The Impact of TikTok on the Body Image and Self-esteem of a Group of Portuguese Adolescent Boys

El impacto de TikTok en la imagen corporal y la autoestima de un grupo de adolescentes portugueses

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that social media influences adolescents' perceptions of their body image and self-esteem. This study examines TikTok's impact on these aspects, specifically focusing on adolescent boys, a demographic that has been underrepresented in research. Given the scarcity of prior studies on this topic, we employed a qualitative, exploratory methodology. The study sample was purposive, comprising 15 pre-adolescents (ages 10-14) and 15 adolescents (ages 15-19). We conducted semi-structured interviews, which were subsequently transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis with MaxQDA software. Our findings indicate that TikTok can have both positive and negative effects on male adolescents' self-perception of body image and self-esteem. Certain practices on TikTok were associated with increased body vigilance and changes in sports practices and eating habits. While excessive use of the platform negatively impacted self-esteem, the type of content consumed also played a significant role, leading to positive outcomes in some cases. These results contrast with previous studies focused on female adolescents, highlighting the importance of exploring the male perspective.

RESUMEN

De acuerdo con estudios previos, las redes sociales afectan la percepción que los adolescentes tienen de su imagen corporal y autoestima. Este estudio se centra en TikTok, explorando si el uso de la plataforma afecta la imagen corporal y la autoestima, y de qué manera, centrándose en los adolescentes varones, un grupo que ha sido escasamente estudiado. Se utilizó una metodología cualitativa de naturaleza exploratoria, ya que existe una falta de estudios previos relacionados con los temas presentados. La muestra del estudio fue intencionada e incluyó 15 preadolescentes (de 10 a 14 años) y 15 adolescentes (de 15 a 19 años). Se llevaron a cabo entrevistas semiestructuradas que posteriormente se transcribieron y analizaron mediante un análisis temático con MaxQDA. Nuestros resultados revelaron que TikTok puede tener consecuencias tanto positivas como negativas en la autopercepción de la imagen corporal de los adolescentes varones y en su autoestima. Prácticas específicas en TikTok están relacionadas con un aumento de la vigilancia del cuerpo, así como con cambios en las prácticas deportivas y hábitos alimenticios. Hubo un impacto negativo en la autoestima asociado con el uso excesivo, pero también un impacto positivo, dependiendo del tipo de contenido consumido. Estos resultados difieren de los estudios previos con adolescentes de sexo femenino, subrayando así la relevancia de investigar la perspectiva masculina.

KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

TikTok, Body Image, Self-esteem, Boys, Teenagers, Adolescents.
TikTok, Imagen Corporal, Autoestima, Niños, Adolescentes, Jóvenes.

1. Introduction

1.1. Adolescents and Social Media

The concept of adolescence emerged in the 19th century to describe the transition between childhood and adulthood, and it has since been widely discussed (Ribeiro, 2011). Both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Health Organization (WHO) agree that adolescence spans from ages 10 to 19, with a division into pre-adolescence (10-14 years) and adolescence (15-19 years) (Sawyer et al., 2018). This period entails physical changes as adolescents experience puberty (Do, 2022; Ribeiro, 2011), accompanied by cognitive development and emotional challenges as they cope with a transforming body image (Pathmanathan et al., 2022; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006).

Identity formation is central to adolescence (Cramer, 2017) and can be described as the development of a sense of self, based on values, beliefs, and self-expression, involving both the individual and their relationships with others (Upreti, 2017). This process entails imitation, identification, and construction, as adolescents seek individual purpose, social approval, and a sense of belonging (Steensma et al., 2013). It is influenced by individual, relational, social, cultural, and contextual factors, and thus, it can present challenges (Upreti, 2017). Given the focus of our research, it is important to note that gender is a significant aspect of identity (Sanansilp & Sirivunnabood, 2023; Steensma et al., 2013). Although gender is much more complex and nuanced than biological aspects, our study focuses on participants who identify as boys, aiming to address the lack of research from this perspective, as most studies on social media, body image, and self-esteem have focused on girls. However, the 2024 Global Online Trends report by Data Reportal shows that 25.5% of Instagram users are girls between 16 and 24 years old, while 26.2% are boys of the same age range. Similarly, 14.7% of TikTok users are girls within this age range, compared to 9.1% who are boys. As male-identifying users become increasingly relevant on TikTok, it is important to investigate the impact of this platform on their body image and self-esteem, as has been previously done with female teenagers.

Adolescence is also characterized by gaining independence from parents, spending more time with peers, and enjoying socializing and meeting new people (Juan y Sumettikoon, 2024; Plote, 2017). In recent years, social media, or Social Networking Sites (SNS), have become one of the primary environments for adolescents to socialize with peers (Meeus, Beullens, & Eggermont, 2019). Social media have become pervasive in daily life, with users adhering at increasingly younger ages, and there is extensive research on their advantages and disadvantages (Worm, 2022). A significant body of research highlights the adverse effects of social media use during such a vulnerable stage as adolescence (Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, 2017), with mental health, self-esteem, and academic performance being the most affected areas (Worm, 2022). Social media can be favorable for self-expression, as online self-representation is an important aspect of identity formation (Andreassen et al., 2017; Elrayah & Alshiha, 2024). Positive feedback on such online self-representation can lead to validation, body acceptance, satisfaction, and higher self-esteem (Sherman et al., 2016). Conversely, negative feedback, or even a lack of feedback, can lead to increased social approval-seeking, vulnerability, low self-esteem, and depression—conditions that can be exacerbated by peer pressure and cyberbullying (Meeus et al., 2019; Upreti, 2017).

1.2. Body Image and Self-Esteem

Body image can be defined as the multidimensional perceptions and attitudes that individuals have about their own bodies, including aspects such as shape, size, and appearance. These perceptions also encompass evaluative responses (e.g., attractiveness) and emotions (e.g., vanity, shame) (Saiphoo, Halevi, & Vahedi, 2020). A positive body image results in self-respect, self-acceptance, and self-esteem and is related to body satisfaction or appreciation (Nelson et al., 2022). Conversely, a negative body image forms when individuals focus on their flaws and fail to recognize positive aspects of their bodies, leading to body dissatisfaction (Mazarelo, 2020). This dissatisfaction often manifests through body checking —frequently monitoring specific aspects of the body or appearance— and body avoidance—avoiding the exposure of certain body parts or aspects. These behaviors are often associated with low self-esteem.

Self-esteem can be defined as self-respect and self-worth (Hasan & Tiwari, 2018), or as a self-evaluation that can be positive or negative, depending on beliefs and perceptions about oneself as

well as social relationships (Savira, Rifai, & Wahyunengsih, 2022). It is considered an indicator of mental health, well-being, and quality of life (Guven, 2019). Cingel, Carter and Krause (2022) emphasize that self-esteem depends on individual, environmental, and sociocultural factors.

Several authors (Mahon & Hevey, 2021) identify social media as one of the main sources of negative body image by disseminating and normalizing idealized and unattainable standards regarding body and beauty. Others suggest that social media indirectly cause body dissatisfaction by providing a stage for social comparisons and peer competition (Scully, Swords, & Nixon, 2023). Still, others argue that social media can also promote a positive body image (Cohen et al., 2019). These mixed results highlight the need for further research.

Adolescence is a particularly vulnerable stage, during which social comparison serves as a strategy for evaluating one's abilities, capabilities, opinions, feelings, appearance, and other personal aspects by comparing oneself to others or to groups (Mazarelo, 2020). Upward comparisons involve looking at individuals perceived as superior, while downward comparisons focus on those considered inferior (Worm, 2022). The former can be inspiring but more often lead to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and depression, while the latter emphasizes negative perspectives and hinders self-improvement (Midgley et al., 2021). Adolescents often resort to social media for social comparisons, which are predominantly lateral —comparing themselves to peers, who are therefore more influential (Tiggemann et al., 2018). Mahon and Hevey (2021) stress that even when adolescents are aware of digital manipulation using filters and photo editing to enhance appearance, they still struggle to meet such unattainable standards (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018). Additionally, social media comments have a profound impact on body image and body (dis)satisfaction (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Digital influencers may also be influential, as they nurture close relationships with their followers, who feel deeply connected to them (Abd Alhadi & Fllayih, 2023; Huang, Peng, & Ahn, 2021).

These issues have been exhaustively studied in women, but few studies have looked at men (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018). Although most studies on adolescent girls agree that social media negatively impact body image, Ricciardelli, McCabe and Banfield (2000) found that, for boys, social media can be a source of body satisfaction, motivating them to exercise and adopt healthier lifestyles. Stanford and McCabe (2005) offer an explanation, showing that the type of social media content consumed by boys is related to body modification strategies such as losing weight or increasing muscle mass. Concurrently, Hasan and Tiwari (2018) found that in teenagers, self-esteem varies inversely with the amount of time spent on social media. On the other hand, Guven (2019) found that teenagers use social media to enhance their self-esteem by making new friends online or finding safe spaces to express themselves. Meeus et al. (2019) add that receiving positive feedback from peers boosts self-esteem.

Attempting to move beyond this debate, Valkenburg et al. (2021) argue that social media have mixed effects on body image and self-esteem, depending on users' and platforms' characteristics, the type of content consumed, social interactions, and a range of other factors, including age and gender.

1.3. TikTok's Impact on Body Image and Self-Esteem

One of the most influential social media platforms among teenagers today is TikTok. It is a short-video creation and sharing platform (Rahmadiansyah, Amir, & Mundzir, 2022). The platform's features make it easy to create and publish videos by mixing video, audio, and text and using filters and effects creatively (Savira et al., 2022). Another distinguishing feature is TikTok's algorithm, which personalizes content presented on the For You Page (FYP) according to each user's previous behavior but also considers trending content, thus offering a more diversified and up-to-date selection and fostering a strong sense of community (Dawood, Liew, & Rajan, 2022; Xu, Yan, & Zhang, 2019).

TikTok presents both opportunities and risks for adolescents. On the positive side, studies emphasize that TikTok helps teenagers combat boredom and provides entertainment (Savira et al., 2022). TikTok also promotes the learning of various skills, such as dancing and choreography, languages, and "life hacks," along with digital skills (Duarte & Dias, 2021). Additionally, it supports socialization with peers and fosters a sense of community (Kennedy, 2020). McCashin and Murphy (2023) emphasize that the platform's fun nature helps teenagers address serious matters important to them, such as acne, bullying, mental health, climate change, and eating disorders, in a playful manner. By supporting teenagers'

self-expression, TikTok helps them build their identity, and positive feedback from peers leads to social validation and self-esteem (Dias & Duarte, 2022a; Nguyen, 2022). However, there is also a negative side, which most studies associate with excessive use (Jaffar, Riaz, & Mushtaq, 2019). Savira et al. (2022) document that excessive use disrupts other routine activities such as studying, sleeping, and socializing, thereby hindering the development and practice of social skills. A significant body of research examines toxic content, ranging from negative comments from followers and cyberbullying (Jaffar et al., 2019) to sexual harassment, fake news, and misinformation in general (Savira et al., 2022), as well as violence, racism, sexism, and dangerous challenges (Nguyen, 2022). Several authors identify low self-esteem and increased loneliness as effects of TikTok's excessive use (Al-Sharifi, Almayali, & Haddawee, 2023; Savira et al., 2022). In general, researchers agree that further work is needed to better understand TikTok's impact on adolescents.

Focusing on the scope of this study, Maes and Vandenbosch (2022) emphasize that TikTok, as a video platform, brings the body to the forefront by displaying its movement, particularly in choreography videos. Characteristic dance moves have emerged on TikTok, predominantly sexualized and executed in provocative clothing. This normalizes certain body types, gestures, and expressions, and also promotes self-objectification (Mink & Szymanski, 2022). There is relevant literature about specific TikTok trends and their relation to body image and self-esteem. Authors highlight the lack of diversity in bodies and beauty standards portrayed on TikTok, noting that these are often self-objectified and generally associated with thinness, which, according to Larsen-Ledet (2022), is harmful to the body image and satisfaction of girls. McGuian (2022) studied videos tagged as #thinspiration, concluding that they normalize body checking.

These videos range from users demonstrating how thin (and beautiful) they are to users exposing strategies used by others to make themselves appear thinner. Even if videos are critical of body manipulation, they still present thinness as an aspiration. Ayguasanosa (2022) studied "What I Eat in a Day" videos, revealing that they present thinness as the goal when selecting food, normalize calorie counting, and offer unhealthy or inaccurate tips on how to burn fat or raise metabolism. Additionally, the author examined "Workout Routine" videos, concluding that they aim at weight loss or modifying specific body parts. Often, they include motivational music and audios, implying that those who fail to reach their workout goals are not committed enough or are lazy. This type of content leads to body dissatisfaction and guilt. Larsen-Ledet (2022) studied "Body Positivity" videos, which usually display body imperfections or bodies that do not fit the dominant beauty standards, combined with messages about body acceptance and self-love. Despite these messages, there is an underlying self-criticism, with users often admitting to feeling uncomfortable or dissatisfied with their bodies. Liu (2021) studied "Makeover" videos, where users display body transformations in "before" and "after" formats. In the "before" section, weight is exaggerated through posing and clothing, while in the "after" section, thinness is associated with confidence and sexiness. Failing to transition to the desired body causes frustration, anxiety, and dissatisfaction.

Our study aims to shed more light on how these types of content impact the body image and self-esteem of boys. It is important to consider the context of the study. However, research on this topic, particularly focusing on the Portuguese context, is scarce, even concerning girls. The first general study on Portuguese teenagers and TikTok was conducted in 2022 by Dias and Duarte (2022a), utilizing the Uses and Gratifications Theory to explore the motivations of Portuguese teenagers for using this platform and the outcomes they were achieving. The results aligned with previous studies in other contexts, highlighting entertainment as the primary use and gratification of TikTok. As the study included younger children, starting at 10 years old, it was possible to compare pre-teens and teens, concluding that pre-teens create more content and are more prone to exploring the platform's potential for expressing their identity and creativity, while teens tend more toward group conformity, aiming to impress their peers and fit into their social groups, fearing exclusion, criticism, or ridicule. This study found no significant differences between boys and girls regarding general TikTok use practices and its uses and gratifications. More recently, in 2023, Carvalho explored the influence of TikTok on the body image of Portuguese teenage girls. The approach was qualitative, including interviews and content analysis of TikTok posts. The study found the same

negative effects on body image that have been documented with other social media, particularly the perpetuation of stereotyped and unrealistic beauty standards, whose unattainability leads to low self-esteem. However, the study revealed that, when compared to other social media, particularly Instagram, TikTok emerges as a more intimate and spontaneous space where teenage girls feel more comfortable expressing themselves more authentically. Apart from these two studies, Dias and Duarte (2022b) have also explored the relationship between brands, influencers, and teenage TikTok users in the Portuguese context, and Duarte and Albuquerque (2024) have looked into the influence of TikTok on teenagers' consumption of footwear.

2. Materials and Methods
2.1. Research Questions
This study aimed to understand how the use of TikTok influences the body image and self-esteem of adolescent boys, focusing on three research questions:

Q1: How does self-perception of body image influence the production of one's own content and the commenting on others' content?
Q2: How do the videos watched by adolescents alter their body perception, and what types of content exert positive and negative influences?
Q3: What is the impact of the content observed on TikTok on adolescents' self-esteem?

2.2. Research Design
This study employed an exploratory design using a qualitative methodology, appropriate for investigating an under-researched topic such as this. The qualitative approach is particularly valuable when examining relatively recent phenomena that have not been extensively studied in specific populations—in this case, adolescent boys. One of the strengths of qualitative research lies in its capacity to elucidate complex processes and patterns of human behavior, including experiences, attitudes, and behaviors that are difficult to quantify (Tenny, Brannan, & Brannan, 2017).

2.3. Sample
A purposive sample was constructed using the snowball sampling technique. Participants were selected based on availability, accessibility, and specific inclusion criteria: identifying as male, aged between 10 and 19 years, and active TikTok users. While these sampling techniques offer advantages in terms of speed and ease of implementation, they are not intended to be representative of the entire population but rather to provide in-depth insights into a specific group.

The study included 30 Portuguese adolescents, with 15 pre-adolescents (ages 10-14) and 15 adolescents (ages 15-19). Participant recruitment ceased upon reaching data saturation, as advised by Creswell and Poth (2017). According to Creswell, data saturation in qualitative research typically occurs between 10 and 30 interviews, indicating that our sample size aligns with qualitative research standards. To ensure participant anonymity, letters and numbers were assigned in ascending order of age. Pre-adolescents were identified with the number "1" followed by a letter from A to O, and older adolescents were identified with the number "2" followed by a letter from A to O. Table 1 provides an overview of the sample.

Table 1: Sample Characterization.		
Subtitles	Participants	Number of Participants
11	A1, B1, C1, D1	4
12	E1, F1, G1, H1	4
13	I1, J1, K1, L1	4
14	M1, N1, O1	3
15	A2, B2, C2, D2, E2	5
16	F2, G2, H2, I2, J2	5
17	K2, L2, M2	3
18	N2, O2	2

2.4. Data Collection Protocol

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews consisting of 46 questions, divided into four main sections: (i) participant demographics (3 questions); (ii) TikTok usage (13 questions); (iii) body image (16 questions); and (iv) self-esteem (14 questions).

The first section included introductory questions to gather demographic information such as age, school year, and involvement in sports activities. The second section focused on TikTok usage, exploring how adolescents interact with the platform, their reasons for using it, their engagement with other social media, content creation, and participation in TikTok trends. The third section addressed body image, aiming to understand participants' self-perception of their bodies, the influence of TikTok on their body image, changes in habits, comparisons with others on the platform, and the platform's positive and negative effects. The final section explored self-esteem, investigating how TikTok affects teenagers' self-esteem and their emotional responses when using the platform.

Most interviews were conducted in person, though some were held via Zoom due to participant preferences or geographic constraints. All interviews were audio-recorded and had an average duration of approximately 20 minutes. Ethical considerations were observed, with informed consent obtained from all participants and one of their legal guardians.

2.5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach is well-suited for analyzing data collected through methods such as interviews (Terry et al., 2017).

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, the data analysis proceeded through six stages: (1) transcription and repeated reading of the data to familiarize ourselves with the content and identify potential patterns of meaning; (2) creation of initial codes to organize the data into meaningful groups; (3) identification of overarching themes by analyzing the relationships among different codes; (4) review of the themes through re-reading the data to ensure their relevance and accuracy; (5) definition and naming of themes to clarify the specific aspects of the data each theme encompassed; and (6) preparation of a discussion to present the data logically and coherently, supported by selected data excerpts to illustrate the identified themes. Table 2 below outlines our coding system, which was developed using MaxQDA software.

Table 2: Coding System for Thematic Analysis.	
Themes	**Subthemes**
Using TikTok	Frequency and duration of use Preferred digital platform Content creation Algorithmic personalization Content typology and consumption Reasons for Using TikTok Knowledge of Trends/ Impact of Trends Need for positive content
Body Image	Body/appearance changes and strategies Self-evaluation Male beauty ideals Optimal Content Protective Strategies Image manipulation Body image trends Social comparison Influence of TikTok on body image Positive content typology
Self-esteem	High/low self-esteem Feelings and TikTok content tipology Impact on self-esteem Social comparison and imitation

3. Results

3.1. Body Image and TikTok Content Creation

Among the 30 participants in this study, 18 had never made TikTok videos, 9 had created videos in the

past but no longer did so, and only 3 participants were currently producing content. This indicates that the majority of adolescents interviewed did not engage in content creation. Among those who did, nearly all focused on content that did not prominently feature themselves. For example, Participant B2 stated, "I post football videos, images of other people playing; I record them and share them, but I never appear in the videos." This finding contrasts with previous studies on female adolescents, who frequently feature themselves in the TikTok content they produce. Most adolescents who created or had created TikTok content had an overall positive self-evaluation of their bodies, with the exception of 2 participants who were neutral. However, all of them expressed specific concerns about their body and image, and half were worried about others' perceptions of them. This indicates that while both boys and girls share common concerns regarding their body image—often heightened during adolescence due to the significant body changes of puberty—boys generally exhibit a positive self-evaluation despite these concerns. In contrast, girls tend to derive a negative self-evaluation from similar concerns.

Comments on TikTok were considered a form of content creation in this study. The majority of participants did not regularly engage in commenting, with only 5 participants reporting occasional comments on friends' videos, requests for specific content, expressions of opinion, or simply showing appreciation for content. For instance, Participant A2 mentioned, "Sometimes I comment because I like the video or make requests, for example, for art or other anime-related content," while Participant G1 said, "Yes, sometimes, especially on videos I really love, I encourage them to make more content."

An interesting observation was made by Participant F2, who noted a gender-based difference in commenting behavior. According to F2, girls tended to comment more intensely on others' bodies, while boys did not engage in such comparisons or derogatory comments. F2 remarked, "I see a lot of comments when a pretty girl appears, with others saying things like 'Why wasn't I born like that?', 'God has his favorites,' and so on. But when a less attractive girl is featured, I find it funny that people tend to comment that she's beautiful, etc. With boys, I don't see those kinds of comparisons."

This testimony highlights the importance of considering how content is interpreted. Previous studies have tried to identify specific types of TikTok content and themes—such as #thinspo—that may negatively influence body image and self-esteem. However, the content alone is just one part of the process. As Participant F2 suggests, the same content can be interpreted differently, leading to diverse effects for boys and girls. Thus, the impact of TikTok must be considered within a broader social and cultural context that shapes interpretation.

3.2. TikTok Content and Body Image

All participants primarily viewed entertainment content on TikTok, with 23 references to content related to sports and physical exercise. Most participants believed there was no singular ideal of beauty, a sentiment also commonly expressed by girls. However, TikTok content produced by and featuring teenage girls often reinforces the beauty standard of being thin, athletic, with long, straight, light-colored hair, and white (Kennedy, 2020). In contrast, 9 participants noted that, for men, the ideal was to be neither too overweight nor overly muscular. Many participants expressed a desire to maintain a slender physique, with more than half indicating a desire to change something about their bodies.

Additionally, a majority of participants reported observing trends related to body image on TikTok, with 10 admitting that these trends had influenced them in some way, both positively and negatively.

On the positive side, many participants described TikTok as a source of motivation. Social comparisons with peers and influencers drove them to make positive changes in their lives, such as adopting healthier eating habits or exercising more regularly. Participant K2 highlighted content creators who actively encourage healthier lifestyles: "I see it as a way of motivating myself because seeing that other people do it encourages me. There are TikTokers whose goal is to motivate others, like encouraging us to go to the gym or change our eating habits."

Conversely, some participants mentioned that social comparisons made them feel inferior to those they observed on TikTok, leading to heightened self-awareness and increased body surveillance. Two participants directly associated their dissatisfaction with their bodies to body image-related TikTok content. For example, Participant N2 explained, "I think it's more the negative part of social media

because a person starts to think, 'Maybe my waist isn't that small, I don't have that many muscles, and that's it.'"

"Fitspiration" or "Body Positivity" content was not commonly consumed by the participants. While about half were aware of this type of content, they did not engage with it, either due to lack of interest or because they had never encountered it, despite its popularity among teenage girls. A few participants mentioned appreciating "Fitspiration" content for its motivational aspects.

3.3. TikTok's Impact on Self-Esteem

Similar to the findings on body image, only 10 participants believed that the TikTok content they consumed had an impact on their self-esteem, and their opinions were mixed regarding whether this impact was positive or negative.

Regarding content that positively influenced self-esteem, participants mentioned various types of content that uplifted them and boosted their self-esteem, such as comedy, motivational content, and relatable content. For instance, Participant E2 stated, "There's this video I saved that says, 'When you think no one loves you, remember me. I love you, man. I love you.' Whenever I'm feeling down, I watch it, and it improves my self-esteem. I feel better." Participant F2 highlighted that connecting with others like him helped him feel more confident: "Seeing a lot of people in the comments who also want and think this way makes me realize that I'm not alone, that many people think like me (...) it makes me want to be different. It feeds what I basically am. It is good."

On the negative side, social comparisons again emerged as a key factor. Comparing themselves to others in videos often led to self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy. Participant N2 illustrated this, saying, "Sometimes, when I watch these videos, I feel like I should be doing the same, like I'm falling behind. These people seem to have it all together, and I start to question myself. But then I remind myself that they have different lives and circumstances."

It is noteworthy that the majority of participants who reported a negative effect on self-esteem used TikTok daily for at least an hour, with some spending 2 to 3 hours on the platform each day.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

In line with our results, we aim to discuss the answers to the research questions posed in this study.

The first research question examines the influence of body image's self-perception on content creation and commenting, social media users often present themselves in ways they wish to be perceived, typically adhering to societal beauty standards. The ability to comment on others' content on social media can also impact one's self-esteem (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). However, our findings only partially align with these observations. The majority of participants in this study did not create content on TikTok, and among those who did or had done so, their content rarely exposed themselves, a stark contrast to the behavior observed among girls in other studies. This suggests an indirect effect: users may avoid exposing their body images to avoid judgment from others. Furthermore, most participants did not actively engage in commenting, indicating that boys tend to be passive TikTok users.

The second research question focused on how videos watched by adolescents affect their body image perception and identifying content types with both positive and negative influences. The majority of our participants claimed that TikTok videos did not significantly influence their body image. However, many did acknowledge that these videos sparked a desire to change certain aspects of their bodies. While some participants reported increased body surveillance due to TikTok videos, the consequences of this on their body image perception were unclear. Two participants noted that social comparisons on TikTok often made them feel inferior, a sentiment supported by Jones (2001). However, for others, these comparisons led to motivation rather than dissatisfaction.

When examining specific types of content associated with positive or negative effects on body image, the results were inconclusive. Both influences appeared to stem from content related to physical fitness, trends, and body positivity. Our findings align with Hülsing's (2021) study, which suggested that TikTok could negatively influence adolescents' body image, particularly through physical fitness content. This content often led to changes in physical activity and dietary habits, motivating participants to exercise more or adopt healthier diets to achieve the body ideals presented. Notably, in our sample,

these changes in eating habits did not reflect strict dieting but rather a shift toward healthier eating. Concerning physical activity, teenagers reported an increased interest in exercise and trying new workouts. While these changes did not result in body dissatisfaction, they also did not necessarily lead to increased body satisfaction, reinforcing Stanford and McCabe's (2005) view that social media influence varies across individuals, complicating the understanding of its true impact and requiring further research. Our data highlight the importance of interpretation, stressing that the same content can be interpreted in different ways, leading to diverse effects. One participant even compared the behavior of boys and girls, noting that boys tend to admire other boys they find attractive as role models, seeking self-improvement, while girls often view other attractive girls as unattainable ideals, leading to feelings of inadequacy.

Hülsing (2021) also suggested that "Body Positivity" content could have a positive impact. However, in our study, among those who encountered such content on their For You Page, one participant reported positive effects on body image, while another experienced the opposite. Despite Mink and Szymanski's (2022) argument that body-positive content might mitigate body dissatisfaction, our study provided limited evidence to support this claim. Identifying content types that enhance body image in adolescent boys remains challenging, and interpretation should be considered in future research.

The third research question investigates the influence of TikTok content on teenagers' self-esteem. Valkenburg et al. (2021) found that the majority of individuals experienced minimal or no effects from social networks. Our study aligns with these findings, as most participants believed TikTok had no significant impact on their self-esteem, though a few reported both positive and negative influences.

Notably, the amount of time spent on TikTok emerged as a key factor. Teenagers who reported a negative impact tended to spend more time on the platform than those reporting a positive impact, consistent with Hasan and Tiwari's (2018) suggestions. Vogel et al. (2014) proposed that increased usage can lead to more frequent upward social comparisons and lower self-esteem. However, this relationship was not clearly evident in our study, as social comparisons generally led to motivation among boys, rather than feelings of inferiority and dissatisfaction, as has been reported among girls. Meeus et al. (2019) suggested that browsing profiles and using social networks can enhance self-esteem. Our study revealed varying effective content types, implying that no universally boosting content type exists; instead, content that resonates with individuals has the greatest impact. TikTok serves as a platform where adolescents can meet their needs, engaging with various communities and themes that align with their passions, ultimately contributing to a more positive self-image and self-esteem.

In summary, our results demonstrated that TikTok can have both positive and negative effects on body image and self-esteem, depending on various factors such as personal susceptibilities, behaviors, attitudes, interpretation, and other potential moderating factors (Cingel et al., 2022; Worm, 2022). We mapped patterns of connection between many of these variables. Concerning body image, TikTok seems to foster increased body surveillance, leading to changes in physical activity and dietary habits. Notably, these changes did not arise from the pursuit of an ideal body, as most participants did not believe such an ideal existed, but rather from exposure to beauty standards on TikTok that motivated them to improve specific parts of their bodies they were dissatisfied with. Regarding self-esteem, the amount of time spent on the platform appeared to be a significant factor, with those who spent more time perceiving a more negative impact. These findings underscore the complexity of the relationship between TikTok, body image, and self-esteem, suggesting the need for further research to explore the interplay of various variables.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The selection of participants, primarily through snowball sampling, may have limited the diversity of contributions. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study with a sample of 30 adolescents does not allow for the generalization of the findings. Future research could benefit from larger, quantitative, or mixed-methods studies to provide more comprehensive insights. Longitudinal studies focusing on male adolescents are particularly scarce and are needed to gain a better understanding of how social media, including TikTok, impacts their body image and self-esteem throughout adolescence.

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