

# *TikTok and Body Image of Young Adults*

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**Abstract:** As social media like TikTok grows more popular in the digital age, people seem to be driven more and more by standards on social media, despite the lack of research. This study chooses to use the research method of Focus group and selects six university students from the University of Macau for research (N=6) to explore the relationship between TikTok and the body image of young adults. These participants were avid users of social media, and the final data showed gender differences, individual differences, and indirect impact differences. In the data provided by this sample, we not only saw the different effects on each participant, but also shows how young adults were indirectly affected when TikTok went mainstream.

## 1. Introduction

The topic of this paper is the impact of Tik Tok on the body image of young adult. Tik Tok, as a social media for watching short videos, is now gradually appearing in everyone's mobile phones. People can learn entertain, and even shop by watching short videos sent by other users. When some users with outstanding appearance and body image upload their own selfies to Tik Tok, other users are influenced by them and have emotions or have ideas to change themselves. Scholars such as Fardouly et al., Logrieco et al., Hogue et al. have all studied the impact of social media on young adults [1, 2, 3]. In Studies, we can know that social media will have a certain negative impact on the body image of young adults. Our studies will focus on Tik Tok and fill in the gaps to a certain extent. Because we determined that Tik Tok is the target, as a short video social media, the pictures, and videos he brings will directly impact and affect the user's body image. We have many Tik Tok users around us, so we could carry out this study. In this study, we will focus on the influence of Tik Tok on the body image of young adults, the extent of this influence and whether it will continue in life.

## 2. Literature review

The emergence of social media has not only brought joy to people, but also brought influence on people. Fardouly et al. believe that with the development of the Internet and the rise of social media, many young people have access to different pictures or videos on several social media platforms, and some young people may be influenced by these pictures or videos to compare their appearance with others, resulting in a negative body image [1]. Tik Tok is one of the most popular social media applications among young people in recent years. Logrieco et al. points out that people can post pictures or videos on this media as they please, and that these pictures or videos have prominent characters and themes that can easily attract the attention of a large number of young people [1], such

as "anorexia weight loss" [4], people start to focus on a slim body image, in order to have a "perfect body" like in Tik Tok, and this "perfect body" is considered attractive by the public, so that people will blindly pursue these images, and also think that these are the standard body, which undoubtedly brings some influence to people. Hogue et al. suggest that women place more emphasis on body image than men because young women compare images of their ideal body image when they see them, whereas men tend to make friends [3]. This suggests that young women want their bodies to attract attention, resulting in a negative body image.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Research questions

With the development of the Internet and the rise of social media, many young people have access to different pictures or videos on many social media platforms, and certain young people may be influenced by these pictures or videos. Videos to compare their appearance to others and create a negative body image. So, we planned to guide the participants by asking them questions about their daily TikTok habits and how influenced they were by TikTok (how anxious they were about their body image).

In addition, it also shows evidence that pictures or videos with prominent features and themes in the media can easily attract the attention of many young people, such as "losing weight for anorexia". "People are starting to focus on being thin in order to have a 'perfect body' like Tik Tok, and that 'perfect body' is seen as attractive by the public, so people blindly chase after these images and see them as the standard body, which definitely has an impact on people." We hope to analyse the behaviours of participants after being affected by TikTok in daily life, as well as through their statements about the changes they have been affected by.

Additionally, it also mentions that women value body image more than men, so we wanted to analyse why young women compare their ideal body image when looking at their bodies, while men tend to make friends. Therefore, we ensure the balance of the proportion of women, so that we can better analyse and compare the data.

1. How do Tik Tok effect the UM students about the body shape and image?
2. How does Tik Tok indirectly effect the body image of young adults?
3. How different in body image between male and female under the influence of TikTok?

#### 3.2. Participants

One of this research methods is focus groups, because this will make our research easier and more effective in answering participants' questions. The most important thing is that during the process, the members of the group can have discussions, which helps us have more data and help us get a wider range of results. Discussions can enable participants to discuss and debate and understand from many aspects problem. And in the process, we can show participants relevant pictures or videos to stimulate their thinking. At the same time, participants can also show the videos they are interested in or posted on TikTok to the group, which will cause discussions and help our research. And the privacy of this issue is not very high, so participants will not feel embarrassed because of this, they can discuss freely, and provide us with a lot of unexpected data.

There are 6 participants in our focus group, including 3 males and 3 females from the University of Macau, 18-22 years old students. They come from different parts of China and have different views on the problem. This is very important to us, and we can get a wide range of data. Because we want to explore the differences between male and female, we ensure that the number of participants of the two genders is equal and sufficient to facilitate their discussions and to collect more balanced data.

They also have different hobbies, and different TikTok habits, which is why we choose them as participants.

- First participant: Bonnie, 20 years old, from Macao, Female
- Second participant: Ya, 21 years old, from Zhuhai, Female
- Third participant: He, 20 years old, from Macao, Female
- Fourth participant: Jacky, 21 years old, from Hong Kong, Male
- Fifth participant: Briscoe, 21 years old, from Dalian, Male
- Sixth participant: Joe, 22 years old, from Jiangmen, Male

This research follows ethical research standards, and all participation in research is voluntary. In addition, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured, and they were informed that they could suspend the research at any time.

### 3.3. Procedures

On April 14th I conducted first Focus Group study on the impact of TikTok on body image among young adults. We selected six participants for this study, three female participants and three male participants. Because we wanted to understand this effect and find differences between men and women, so we wanted to make sure that there were equal numbers of male and female participants. This can promote the communication between them and allow us to collect more comprehensive data.

Our three female participants are Bonnie, 20, from Macau, He, 21, from Macau, and Ya, 20, from Zhuhai. We chose them because they are also taking Comm3003 courses, so they also understand the Focus Group process. And they're all in the habit of browsing TikTok. The three male participants were Jacky, 21, from Hong Kong, Joe, 22, from Jiangmen, and Briscoe, 21, from Dalian. They are friends of our group members, and we know that they all have the habit of browsing TikTok. In addition, they come from different regions, which can enrich the comprehensiveness of the data we collect.

I chose the Cheng Yu-tung College of the University of Macau to conduct the Focus Group. We originally planned to conduct the interview in the library of the college, but the environment there was a little too comfortable, full of sofas and comfortable cushions. We were afraid that it would be difficult for participants to concentrate, so I chose the Common Room, which is more formal but also comfortable.

After knowing the subject and problem of our research, we began our research. Our study lasts for an hour from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. We taped the entire study and showed the participants videos as they went along, and they showed us the videos they liked and the videos they had posted on TikTok. We also recorded their reactions in the form of image. We used open-ended questions to guide the participants, who answered them one by one and discussed some of the questions. At the beginning of the focus group, everyone spoke shyly because they did not know each other. However, with the deepening of the questions and the collision of opinions, the participants' speeches and discussions became richer. The data we collect is also much more valuable. The attitude of all the participants was very friendly and they expressed their ideas to us as much as possible. Ya and Joe had heated discussions about our problems many times.

During the discussion, we would give a question for the participants to express their views and discussions, and we would record their content with a computer to facilitate the analysis of data. After the Focus Group, data were consolidated, and qualitative analysis was performed.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. TikTok will affects the body image of young adults:**

At the beginning of our focus group, we asked participants about their daily habits of using TikTok. To trigger their discussion, so that we can better understand the relationship between TikTok and the body image of young adult. By questions question of "Do videos on TikTok affect your body image" aroused everyone's discussion, we got the answers that are associated to our research. The results showed that most of the participants would change their body image because of TikTok. Five of the six participants said that in their daily lives, after watching TikTok videos, they would change their body image by learning fitness classes, controlling diet, learning how to wear, lose weight, and learn makeup techniques. Another participant said that she would not change too much, but still feel enviable towards the objects in the video.

### **4.2. TikTok can indirectly affect the body image of young adults:**

In our focus group, a participant showed us his video showing magic in Tik Tok. What we found interesting is that he did not show himself in the video. The participant also stated that the reason for this was that he was not confident about his appearance. This caused the focus group to discuss the comments under TikTok videos. Participants said that they have noticed the content of Tik Tok's comments that maliciously attacked the body image of others and expressed their opposition to this behaviour. All six participants said that such comments will lead to a popular aesthetic, and that the video producer must cater to this aesthetic for a higher degree of attention, thereby changing their body image.

These results make us realize that Tik Tok may indirectly affect the body image of young adults. In the ensuing discussion, the results confirmed this to us. By the question "Do you ask for the body image of your romantic partner according to TikTok standards?", although most of the participants said that if the other party is healthy, they won't have too much demand for the other party on the body image. Participants said that he would require his partner according to the aesthetic standards on TikTok, and even change partners according to these aesthetic standards.

From the results, we find that Participants were influenced by TikTok to demand that their romantic partners conform to Tik Tok's aesthetic standards. And video comments will also have an impact.

### **4.3. Different between male and female**

During the discussion, we found that there is a big difference in body image between male and female affected by TikTok. Through our data collection, male participants do not usually browse too many videos showing body images of the same gender, while female participants do the opposite. When talking about "Are you worried about your body image?", the results showed that all the male participants were not very concerned about it, and two of the three female participants said that they would be affected by TikTok. Anxiety caused by the impact causes them to take some actions to change their body image. Through our Observation research method, we also found that more female participants pay more attention to their body image or even anxiety, while most of the male participants are not anxious about their body image and pay attention to their daily lives. It's far less than female.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Summary

In conclusion, we explored the relationship between TikTok and the body image of young adults. The data we collected shows us that Tik Tok will directly affect the body image of young adults in different ways and to varying degrees. Participants will follow the body image displayed by Tik Tok to change after watching the video, and even question or feel unconfident about their body image.

At the same time, TikTok will also indirectly affect the body image of young adults. Some people around the participants will be affected by Tik Tok's aesthetic standards, to influence the participants. And young adults who post videos on TikTok will also be affected by comments on the body image under the video.

These effects may be positive, because some changes in the body image can make people healthier and more confident. But in the research data, some data indicate that some young adults will take some exaggerated ways to cater to the body image on TikTok. For example, lose weight in unhealthy ways, or even get plastic surgery. The change in this way makes this influence negative.

And the research data shows us that females are more severely affected by Tik Tok, and most female participants will lose weight or even become anxious due to Tik Tok's influence. The male participants will also be affected, but they are not affected too deeply. They will learn some dressing styles, but most of them are changed in a healthy way.

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Compared with our previous literature review, the results show that we have reached some of the same conclusions. Social media like TikTok does affect the body image of young adults. And it produces some negative effects, and women are more affected than men. This condition satisfied with Hogue et al. (2019) suggest that women place more emphasis on body image than men. And Fardouly et al. (2016) suggested that some young people may be influenced by these pictures or videos to compare their appearance with others, resulting in a negative body image. But our data shows that we have some more conclusions. This study offered another perspective from the previous studies. The impact of social media like TikTok on body image is not only negative, but also positive, to guide people to be healthier or more confident. And we found that TikTok will also indirectly affect the body image of young adults, not the viewers themselves are directly affected, but through the affected surrounding people, or the publisher being affected by the comments. These will affect the body image.

### 5.2. Implications

Because of the rapid development of the Internet, social media has become a daily necessity for people. This has led to the unification and virtualization of aesthetic standards. The phenomenon of facial anxiety is becoming more and more serious among contemporary young people. The significance of this study is to guide young adults to be actively affected by TikTok through a qualitative method, so that this effect becomes positive within the scope of health.

### 5.3. Future directions

To continue this study, I hope to increase the sample size of focus groups and participants to make the results more comprehensive. The age point stratification will be more detailed to facilitate the analysis and comparison of the differences in the impact among different age groups. In addition, I

hope to add more questions about their daily TikTok habits, to better analyze the relationship between them. More attention should be paid to the changes in the body image of the participants, and the positive and negative effects should be compared, so that this research can better guide young people. More detailed observation methods are added to our daily life, which can be more helpful to our data analysis and nuclear problem setting.

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