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Tiktok Usage, Social Comparison, and Self-Esteem Among the Youth: Moderating Role of Gender

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Abstract

TikTok has swiftly risen to prominence as one of the world's top social media and entertainment sites. Every day, millions of users log on to the site. The platform's users generate millions of moments and post several videos every minute. Nevertheless, research shows that TikTok usage is more prevalent among those with high self-esteem and less among those with poor self-esteem. This study examines the relationship between TikTok usage, social comparison, and self-esteem using gender as a moderator. The research used a cross-sectional survey design in which structured questionnaires were used to collect data from a sample of 314 TikTok users among university students in Nigeria. Structural Equation Modeling-Analysis of Moment Structures (SEM- AMOS) was employed to test the study hypotheses. The results showed that TikTok usage has a positive and statistically significant direct effect on self-esteem with a path coefficient (Beta) =.330, (p = 0.000) and critical ratios (z-values) = 3.402. Additionally, the study revealed that social comparison has statistically significant effects on self-esteem with a path coefficient (Beta) =.570, p = 0.000, and critical ratios (z-values) = 7.870. However, the result of moderating analysis shows that the effect is more pronounced in the female group than in the male group. The study provides empirical evidence on the moderating role of gender in the relationship between TikTok usage, social comparison, and self-esteem among Nigerian university students.

Keywords

Gender; Self-Esteem; Social Comparison; Social Media; Tiktok Usage; Behavioral Psychology; Media Influence; Digital Society; Cultural Differences; Emotional Well-being

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Использование TikTok, социальное сравнение и самооценка в молодежной среде: модерирующая роль гендера

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Аннотация

TikTok быстро стал одним из ведущих мировых платформ социальных медиа и развлечений, привлекая миллионы пользователей ежедневно. На этой платформе создается и публикуется огромное количество видео каждую минуту. Тем не менее исследования показывают, что использование TikTok особенно популярно среди людей с высокой самооценкой, нежели чем у людей с низкой. Это исследование изучает связь между использованием TikTok, социальным сравнением и самооценкой, используя гендер как модератор. В исследовании использовался поперечный опросный дизайн с структурированными анкетами для сбора данных от выборки из 314 пользователей TikTok среди студентов университетов в Нигерии. Для проверки гипотезы исследования использовалось структурное уравнение моделирование-анализ моментных структур (SEM-AMOS). Результаты показали, что использование TikTok имеет положительное и статистически значимое прямое воздействие на самооценку с коэффициентом пути (Бета) = .330, (p = 0.000) и критическими соотношениями (z-значения) = 3.402. Кроме того, исследование показало, что социальное сравнение оказывает статистически значимое воздействие на самооценку с коэффициентом пути (Бета) = .570, p = 0.000, и критическими соотношениями (z-значения) = 7.870. Однако результат модерирующего анализа показывает, что эффект более выражен в женской группе, чем в мужской. Исследование предоставляет эмпирические доказательства модерирующей роли гендера в связи между использованием TikTok, социальным сравнением и самооценкой среди студентов университетов Нигерии.

Ключевые слова

гендер; самооценка; социальное сравнение; социальные медиа; использование TikTok; психология поведения влияние медиа; цифровое общество; культурные различия; эмоциональное благополучие

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Introduction

Social media have become one of the most potent factors influencing self-esteem in today's world (Jiang & Ngien, 2020). Social media is dominating the daily lives of today's young people. Social media has started to significantly affect people's way of life, communication, language, and hobbies, as well as their health and well-being, because online interactions have begun to outnumber in-person encounters (Köse & Doğan, 2019). According to Schmuck, Karsay, Matthes, and Stevic (2019), social media can have a profound influence on the self-esteem of young users, as well as the self-esteem of those monitoring them. Social media increases self-esteem because it validates them (Shchebetenko, 2019). Also, users receive attention from significant others, gain status among others, and learn to present themselves as more confident through the use of Internet communications (Lee et al., 2020; Valkenburg, Beyens, Pouwels, van Driel, & Keijsers, 2021). Therefore, when they use social media, they feel more confident and earn more respect.

People use social media to improve their thoughts and feelings, and the internet has changed many people's self-perception of their bodies and abilities (Midgley, Thai, Lockwood, Kovacheff, & Page-Gould, 2021; Valkenburg et al., 2021). Social media has had a profound impact on the way that people interact with one another and with the world at large. People use social media to share information about body image and to connect with others who have shared similar experiences. Social media platforms also provide opportunities for people to connect with their community and practice positive social norms (Nasidi, Ahmad, Abdulkadir, & Garba, 2022; Nesi, Choukas-Bradley, & Prinstein, 2018). The potential for social media to be more addictive than cigarettes exists (Grau, Kleiser, & Bright, 2019; Pokhrel et al., 2018). Furthermore, kids and teenagers use social media more regularly.

In recent years, TikTok has been one of the most popular and addictive social media among Nigerian youth. TikTok is a social networking site focusing on vertical reading and short videos. TikTok is the most downloaded app from the Google Play Store and Apple App Store in the world in 2019 (Jia & Liang, 2021). The excessive use of social media led most youth to seek virtual friendship on TikTok with fewer interactions offline with the people they would interact with online (Domingues, Nogueira, Francisco, & Frade, 2021). The most notable social media platform Nigerian Youth has recently used is TikTok. Youths have become more addicted to social media across the globe. This has prompted concerns about various mental health disorders and psychological suffering among youth who exhibit negative emotional symptoms. It is against the backdrop, this study intends to explore the relationship between Tik Tok usage, social comparison, and self-esteem.

Literature Review

TikTok Usage

TikTok is a social media platform that allows users to create and post short videos. The platform was launched in 2017 and has become the go-to place, especially for young adult users to create and share short videos (Lu & Shen, 2023; Kaye, Zeng, & Wikstrom, 2022). Users often post videos of themselves dancing, lip-syncing, and performing their best on the platform (Comp, Dyer, & Gottlieb, 2021; Presley et al., 2022). They can also add filters, backgrounds, and other enhancements to their videos to improve them. The platform has become a popular place for users to create and share their best content. Users share content with friends, family members, and followers. Users can also find and share other users' content on the platform. In essence, TikTok has helped to create a social network that is accessible to widely diverse users. Presently, TikTok has about 1.5 billion active users worldwide (Lin, 2023; Lu & Shen, 2023). It is currently one of the most-used video-sharing platforms in the world and has become the go-to place for young adult users to share content (Petrovic, 2023).

Recent studies have demonstrated the usage and popularity of TikTok as a short video creation and sharing platform (Lin, 2023; Pan, Mu, Zhao, & Tang, 2023; Yang, 2023). For instance, Pan et al (2023) used a cross-sectional survey to investigate both active and passive usage of TikTok among 7,750 adult female users in China. According to the findings, active and passive TikTok usage are positively and negatively correlated with users' weight esteem and appearance respectively. Additionally, Yang (2023) further explored some reasons for TikTok usage among teenagers, such as a lack of self-control and the platform's tactics. According to Yang, TikTok creates opportunities for much fun and convenience for users and makes it possible "for people's fragmented time to be used wisely" (p. 1). However, some users, especially teenagers with poor self-discipline, easily become overdependent on the platform, which could seriously change their minds. In this regard, Lin (2023) revealed that TikTok content typically contains a lot of violence and pornography, which can have a huge psychological effect on teenagers as dominant users of the platform.

Social Comparison

The term "social comparison" refers to how people compare themselves with others to judge their abilities and worth (Gerber, Wheeler, & Suls, 2018; Gursoy, & Ozkan, 2023). Social comparison is one of the most common methods for people to evaluate themselves. People often view themselves using social comparison and often view others through this lens. This is because individuals tend to judge themselves by comparison to those who are socially similar rather than those who are very different from them (Verduyn, Gugushvili, Massar, Täht, & Kross, 2020). This comparison is based on how individuals perceive themselves to be like others or what other people think of them on various dimensions, including physical

health, success, appearance, and intelligence (Matta & Van Dyne, 2020; de Vries, Möller, Wieringa, Eigenraam, & Hamelink, 2018).

Social comparison has been found to affect how individuals think about their lives and the people around them through social media (Carraturo et al., 2023; Meier & Schäfer, 2018; Wang, Miao, Jia, & Lai, 2023). For instance, a recent systematic review conducted by Carraturo et al (2023) revealed a simple correlation between social comparison on social media, depression, and envy" (p. 364). Another study by Wang et al (2023) used a survey method to examine digital hoarding behavior among 556 social media users. The findings revealed that social comparison increases individuals' digital hoarding behaviors". According to Wang et al (2023), "social comparison has become ubiquitous and easier via social networking sites" (p. 4).

Hypothesis Development

TikTok Usage and Self-Esteem

Research has established that social media platforms, such as TikTok, have a powerful effect on how people think about their lives and those around them (Cingel, Carter, & Krause, 2022; Purba & Hasibuan, 2023; Pyun & Cotton, 2023). For instance, college students have been going crazy for TikTok; the popularity has also led to a new form of addiction; users spend hours on the app, which can negatively affect their self-esteem (Kovács et al., 2022). According to Chakraborty, Kapoor, and Ilavarasan (2020), TikTok is an important source of self-esteem for many young people. When people post a video on TikTok, they receive feedback from their peers and gain a sense of acceptance. In particular, empirical studies using different techniques and scopes revealed that TikTok usage has a significant relationship with self-esteem (Akbari, Jastacia, Setiawan, & Ningsih, 2022; Amoda, Domingo, Gasgonia, & Relleve, 2022; Hung, 2022; Jaramillo-Dent, Contreras-Pulido, & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2022; Pop, Iorga, & Iurcov, 2022; Savira, Rifai, & Wahyunengsih, 2022). For example, Amoda et al (2022) revealed that TikTok usage is associated with increased self-esteem and social comparison. Similarly, Savira et al (2022) found that people with high self-esteem are more likely to use TikTok frequently than those with low self-esteem. Based on the above theoretical and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H_1 TikTok usage significantly affects TikTok users' self-esteem in Nigeria

Social Comparison and Self-Esteem

People often use social comparisons to evaluate their self-worth. Social comparison has been found to affect people's perceptions of their usage of social media and their self-esteem (Farinha, 2022; Lau, 2020). Research has also shown that social comparison significantly impacts people's self-esteem (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018; Cho, Noh, Lee, & Rim, 2020; Fagundes, Marot, & Natividade, 2021; Schmuck et al., 2019). For instance, Lau (2020) revealed that in Ireland social comparison is connected with self-esteem. Likewise, Farinha (2022) found that state self-esteem scores for people with an upward social comparison were lower than the self-esteem scores for those with a downward comparison. Additionally,

research indicates that social comparison has also been found to affect how people think about their lives and the people around them influence people's perceptions of their usage on social media platforms, such as TikTok (Masciantonio, Bourguignon, Bouchat, Balty, & Rimé, 2021). For example, a person who sees others posting pictures of themselves on TikTok at a new fitness club may use that as a social comparison to evaluate their fitness level. People's perceptions of how they use social media platforms are connected with their self-esteem and social comparison. People with high self-esteem might use social media platforms to develop and strengthen social connections. Based on the above empirical evidence, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H_2 Social comparison significantly affects TikTok users' self-esteem in Nigeria.

Mediating Role of Gender

The influence of social comparison through social media on users' self-esteem and its connection with gender has been a crucial topic (Farinha, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2023; Lau, 2020). In this regard, Lau (2020) found that women in Ireland "reflect a more substantial influence on social comparison than males on social networking sites which results in a negative impact on their self-esteem" (p. 2). According to Lau, gender differences are found in self-esteem when a social comparison is performed on social media. Gender can significantly influence social media use as men and women have different decision-making processes, usage habits, etiquette, and preferences for particular platforms (Bernhard & Kübler, 2023; Gerwin, Kaliebe, & Daigle, 2018). Males and females exhibit distinct behaviors and have diverse opinions and attitudes about online communication (Abdullah, Alsohbo, & Hassan, 2022). Additionally, individual motives for using technology may vary depending on one's gender since men and women have distinct need structures and regard specific requirements or desired values differently (Karatsoli & Nathanail, 2020). Based on the above evidence, this study hypothesizes that gender moderates the relationships between TikTok usage, social comparison, and self-esteem. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H_3 Gender moderates the relationship between TikTok usage and TikTok users' self-esteem in Nigeria.

H_4 Gender moderates the relationship between social comparison and TikTok users' self-esteem in Nigeria.

Underpinning theory

This study is based on Social Identity Theory (SIT). The theory was proposed by Tajfel, Turner, Austin, and Worchel (1979). Social identity theory developed the idea of social identity to explain intergroup behavior (Turner & Reynolds, 2001; Azmi, Hassan, Ali, Abdullah, Anas, & Suhaimi, 2020). According to social identity theory, some intergroup behaviors are predicted based on perceived group status disparities, the validity and stability of those status differences, and the perceived capacity to transition between groups (Hennessy & West, 1999). According to Tajfel

and Turner (2004), there are three mental processes involved in classifying someone as either "us" or "them". The first stage is categorization. People categorize things in order to understand and recognise them. To comprehend the social environment, individuals categorize persons in a manner fairly similar to this. The second step, referred to as social identification, is where people adopt the identity of the group, they have placed themselves in. The final factor is social comparison. After categorizing ourselves as members of a group and identifying with that group, we frequently compare that group to others. If we want to maintain our self-esteem, our group must do well in comparison to other groups. Social identification theory is clearly explaining the variables of this study. TikTok users identified themselves with certain social groups and categorized themselves as celebrities and compared themselves with members of another group.

Research Model

The research framework on which the study is based is depicted in Figure 1. The hypothesis testing was done to see if there was a relationship between the independent variables (IVs) of Tik Tok usage, social comparison, and dependent variables (DV) of self-esteem and gender as moderating variables.

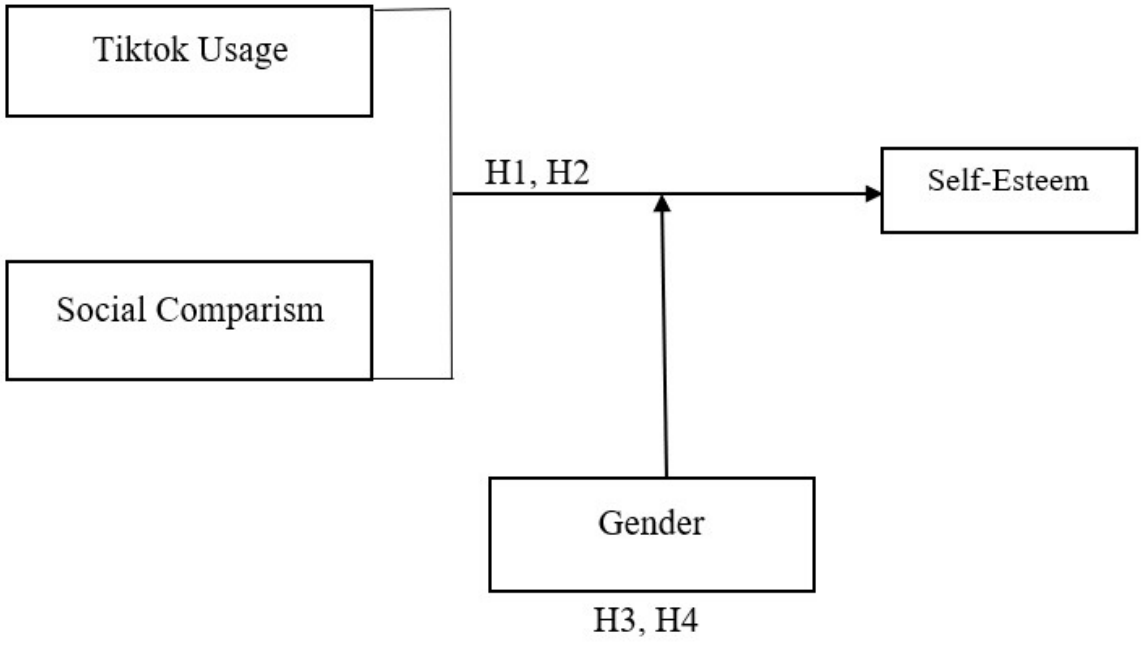

Figure 1. Research Framework

Methodology

A survey research design was used in this research, and a questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. A sample of 370 was determined from

a total population of 3415 TikTokers using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for sample size calculation. The population comprises students in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria. The sample size was raised by 50% to solve the non-response issue and sample size error, which ultimately resulted in a sample size of 557 as recommended by (Hair, Howard, and Nitzl, 2020). A self-administered questionnaire was utilized to collect data, and a total of 557 questionnaires were distributed to the research participants, with 314 fully completed and returned. Based on this, the study progressed with 314 correctly answered questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 56.37% for the final assessment of the study hypotheses. The questionnaire items are graded on a five-point Likert scale with responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire content was adapted from previous studies (Mayukh & Manaf, 2022; Pop et al., 2022; Savira et al., 2022; Zuo & Wang, 2019). The research used purposive sampling techniques in selecting respondents; only TikTok users are selected among social media users. The data were analyzed using the SEM – AMOS software package, version 24.0, to examine Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Validity and Reliability

Table 1 reveals that the AVE value is greater than 0.5, which is the cut-off AVE value suggested by Hair et al (2020). Also, the composite reliability values were higher than the recommended value of 0.700, as indicated by Sarstedt, Hair, Cheah, Becker, and Ringle (2019). Finally, Cronbach's alpha values satisfied the cut-off of 0.700 as Hair Jr et al. (2020) recommended.

	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
TikTok Usage	0.852	0.658	.853
Social Comparison	0.834	0.502	.821
Self-Esteem	0.798	0.543	.816

Table 1. CR, AVE and CA

Discriminant Validity

A number greater than 0.850 may suggest multicollinearity; 0.850 or below is the ideal value for discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2020; Sarstedt, Hair, Nitzl, Ringle, & Howard, 2020). Overall discriminant validity of the model was less than 0.850, which is an acceptable result (Manley, Hair, Williams, & McDowell, 2020). The findings of the discriminant validity test for the entire model are summarized in Table 2. As seen in Table 2, the square root of AVEs on diagonals is higher than the correlations between the constructs, suggesting how the constructs correlate with their indicators.

	TikTok Usage	Social Comparison.	Self-Esteem
TikTok Usage	0.811		
Social Comparison.	0.557	0.708	
Self-Esteem	0.483	0.615	0.736

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

Results

The study's research hypotheses for direct effects were evaluated using the standardized estimates from the structural model and the regression weight results. According to the regression path coefficients, the exogenous constructs significantly impacted the endogenous construct. The single-headed arrow indicates the causal relationship between the exogenous and endogenous construct underestimation. The double-headed arrow should be used to quantify the correlational effects between all exogenous constructs. Figure 2 shows the standardized results and squared multiple correlations (R2) of the structural model.

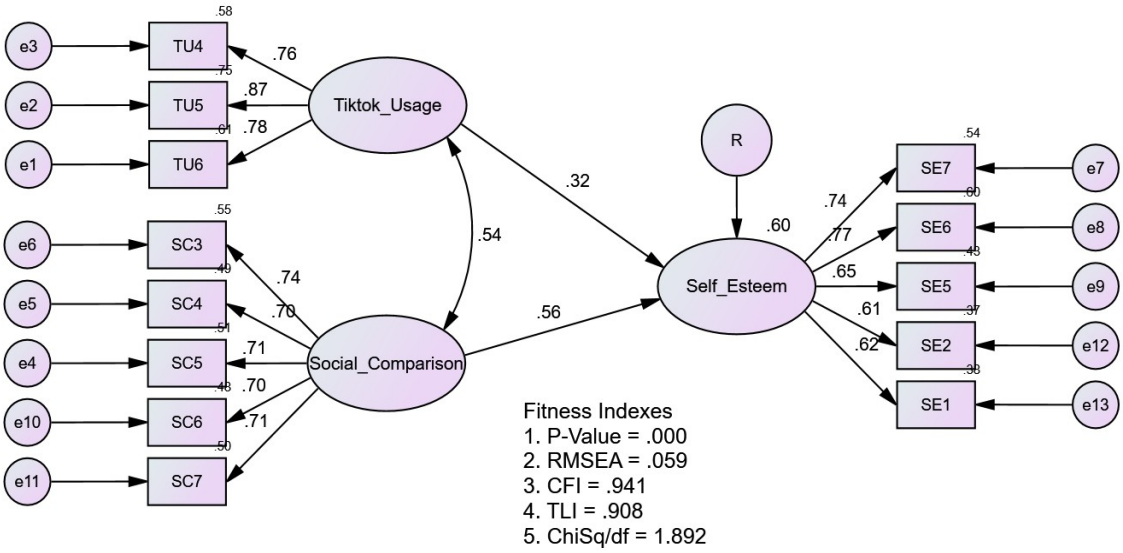

Figure 2. Standardized Results

Figure 3 displays the unstandardized estimates of the regression path coefficients between the study's constructs. According to the regression path coefficients, the exogenous constructs significantly impacted the endogenous construct.

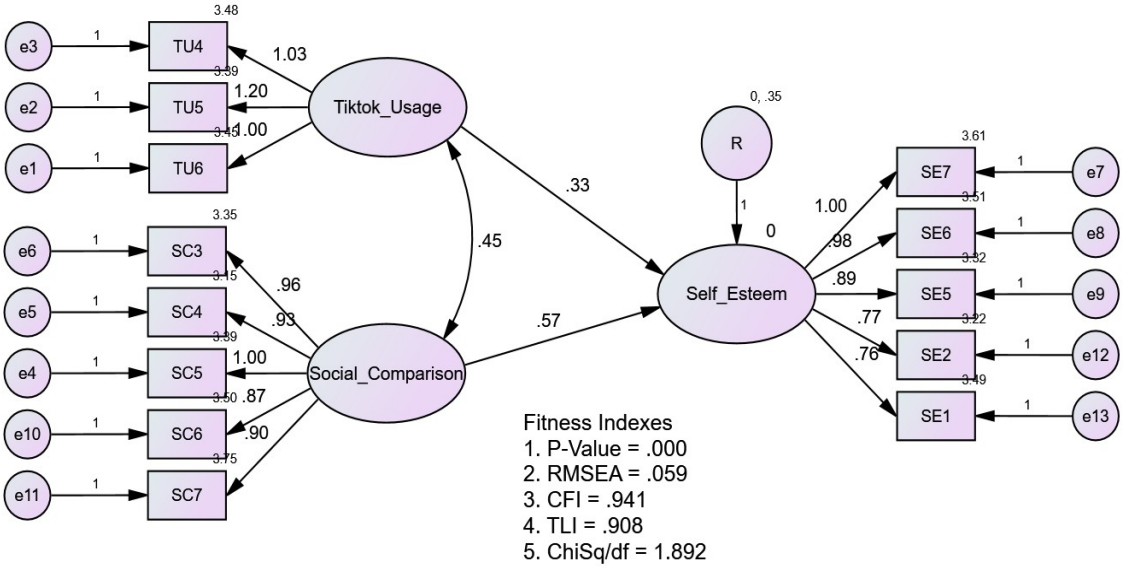

Figure 3. Unstandardised Results

The result shows that the suggested structural model met the required fitness indexes (Chis q/df = 1.892 < 5.0, RMSEA = 0.059 < 0.08, CFI = 0.941 > 0.90, and TLI = 0.908 > 0.9).

Hypothesis Testing

The regression weights for each path analysis reported in the research hypotheses for the study are shown in Table 3. The regression weights for the influence of each exogenous construct on the dependent construct are extracted from Figure 3. The result of the analysis shows that TU had a positive and statistically significant direct effect on SE with a path coefficient (Beta) = .330 (p = 0.000) and critical ratios (z-values) = 3.402. Thus, this result supported the hypothesized model (Hypothesis 1), which states TikTok Usage (TU) has a significant effect on Self-Esteem (SE). Furthermore, the study revealed that SC has statistically significant effects on SE with a path coefficient (Beta) =.570, p = 0.000 and critical ratios (z-values) = 7.870. This result supported the hypothesized model (Hypothesis 2), which stated that Social Comparison (SC) has a significant effect on Self-Esteem (SE). Therefore, based on the result, it can be presumed that SC directly affects ES.

Hypotheses			Estimate	SE.	CR.	P-value
Self-Esteem	<---	TikTok Usage	.330	0.097	3.402	***
Self-Esteem	<---	Social Comparison	.570	.072	7.870	***

Table 3. Path Coefficients

Moderation Results

Gender is used as a moderator in this research. To compare the study model across the gender (male and female), a multi-group analysis was conducted. Consequently, the present study used a Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) to test the moderating effect. The data set for testing the moderating effect of gender was divided into two; Male TikTok users (group 1) and female TikTok users (group 2). Each category was constrained by a parameter (1), while the constrained and unconstrained model results were compared. If the difference in Chi-Square value between the constrained and unconstrained models is greater than 3.84, the path is moderated. Additionally, for moderation to exist, the difference in the Chi-Square degree of freedom (DF) must be 1 (Alsheikh et al., 2021). The moderation test for the male gender between TU and SE, SC and SE, as presented in Table 4. was insignificant. The difference in Chi-Square values between constrained and unconstrained models was 0.619 and 0.1, less than 3.84, whereas the difference in Degrees of Freedom is 1. Consequently, the hypothesis (H3) was not supported.

Hypothesis	Measurement	Constrained Model	Unconstrained Model	Difference in Chi-Square	Moderation Results	Hypothesis Results
TU & SE	Chi-Square	3.254	2.635	0.619	Insignificant	Not Supported
	DF	63	62	1		
SC & SE	Chi-Square	2.735	2.635	0.1	Insignificant	Not Supported
	DF	63	62	1		

Table 4. Male Gender moderates TU-SE and SC-SE

Table 5 presents the moderation result for the female group. The result is significant because, while the degree of freedom differs by 1, the difference in the Chi-Square values between the constrained and unconstrained is higher than 3.84. Thus, hypothesis (H4) was supported.

Hypothesis	Measurement	Constrained Model	Unconstrained Model	Difference in Chi-Square	Moderation Results	Hypothesis Results
TU & SE	Chi-Square	9.342	3.848	5.494	Significant	Supported
	DF	63	62	1		
SC & SE	Chi-Square	12.311	3.848	8.463	Significant	Supported
	DF	63	62	1		

Table 5. Female: Gender moderates TU-SE and SC-SE

Discussion

The result reported in this study implies that TikTok usage has a significant effect on self-esteem. There, we accept the alternative hypothesis (H1) which postulates that TikTok usage significantly affects TikTok users' self-esteem in Nigeria. This outcome is consistent with most previous studies on self-esteem and social media usage (Cingel et al., 2022; Purba & Hasibuan, 2023; Pyun & Cotton, 2023) and specifically TikTok usage (Akbari et al. 2022; Amoda et al., 2022; Hung, 2022; Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022). Accordingly, the first hypothesis supports the presumption of social identity theory that people who wish to maintain self-esteem must do well in comparison to other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). TikTok usage, perhaps, helps Nigerian TikTokers to form their self-esteem by exposing them to what other people have and what goes on. Because of this, many individuals utilize their TikTok pages to post carefully selected videos and photographs with a variety of effects.

Additionally, the current study revealed a positive effect of social comparison on self-esteem among TikTok users in Nigeria. Thus, we accept the second hypothesis (H2) which assumes that social comparison significantly affects TikTok users' self-esteem in Nigeria. This outcome also concurs with previous research (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018; Farinha, 2022; Jiang & Ngien, 2020; Lau, 2020; Robinson et al., 2019). Again, the second hypothesis supports the assumption of social identity theory that some intergroup behaviors are predicted based on perceived group status disparities (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). For Nigerian TikTok users, social comparison tends to enhance their chances for comparison.

The current research also revealed an insignificant moderating effect of gender in the relationship between TikTok usage and self-esteem. The difference in Chi-Square values between constrained and unconstrained models was 0.619 and 0.1, which is less than 3.84. Whereas the difference in degrees of freedom is 1. Consequently, we reject the third hypothesis (H3) which presumes that gender moderates the relationship between TikTok usage and TikTok users' self-esteem in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the outcome revealed a significant moderating effect of social comparison on TikTok users' self-esteem in Nigeria, and hence we accept the fourth hypothesis (H4). This outcome suggests that the correlation between social comparison and self-esteem among Nigerian TikTokers depends on their gender. Again, this result supports the basic assumption of social identity theory that intergroup behaviors are predicted based on perceived group differences (Hennessy & West, 1999). In essence, the presumptions of social identity theory explain the variables of this study. Nigerian TikTok users tend to identify themselves with certain groups.

Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated TikTok usage, social comparison, and self-esteem among Nigerian university students using gender as a moderator. A conceptual framework was used to assess the effects of variables using SEM-AMOS analysis. The findings indicated a significant positive impact on TikTok usage and self-esteem. Additionally, there is a positive relationship between social comparison and self-esteem. As the usage of TikTok increases, social comparison and self-esteem will increase. Subsequently, the contribution of this study is that it fills the gap in the literature in terms of incorporating gender as a moderating variable; the study found that the female group moderates the relationship between TikTok usage and social comparison on self-esteem. The findings of this study could advance our understanding of the extent to which TikTok usage and social comparison affect self-esteem among Nigerian TikTokers. However, while this research is limited to a cross-sectional survey, further research may consider a qualitative content analysis of TikTok content produced by Nigerian TikTokers to offer a more in-depth analysis of how TikTok usage relates to social comparison and self-esteem. Also, a longitudinal analysis can be employed to ascertain if the phenomenon changes in the Nigerian context.

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** Social network belonging to a company recognized as extremist in the territory of the Russian Federation | Социальная сеть, принадлежащая компании, признанной экстремистской на территории РФ