goals can stem from social media, society, culture, and comparisons made from fitness-related content. The following is a table of respondents answering survey question 16, which explicitly asks what their desired physical goals are.

Table 22: Aesthetics (AG) Data

<i>Aesthetics (AG)</i>	Respondent	Respondent Quotes
	Respondent 1	“Being toned; personal goal.”
	Respondent 2	“Toned, leaner, I want to look better”
	Respondent 3	“Slim, toned body.”
	Respondent 5	“Build muscle.”
	Respondent 7	“Lose weight and tone my arms and stomach.”
	Respondent 8	“Slim down. Not necessarily concerned with losing weight but just overall aesthetic change.”
	Respondent 10	“Love overall weight, flatter stomach, no love handles.”
	Respondent 13	“Losing weight and toning my body to look small.”
	Respondent 15	“To be a little more lean. I would like to maintain muscle but lose fat.”
	Respondent 25	“Cut body fat so I look leaner and muscles more defined.”
	Respondent 26	“Wants to gain more weight and look more toned.”
	Respondent 30	“Get rid of extra fat and have a flat stomach.”
	Respondent 34	“to lose fat around the stomach.”
	Respondent 37	“I would like to lose fat in my stomach area.” “Body goals stem from seeing girls with super flat stomachs on either TikTok, Instagram or in real life.”
	Respondent 40	“Grow muscle.”
	Respondent 49	“Build muscle definition.”
	Respondent 50	“I want to have stronger abs.”
	Respondent 52	“I want to be trimmed and toned.”

Thirty of the 56 respondents say they want to either tone up or lose weight. 7 out of the 56 say they would like to gain weight. Three specific patterns appear in the data. The word “tone” is used the most to describe physical body goals. Over 50% of respondents want a more toned or smaller look. In addition, seven respondents mentioned wanting a smaller or flatter stomach area. The third pattern of data is muscle definition. Seven respondents also say they desire to build or maintain their muscle mass. Eighteen out of the 30 respondents who mentioned wanting to tone up their body or lose weight or are engaged in fitness or health TikTok content.

Summary

This chapter briefly described the method used to organize the study results. Next was a brief description of participant demographics. The results of the study were collected by theme and codes and then discussed based on how they relate to the research question. Each theme and code were introduced with the reason for its establishment, and the results followed. The following chapter will answer the research question and outline additional significant findings.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION

The following chapter will address the research question, summarize findings, describe the study's limitations, and provide suggestions for future research.

Discussion & Summary of Findings

This study aimed to address the problem of negative body image concerns among Generation Z females and further understand the role TikTok plays in communicating these standards. The research question addressed in this study is:

RQ1: How has TikTok influenced society's idea of physical beauty as it pertains to body image concerns among Generation Z females?

A direct answer to this question would be the application TikTok itself, which plays a reinforcement role in communicating physical beauty standards and provides more opportunity for upward comparisons and, therefore, negative body image concerns among Generation Z females.

Based on participants' responses, TikTok users open the application with an image already established that exemplifies this ideal standard of beauty. According to the participants, this would be a toned, leaner body. TikTok feeds content to users based on an algorithm that shows them images based on what users choose to engage with. Therefore, the user has an extent of power in what videos or pictures are being fed to them. These videos and images reflect the preferences and interests of the user. Based on the study findings, most users with negative body image concerns chose to engage with fitness or health-related content. Fitness content and even fashion content that focus on physicality lead to more negative body image concerns among females. There seems to be a cycle of users looking to feel better when on TikTok. Still, because of the content they choose to engage with, they receive images that they attribute as ideal,

resulting in upward comparisons and negative views of self. Fitness TikTok content appears to be reinforcing society's idea of physical beauty to a greater degree and creating more opportunities for Generation Z females to feel negative about themselves. The factor that constitutes the most power in this scenario is the user. Suppose users do not want to put themselves in a more vulnerable position to experience upward comparisons and negative body image concerns. In that case, they should limit their engagement with content focusing on physicality. Like all social media, TikTok is a collection ground for opportunities for upward comparisons. It is up to the user to determine to what extent they choose to engage with content that has proven to instigate negative body image concerns. Additional findings that did not necessarily pertain to the research question were uncovered during the analysis.

Additional Findings

Some prominent findings came out of the data that was unexpected. These additional findings include participants' focus on materialistic or lifestyle comparisons, and the positive mental health benefits users receive from time spent on TikTok.

While the data show that 50% of users find themselves more frequently engaging in comparisons with strangers than peers, these comparisons are not always physical. Twenty-five percent of respondents mention their tendency to compare lifestyles and materials to those on TikTok. One respondent even suggested that TikTok is a social media site that yields more lifestyle comparisons, while other social media sites, like Instagram, create more opportunities for physical comparisons. The findings also suggest that the application is being used as a place to momentarily retreat from the realities of day-to-day stressors.

While this study focuses on the adverse mental health effects of TikTok, there are many positive mental health influences the application has for its users. Forty-three percent of

respondents find TikTok a positive escape for inspiration, education, clarity of mind, or motivation to improve their lifestyle. Close to half of the respondents mentioned using TikTok as a mindless activity to de-stress or improve their quality of life. TikTok and social media is a platform for people to share their own personal journeys. Many participants draw inspiration and motivation to improve their quality of life from the videos that showcase these journeys. Furthermore, the content that TikTok feeds to the user is customizable to their personal preferences and in the form of short videos, making this an effortless entertainment choice for Generation Z consumers. This accessibility of entertainment and lack of brain power makes TikTok a logical choice for users to engage with for relaxation or combat stress. In addition, the theme of a false reality frequently emerged throughout the data. Therefore, users could be using TikTok as a place to distance themselves from the realities of their daily lives. In addition, TikTok has proven to be a platform that yields comparisons based on the amount of content the application has.

In addition, a significant finding from the study is the fact that there is no data recorded under the themes “TikTok Controversy,” “Virtual Community,” and “TikTok use for creativity.” TikTok has been a big topic of conversation as its parent company, ByteDance, is under investigation in the United States. Several countries have banned TikTok on certain networks and federal devices. Many people are having privacy concerns as TikTok and its parent company have been the subject of many data breach cases and allegations. On the other hand, many people also speak out in support of the application. Interestingly, no participants mentioned privacy concerns in their responses. However, the data shows powerful support for the positive effects TikTok brings to their personal life. Social media, in general, is a space for users to take creative control of the content they produce. Generation Z, in particular, values creativity and

personalization (Scwieger & Ladwig, 2018), so participants were expected to use TikTok for these purposes. On the contrary, no participants mentioned posting and creating their own videos. One participant even went so far as to say that posting TikTok is uncommon among her friends. This piece of data reveals that TikTok is primarily for consumption rather than creation. Based on previous research, Generation Z has a strong gravitational bond for online communication (Yadav & Rai, 2017); participants were expected to discuss how much they prefer to interact over technology, specifically TikTok. No data was found on participants who value a virtual community over in-person experiences. The closest piece of data to this concerns interpersonal vs. parasocial comparisons, which could be evaluated more in future research.

Theoretical Implications

Social comparison theory provides insight into the influence of TikTok on a deeper cognitive level. Social comparison theory has previously been used to better understand why individuals engage in comparisons and the emotions associated with upward and downward comparisons. Jan Crusius, Katja Corcoran, and Thomas Mussweiler (2022) allowed three questions to guide their research and review of social comparison theory. These questions include, “Why do people engage in social comparisons? To whom do they compare themselves? [and] how do social comparisons influence the self” (Crusius et al., p.1). These three questions are imperative when evaluating different comparisons in different contexts.

In the context of this study, people are engaging in comparisons, not necessarily as a means to evaluate their own abilities but more as a subconscious by-product of time spent on TikTok. Participants do not choose to engage in such comparisons, but once met with content that yields the comparisons, they do so out of an enhanced self-awareness. In the case of this study, participants are comparing themselves to strangers or influencers. A wide range of data

was gathered on the relational status of individuals, and participants were more likely to engage in comparisons. Some mentioned that they were more likely to compare with peers because of a sense of “realness” to their lives. This strengthens Festinger’s (1954) original hypothesis that,

A person does not tend to evaluate his opinions or his abilities by comparison with others who are too divergent from himself. If some other person’s ability is too far from his own, either above or below, it is not possible to evaluate his own ability accurately by comparison with this other person. There is then a tendency not to make the comparison.
(p. 120)

This would also mean they are engaging in interpersonal comparisons, which does not contribute to this study's virtual comparison implications. The findings show that over 50% of participants are more likely to compare with strangers or “influencers” than peers. The tendency to engage in comparisons with these parasocial relationships goes against what Festinger proposed in his original assertion that people tend to compare with others who are not too divergent from themselves (Festinger, 1954). There is a great distance between the two parties in communication, geography, and reality. Yet, over 50% of users still say they are more likely to engage in comparisons with strangers or “influencers.” Findings suggest that edited and unrealistic videos could justify the lack of comparison or lead to more comparisons in these parasocial relationships. Despite the relational status of both parties, the comparisons participants described are considered upward comparisons.

Previous research also suggests that upward comparisons can lead to negative views and feelings of motivation (Collins, 1996). This study chose to focus on the adverse side effects of upward comparisons. This study found that 85% of respondents who mentioned upward comparisons followed up in their responses with knowledge regarding the negative mental health

side effects like lack of self-esteem, feelings of discontentment, or lack of worth they feel toward themselves these comparisons can have on them. Only 15% of respondents who mentioned upward comparisons use these comparisons for a sense of positive motivation. Therefore, the data show that upward comparisons likely lead to discontentment with either the physical body image or the lifestyle of individuals.

Social comparison theory is necessary to consider because upward comparisons specifically drive the negative body image concerns among Generation Z females. TikTok is one of many social media sites where users can log on and see videos and images of women that fit an ideal standard of beauty. There is still a world full of virtual content communicating messages to users without TikTok's existence. During the initial stages of this research study, the focus was on the influence of the application itself. As data started to be analyzed and discussed, the research study quickly became more concerned with the cognitive development and concerns of Generation Z females. There is still much to be researched regarding the psychology behind social comparison theory concerning different communication contexts and social influences.

Limitations

With every research study, some limitations affect the results that are outside the control of the researcher, which could lead to further or different results. In this case, the researcher gathered participants primarily from similar demographics based on the convenience sampling method. Additionally, respondents were mostly from a single university. Therefore, most participants were around the same age and stage in life. Still, some participants were outside of this majority, and their survey feedback was very valuable and seemed to align with the majority population of participant results. This study had a limited participant age range, which restricted the data to a specific generation. Furthermore, this study could not draw a correlation between

time spent on TikTok and the strength of its influence. Lastly, it appeared some participants' body image concerns had been shaped by outside influences, like comments from parents or family members. While this is outside the scope of the study, it could have impacted the data. There are also delimitations or ways the researcher chose to go about the study that could have been altered to yield further results.

Delimitations of this study include the lack of questions that could have led to further results or asking questions that relate more specifically to the research question being answered. Specific questions could have been phrased or added to focus more on virtual comparisons through TikTok and eliminating the option for the respondent to go into detail about in-person comparisons. While in-person comparisons are necessary for research, they do not pertain to this study. In some cases, it was left to the researcher to determine whether they were referring to in-person comparisons or comparisons made over TikTok based on the language used or in context with the surrounding survey questions. In addition, more questions could have been asked about the content users choose to watch. "Fitness and health videos" are very broad terms; many respondents left it at that when describing the kind of content they like to watch or engage with. It would have benefited the study if respondents were asked what specific videos or trends they prefer watching and why.

Future Research

Future researchers can use the delimitations of this study when forming future studies on the media effects of TikTok. The results of this study have not only answered the research question but also present many implications for future research. A few of the respondents mention how comments from family members have shaped their attitudes toward their own body image. Further research on parental influences on the body image of children could be studied.

This kind of study could help determine if the closeness of a relationship determines the influence and power of resonance of specific comments or phrases during exchanges.

Further research on the effects of TikTok on children or teenagers under 18 could be of value to the field of media effects. Participant requirements for this study included Generation Z females from the ages of 18-26. Future research, including both males and females and with younger demographics, might lead to useful information on the implications of social media introduced at younger ages. A few respondents in this study mentioned social media being introduced to them at such a young age, and this contributed to the social media platform's influence on their cognitive development. TikTok is still considered a new platform. Therefore, future research on how influential TikTok is following younger ages and their cognitive development might help parent awareness and further understanding of the platform. As mentioned previously, this study was very limited in its demographics, which leads the researcher to believe there are still implications for further research regarding beauty standards.

Different groups of people have different ideas of ideal beauty standards, which have been discussed in Chapter three of this study. Because this study's participants were from a white racial background, many of these ideal beauty standards communicated by the respondents reflected an Americanized idea of physical beauty. Further research could be conducted dealing with racial differences in beauty standards in America and whether these standards are consistent with the majority.

In addition, over 50% of participants mentioned that they are more likely to engage in comparisons with strangers rather than peers. Thirty-six percent said they are more likely to engage in comparisons with peers. During analysis, it was difficult to determine whether respondents were referring to interpersonal encounters or virtual encounters. There were also a

lot of responses to the “fake reality” portrayed on TikTok. Some said this “fake reality” enhances their likelihood of comparisons because it shows an improved version of a person or life. Others said that their awareness of how social media often depicts a “fake reality” helps them rationalize and not be as vulnerable to comparisons, which makes them more vulnerable to interpersonal comparisons. Further research could be conducted to better understand the nature of relationships in one’s personal life and whether this has an influence on the type of comparisons they engage with. In addition, further research could be done to better understand parasocial relationships and how this affects the single party involved. Lastly, the results were surprising in the positive feedback respondents gave on behalf of TikTok.

This study’s findings reveal that TikTok has many positive mental side effects for users. Many participants found the application to help them de-stress and relax at the end of their day. Future research on TikTok could emphasize the positive side effects of TikTok and expand on the application's ability to reduce stress and anxiety for certain users. TikTok is still a relatively new social media site, so much more research must be done.

Conclusion

If the pattern of history continues, social media is a medium of communication that will continue to grow and influence future generations as they become more accustomed to this communication norm. This study addresses the power and influence societal beauty standards can have on young women and the role TikTok plays in this communication process. Beauty standards constantly change and evolve as new ideas of beauty are introduced and discussed in society. The data from this study shows that young women can feel the desire to meet these standards of beauty and experience self-criticism when they are unable to meet them. Social media plays a significant role in communicating these beauty standards to younger generations

because Generation Z utilizes social networking communication opportunities more than any previous generation. Future generations will likely follow suit as new social networking platforms are developed. This study's findings contribute to the media effects research regarding social media and the cognitive influence it can have on Generation Z females' and future generation's body image concerns. The findings of this study will also contribute to the social media consumers' ability to identify TikTok or other social media influences on their cognitive behavior or tendency to engage in comparisons. Lastly, this study contributes to inviting those who hold influential communication platforms over media to minimize the image of a false reality that can be easily portrayed through social media platforms.

Viewed through a social comparison theory framework, this study provides insight into how upward comparisons contribute to body image concerns among Generation Z females. Furthermore, this study confirms and contradicts part of the original hypothesis behind the social comparison theory coined by Leon Festinger through its analysis of comparisons made in parasocial relationships. Despite the relational status, the research shows that most of those who mentioned upward comparisons also experience negative views of self as a response.

Like all social media, TikTok is a collection ground of information and opportunities for comparison. It was found that content oriented around physicalities, mostly fitness-related content, led to a higher likelihood of physical comparisons. Users then would process these images as the ideal standard of beauty they sought to achieve. Therefore, if users do not want to subject themselves to body image comparisons, they should avoid content focusing on physicalities. Despite many participants subjecting TikTok as portraying the entirety of society, TikTok is not necessarily the origin of these beauty standards. Rather, TikTok is a small glimpse into what is already established by society. TikTok is a mere fraction contributing to the vast

number of media and life messages that build societal ideals. This study revealed that TikTok contributes to reinforcing physical beauty standards, fostering increased chances of upward comparisons, and consequently leading to negative body image concerns among Generation Z females.

References

- Abbott, G. The State of Texas. (2022). State Agencies Letter.
https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/State_Agencies_Letter_1/pdf
- The Advertising Standards Authority & The Committee of Advertising Practice Ltd. (2021).
Skinny Tan Ltd in association with Elly Norris. ASA | CAP.
<https://www.asa.org.uk/rulings/skinny-tan-ltd-in-association-with-elly-norris.html>
- Ahlse, J., Nilsson, F., Sandstrom, N. (2020). It's time to TikTok : Exploring Generation Z's motivations to participate in #Challenges. DIVA. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1434091&dswid=8453>
- Ahn, H. Y. A. (2019). COLLEGE-AGED FEMALE CONSUMERS' MEANINGS OF THE DIGITALLY-ENHANCED FIGURES IN FASHION ADVERTISING AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ISRAEL'S PHOTOSHOP LAW. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research*, 14(2).
- Ameen, N., Cheah, J. H., & Kumar, S. (2022). It's all part of the customer journey: The impact of augmented reality, chatbots, and social media on the body image and self-esteem of Generation Z female consumers. *Psychology & Marketing*.
- American Civil Liberties Union. (2023). Coalition letter opposing Montana House bill that would ban TikTok. <https://www.aclu.org/documents/coalition-letter-opposing-montana-house-bill-that-would-ban-tiktok>
- Austin, S. (2023, June 13). Eyewitness News (WEHT/WTWV). *Eyewitness News (WEHT/WTWV)*. <https://www.tristatehomepage.com/news/indiana-news/ag-rokita-files-amended-lawsuit-against-tiktok/>

- Baird, A., Grbavac, A., Marinko, D., Neuman, M., Ericksen, M.K. (2015). Social Comparison and the Idealized Images of Advertising: Revisited. In: Gnomes, R. (eds) Proceedings of the 1995 Academy of Marketing Sciences (AMS) Annual Conference. Developments in Marketing Science; Proceedings of the Academy of marketing Science. Springer, Cham.
- Baker-White, E. (2022, December 22). EXCLUSIVE: TikTok Spied On Forbes Journalists. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2022/12/22/tiktok-tracks-forbes-journalists-bytedance/?sh=42f450197da5>
- Bawden, D., & Robinson, L. (2020). Information overload: An overview. In: Oxford Encyclopedia of Political Decision Making. Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637
- Bell, Kathryn. (2016). Social Media and Female Body Image. In BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects. Item 173. Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/173
- Betz, D. E., Sabik, N. J., & Ramsey, L. R. (2019). Ideal comparisons: Body ideals harm women's body image through social comparison. *Body image*, 29, 100-109.
- Bhuiyan, J. (2023, January 5). Why did the US just ban TikTok from government-issued cellphones? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/dec/30/explainer-us-congress-tiktok-ban>
- Bloch, P.H. and Richins, M.L. (1992), You look "mahvelous": The pursuit of beauty and the marketing concept. *Psychology & Marketing*, 9: 3-15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.4220090103>
- Chappet, M. (2019). We've been more empowered than ever, so why are Gen-Z the least confident generation yet? *Glamour*. <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/gen-z-least-confident-generation>

- Chen, R., & Ma, R. (2022, February 24). How ByteDance became the world's most valuable startup. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2022/02/how-bytedance-became-the-worlds-most-valuable-startup>
- Chew, Shou (2023). Testimony Before the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Written Statement of Testimony Testimony of Shou Chew Chief Executive Officer,
TikTok Inc. March 23, 2023.
<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IF/IF00/20230323/115519/HHRG-118-IF00-Wstate-ChewS-20230323.pdf>
- Christian, C. T. (2023). Commissioner's directive on TikTok | Montana University System.
<https://mus.edu/che/directives/social-media-applications.html>
- Clampitt, P. G. (2018). *Social media strategy: tools for professionals and organizations*. Sage
- Collins, R. L. (1996). For better or worse: The impact of upward social comparison on self-evaluations. *Psychological Bulletin*, *119*(1), 51–69. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.119.1.51>
- Cooper, D. E. (2017). Buddhism, beauty and virtue. In *Sophia studies in cross-cultural philosophy of traditions and cultures* (pp. 125–137). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43893-1_9
- Criddle, C., & Cameron-Chileshe, J. (2023, March 16). UK joins EU, Canada and US in government device TikTok ban. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/98360828-4124-4f30-a5b7-7931a9543a5b>
- Crusius, J., Corcoran, K., & Mussweiler, T. (2022). Social comparison: A review of theory, research, and applications. In D. Chadee (Ed.), *Theories of social psychology* (2 ed.). Wiley.

Daniela, S. B., Tonja, V. O. (2021). The Effectiveness of TikTok in Building small Businesses:

A quantitative study of a Media Sharing Network based on the Task-Technology fit model. DIVA. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1586713&dswid=8496>

Dawson, S. A. (1986). Review of The Physical Attractiveness Phenomena, by G. L. Patzer. *Journal of Marketing*, 50(4), 256–258.

Diller, V., PhD. (2011, September 6). Is Photoshop Destroying American's Body Image?

HuffPost. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/photoshop-body-image_b_891095

Dirir, S. A. (2022) Investigating the impact of TikTok on the generation Z buying behavior and their insight of selecting brands.

Doyle, B. (2022, October 26). TikTok Statistics – Everything You Need to Know [Oct 2022

Update]. Wallaroo Media. <https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/>

European Commission. (2023). Commission strengthens cybersecurity. European Commission.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1161

Federal Trade Commission. (2023). Advertising and Marketing on the Internet: Rules of the

Road. Federal Trade Commission. <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/advertising-marketing-internet-rules-road>

Federal Trade Commission. (2019). Joint Statement of Commissioner Rohit Chopra and

Commissioner Rebecca Kellp Slaughter. In the Matter of Music.ly Inc. (now known as TikTok) Commission File Number 1723004.

https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/public_statements/1463167/chopra_and_slaughter_musically_tiktok_joint_statement_2-27-19_0.pdf

- Federal Trade Commission. (2014). L’Oréal Settles FTC Charges Alleging Deceptive Advertising for Anti-Aging Cosmetics. Federal Trade Commission.
<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2014/06/loreal-settles-ftc-charges-alleging-deceptive-advertising-anti-aging-cosmetics>
- Festinger, Leon. (1954). A Theory of Social Comparison Processes, Retrieved September 12, 2007, from hum.sagepub.com database
- Fischer, S. (2023, March 21). TikTok bans spread globally. *Axios*.
<https://www.axios.com/2023/03/21/tiktok-bans-spread-globally>
- Fresno García, Miguel del; Daly, Alan J. y Segado Sánchez-Cabezudo, Sagrario (2016). Identifying the new influencers in the internet era: social media and social network analysis. *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 153: 2340. [L]
[SEP] (<http://dx.doi.org/10.5477/cis/reis.153.23>)
- Goethals, G. R. (1986). Social Comparison Theory: Psychology from the Lost and Found. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 12(3), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167286123001>
- Governor Sanders and Attorney General Griffin Announce Filing of Lawsuits Against Meta, TikTok – Arkansas Attorney General. (2023, March 28).
https://arkansasag.gov/news_releases/governor-sanders-and-attorney-general-griffin-announce-filing-of-lawsuits-against-meta-tiktok/
- Gupta, M., & Sharma, A. (2021). Fear of missing out: A brief overview of origin, theoretical underpinnings and relationship with mental health. *World Journal of Clinical Cases*, 9(19), 4881–4889. <https://doi.org/10.12998/wjcc.v9.i19.4881>

- Halder, Deb P., Phillips, Sharon C.. Social Media and Female Body Image: A Study on the Imposition of Body Characterization in Tobago. *Advances in Sciences and Humanities*. Vol. 5, No. 4, 2019, pp. 105-113. doi: 10.11648/j.ash.20190504.13
- Haque, Lajmy. (2020). Influence of Appearance Related Content on social media Affecting Body Image of College Going Females in India. ESEDS School of Design. Makaut University. Available at: <https://www.eseds.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/INFLUENCE-OF-APPEARANCE-RELATED-CONTENT-ON-SOCIAL-MEDIA-Lajmy-Haque-min.pdf>
- Heiligenstein, M. X. (2023, April 7). TikTok Data breaches: Full timeline through 2023. *Firewall Times*. <https://firewalltimes.com/tiktok-data-breach-timeline/>
- Higgins, K.M. (2017). Beauty and the Sense of Life. In: Higgins, K., Maira, S., Sikka, S. (eds) *Artistic Visions and the Promise of Beauty. Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures*, vol 16. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43893-1_11
- Information Commissioner's Office. (2023). ICO fines TikTok £12.7 million for misusing children's data. <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/media-centre/news-and-blogs/2023/04/ico-fines-tiktok-127-million-for-misusing-children-s-data/>
- International Telecommunication Union Development Sector. (2021). *Measuring Digital Development. Facts and Figures 2021*. ITU Publications. <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2021.pdf>
- Iowa, B. O. R. S. O. (2022). Statement from President Mike Richards on Governor Reynolds Directive to Ban Access to TikTok. Copyright 2023 Board of Regents, State of Iowa. All

- Rights Reserved. <https://www.iowaregents.edu/news/board-news/statement-from-president-mike-richards-on-governor-reynolds-directive-to-ban-access-to-tiktok>
- Jaipong, P. (2023, January 24). Business Model and Strategy : A Case Study Analysis of TikTok. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4335962
- Jamal Al-Menayes, 2015. "Motivations for Using Social Media: An Exploratory Factor Analysis," *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, Canadian Center of Science and Education, vol. 7(1), pages 1-43, March.
- Jennings, J. (2022). Scrolling Your Way to a Warped Sense of Self: Body Image, Social Media and College- Aged Females. *Media Report to Women*, 50(3), 12-19
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2747854>
- Katz, E., Gurevitch, M., & Haas, H. (1973). On the Use of the Mass Media for Important Things. *American Sociological Review*, 38 (2), 164-181. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/267
- Keeter, S. (2020, May 30). From Telephone to the Web: The Challenge of Mode of Interview Effects in Public Opinion Polls. Pew Research Center Methods. <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2015/05/13/from-telephone-to-the-web-the-challenge-of-mode-of-interview-effects-in-public-opinion-polls/>
- Kleemans, Mariska, Daalmans, Serena, Carbaat, Ilana Carbaat, Anschutz, Doeschkta Anschütz (2018) Picture Perfect: The Direct Effect of Manipulated Instagram Photos on Body Image in Adolescent Girls, *Media Psychology*, 21:1, 93-110, DOI: 10.1080/15213269.2016.1257392

KOCO Staff. (2023, February 1). University of Oklahoma revises policy banning TikTok.

KOCO. <https://www.koco.com/article/university-of-oklahoma-ou-revises-tiktok-policy/42732415>

Kronberg, S. (2021, April 23). How to Have a Healthy Relationship with Food. National Eating Disorders Association. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/blog/how-have-healthy-relationship-food>

Lee, Hye-Ryeon, Choi, Jounghwa, Kim, Jang Hyun, & Han, Hae Lin. (2014) Social Media Use, Body Image, and Psychological Well-Being: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Korea and the United States, *Journal of Health Communication*, 19:12, 1343-1358, DOI: 10.1080/10810730.2014.904022

Legislative Services Division. (2023). AN ACT BANNING TIKTOK IN MONTANA...Senate Bill No. 419. <https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2023/BillPdf/SB0419.pdf>

Levine, A. (2011). NAD Case Report 5400.

Man, E.K.W. (2017). Female Bodies in China: Literati Fantasies, Iron Girls and Olympics Hoopla. In: Higgins, K., Maira, S., Sikka, S. (eds) *Artistic Visions and the Promise of Beauty*. *Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures*, vol 16. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43893-1_8

Mitter, P. (2017). Western Theories of Beauty and Non-Western Peoples. In: Higgins, K., Maira, S., Sikka, S. (eds) *Artistic Visions and the Promise of Beauty*. *Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures*, vol 16. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43893-1_6

National Eating Disorders Association. (2018, February 22). *Binge eating disorder*. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/learn/by-eating-disorder/bed>

- National Programs. National Advertising Division BBB. (2022). National Advertising Division Annual Report 2022.
- Neuendorf, K. A., & Jeffres, L. W. (2017). Media Effects: Accounts, Nature, and History of. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0023>
- Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2019). Are Facebook and other social media platforms bad for our well-being?. Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/social-media-wellbeing>
- Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2019). The rise of social media. Our World in Data; University of Oxford.
<https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media>
- Pagano, K. M., Burns, R. D., & Galli, N. A. (2021). The influence of Social Comparisons on Body Image in Men: A scoping Review. *New Male Studies*, 10 (2), 20-44
- Pajares, F., Prestin, A., Chen, J., & Nabi, R. L. (2009). Social cognitive theory and media effects. *The SAGE handbook of media processes and effects*, 283-297.
- Pande, A. (2017). Valli and Devasena. In: Higgins, K., Maira, S., Sikka, S. (eds) *Artistic Visions and the Promise of Beauty. Sophia Studies in Corss-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures*, vol 16. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43893-1_7
- Peng, W., & Ahn, S. (2020). When media become the mirror: a meta-analysis on media and body image. *Media Psychology*, 24(4), 437-489.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2020.1737545>
- Perault, M., & Sacks, S. (2023). Project Texas: The details of TikTok’s plan to remain operational in the United States. Default. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/project-texas-the-details-of-tiktok-s-plan-to-remain-operational-in-the-united-states>

Potter, W. J., & Riddle, K. (2007). A Content Analysis of the Media Effects Literature.

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 84(1), 90–104.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900708400107>

Rao, N., Sharma, V., & Ola, M. (2020). A review on body image concerns among men and its consequences. *Google Scholar*.

Ridolfi, D. R., Myers, T. A., Crowther, J. H., & Ciesla, J. A. (2011). Do Appearance Focused Cognitive Distortions Moderate the Relationship between Social Comparisons to Peers and Media Images and Body Image Disturbance? *Sex Roles*, 65(7-8), 491-505.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9961-0>

Samangani, Inamullah [@HabibiSamangani] (2020, Apr 21). Cabinet decision: The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology is obliged to block the game PUBG

Seekis, V., Bradley, G. L., & Duffy, A. L. (2020). Appearance-Related Social Networking Sites and Body Image in Young Women: Testing an Objectification-Social Comparison Model. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 44(3), 377–

392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684320920826>

Senator Rubio. (2023). Rubio, Ernst. Introduce bill to deny federal funds to TikTok partners.

<https://www.rubio.senate.gov/rubio-ernst-introduce-bill-to-deny-federal-funds-to-tiktok-partners/>

Schwieger, D., Ladwig, C. (2018). Reaching and Retaining the Next Generation: Adapting to the Expectations of Gen Z in the Classroom. *Information Systems Education Journal*, 16(3) pp 45-54. <http://isedj.org/2018-16/> ISSN: 1545-679X. (A preliminary version appears in The Proceedings of EDSIGCON 2017)

- Smahelova, M., Drtilova, H., Smahel, D., & Cevelicsek, M. (2020). Internet Usage by Women with Eating Disorders during Illness and Recovery. *Health communication*, 35(5), 628–636. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1582135>
- Stahl, C. C., & Literat, I. (2022): #GenZ on TikTok: the collective online self-Portrait of the social media generation, *Journal of Youth Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2022.2053671
- Social Media and News Fact Sheet. (2022, October 7). Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/social-media-and-news-fact-sheet/>
- Tanta, I., Mihovilović, M. i Sablić, Z. (2014). Uses and Gratification Theory – Why Adolescents Use Facebook?. *Medijska istraživanja*, 20 (2), 85-111. Preuzeto s <https://hrcak.srce.hr/133809>
- Thomas E. Ruggiero (2000) Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century, *Mass Communication & Society*, 3:1, 3-37, DOI: 10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02
- TikTok. (2023, March 21). *About Project Texas / TikTok*. TikTok. <https://usds.tiktok.com/usds-about/>
- TikTok. (2023). *USDS / TikTok*. <https://usds.tiktok.com/>
- TikTok. (2023, March 8). Setting a new standard in European data security with Project Clover. *Newsroom / TikTok*. <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-ie/project-clover-ireland>
- TikTok India* [@TikTok_IN]. (2020, Jun 29). An Update [Image Attached]. [Tweet]. X. https://twitter.com/TikTok_IN/status/1277811841364668416/photo/1
- Tiktok Legal Privacy. Available online: <https://www.tiktok.com/legal/privacypolicy?lang=it> (accessed on 17 March 2022)

TikTok v Montana. (2023). Case 9:23-cv-00061-DLC.

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/23820566-tiktok-v-montana>

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (2023, February 27). Statement by Minister Fortier announcing a ban on the use of TikTok on government mobile devices. *Canada.ca*.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/news/2023/02/statement-by-minister-fortier-announcing-a-ban-on-the-use-of-tiktok-on-government-mobile-devices.html>

Trump, D. J. (2020) Executive Order on Addressing the Threat Posed by TikTok – The White House. The White House. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-addressing-threat-posed-tiktok/>

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition. Rev. 1*.

UT Austin. (2023). TikTok blocked on university network. <https://it.utexas.edu/tiktok-blocked-university-network>

Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., & Walther, J. B. (2016). Media effects: Theory and research. *Annual review of psychology*, 67, 315-338.

Vázquez-Herrero, J., Negreira-Rey, M.-C., & López-García, X. (2022). Let's dance the news! How the news media are adapting to the logic of TikTok. *Journalism*, 23(8), 1717–1735. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920969092>

Waller, D. S. (2015). Photoshop and deceptive advertising: An analysis of blog comments. *Studies in Media and Communication*.

Weiyang, Liu. (2015). A Historical Overview of Uses and Gratifications Theory. *Cross-Cultural Communication* Vol. 11, No. 9, pp. 71-78. DOI:10.3968/7415

We Are Social, & DataReportal, & Meltwater. (January 26, 2023). Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2023, ranked by number of monthly active users (in millions)

[Graph]. In Statista. Retrieved September 06, 2023, from

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

Yadav, G. P., & Rai, J. (2017). The Generation Z and their Social Media Usage: A Review and a Research Outline. *Global Journal of Enterprise Information System*, p(2), 110.

<https://doi.org/10.18311/gjeis/2017/15748>

APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Prefer not to say
3. What is your marital status?
 - a. Single, never married
 - b. Married
 - c. Divorced
 - d. Widowed
 - e. Separated
4. What is your highest level of education?
 - a. Did not complete high school.
 - b. High school diploma/GED
 - c. Some college or vocational training
 - d. Associates degree
 - e. Bachelor's degree
 - f. Master's degree
 - g. Doctoral degree
5. What is your employment status?
 - a. Employed full-time

- b. Employed part-time
 - c. Self-employed
 - d. Not currently employed
 - e. Retired
 - f. Other
6. Which range best describes your annual household income?
- a. Less than \$20,000
 - b. \$20,000 to \$34,999
 - c. \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - d. \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - e. \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - f. Over \$100,000
7. What is your ethnicity?
- a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - e. White
 - f. Two or more races
 - g. Other
8. What is your religious affiliation?
- a. Protestant Christian
 - b. Roman Catholic

- c. Mormon
 - d. Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox
 - e. Jewish
 - f. Muslim
 - g. Buddhist
 - h. Hindu
 - i. Atheist
 - j. Agnostic
 - k. No religious affiliation
 - l. Other
9. How much time do you spend on TikTok in an average day?
- a. 0-30 minutes
 - b. 1-2 hours
 - c. 2-3 hours
 - d. More than 3 hours
10. What are you doing when you usually find yourself opening up the app? (Example: getting ready for bed, hanging out with friends, on a break from work) Why is this?
11. What kind of videos do you enjoy watching? (Example: Health, fitness, comedy, sports)

12. Do you believe TikTok may have had any effects on your mental health? Why or why not?
13. Do you experience negative body image concerns? If so, what are you doing when that happens?
14. How many times a day would you say you have negative body image thoughts?
15. Can you describe any physical body goals you may have? If so, where do these goals stem from?
16. Do you feel like time on TikTok influences your body image satisfaction? Describe.
17. How would you describe the relationship of people you are most likely to engage in physical comparisons with to yourself?
18. Do you feel like these comparisons influence your mood or actions? If so, how?
19. Do you think TikTok enhances your likelihood of engaging in comparisons? Why or why not?
20. Describe how often you engage in comparison with peers or “influencers” over TikTok?
Which do you find yourself comparing to more?