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Dispositional Social Comparison Orientation Predicting Multidimensional Social Media Fatigue in Generation Z TikTok Users

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of algorithm-based social media platforms has intensified evaluative social interaction among young users, potentially increasing susceptibility to social media fatigue. Individual differences in Social Comparative Orientation are assumed to shape psychological responses to the social media environment. This study aims to examine the role of dispositional Social Comparison Orientation in predicting multidimensional social media fatigue among Generation Z TikTok users. Social Comparative Orientation was measured using the adjusted Iowa-Netherlands Comparative Orientation Measure, while social media fatigue was assessed using a multidimensional scale that included cognitive, emotional, and behavioral fatigue. The data was analyzed using covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling. The findings showed that ability-based comparisons significantly predicted cognitive, emotional, and behavioral fatigue, while opinion-based comparisons showed no significant association. The structural model describes the proportion of small to moderate variance in the fatigue dimension. These findings highlight the comparative tendency of disposition as an intrapersonal vulnerability factor in social media fatigue in an algorithm-mediated social media environment.

Keywords : *generation z, social comparison orientation, social media fatigue*

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BACKGROUND

TikTok has become one of the most dominant social media platforms in the lives of Generation Z. TikTok is a short-form video social media platform that operates through a system of algorithmic recommendations and high content personalization, thus allowing for the rapid and widespread distribution of content based on user interaction patterns (Abidin et al., 2021). In the context of Indonesia, this phenomenon is increasingly relevant because Indonesia is the country with the largest TikTok audience reach globally. Statista data (2025) shows that until October 2025, TikTok's ad reach in Indonesia will reach around 180.11 million users. The APJII Internet Survey (2025) also reports that the number of internet users in Indonesia has reached 229 million people with a penetration rate of 80.66%, and the age group of 15-24 years is the most active user. The magnitude and intensity of this use shows that the dynamics of interaction on TikTok have significant psychological implications for Generation Z Indonesia.

According to Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals rely on comparisons with others as a reference framework for evaluating their abilities and personal attributes, particularly in situations where objective benchmarks are absent. The tendency to consistently conduct such evaluations is known as *Social Comparison Orientation* (SCO) (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Individuals with high SCO are more sensitive to social information and more often make *upward comparisons*, making them more susceptible to psychological pressure in a social media environment that emphasizes achievement and performativity. In digital social media contexts, such dispositional sensitivity to evaluative social cues may increase individuals' vulnerability to psychological strain associated with social media use (Boer et al., 2021).

A number of studies show that social comparisons play a role in the emergence of psychological pressure on social media use. Jabeen et al. (2023) found that the tendency to compare oneself increases the risk of *social media fatigue* through an increase *in fear of missing out* (FoMO). In addition, FoMO and self-disclosure tendencies on social media are known to increase psychological fatigue through repetitive social evaluation mechanisms (Dhir et al., 2023). Malik et al. (2020) also stated that *online social comparison* is directly related to increased social media fatigue and decreased academic function. Ou et al. (2023) reported that social comparisons and FoMO together correlated with psychological stress and fatigue.

In terms of mechanisms, Dhir et al. (2023) stated that repeated social evaluations increase psychological pressure

on young users. Qin et al. (2024) also explain that the intensity of social media exposure is related to increased *social media fatigue* through the depletion of cognitive and emotional resources, in line with *the Conservation of Resources Theory* (Hobfoll, 1989). This is also supported by research in adolescents that shows that the intensity of social media use correlates with increased social comparison tendencies, mental health disorders, and sensitivity to social evaluation (Boer et al., 2021). In the context of visually oriented social media platforms, Chen et al. (2024) found that *upward comparison* and content exposure that displays ideal life is related to increased emotional exhaustion.

The findings in the context of TikTok show a similar pattern. Haque (2026) found that individuals with higher levels of depression and social anxiety tended to exhibit problematic TikTok use patterns. Research shows that the characteristics of the system and the quality of information on TikTok are related to the tendency of addictive and compulsive use so that it can potentially increase psychological pressure and strengthen the dynamics of social comparison in algorithm-based platforms. (Qin et al., 2022). Repeated exposure to short videos was also associated with changes in attention patterns and increased cognitive distractions (Chen et al., 2023). In addition, research conducted by Tian (2025) found that appearance-based comparisons on TikTok increase anxiety and reinforce evaluative pressure.

Social media fatigue can be understood as the depletion of psychological resources resulting from prolonged and repetitive interaction with digital platforms (Malik et al., 2020). Algorithm-driven social media platforms expose users to continuous evaluative feedback and ideal peer representations, which can intensify the process of social comparison and increase psychological tension (Abidin et al., 2021). Repeated involvement in such evaluative interactions has been linked to emotional exhaustion and decreased psychological well-being, reflecting core symptoms of social media fatigue (Chen et al., 2024). From a disposition perspective, Social Comparative Orientation represents a relatively stable tendency to evaluate oneself in relation to others, which can increase an individual's susceptibility to experiences of burnout in the contemporary social media environment.

Previous research has shown a consistent link between social comparison and negative psychological effects in online environments, including a decline in subjective well-being and problematic patterns of social media engagement (Dhir et al., 2021). However, many studies still conceptualize social comparison primarily as a response to situational behavior rather than as a disposition tendency that systematically shapes an individual's vulnerability to social media fatigue (Verduyn et al., 2020). In addition, social media fatigue is often operationalized as a one-dimensional construct even though theoretical perspectives suggest a multidimensional experience of fatigue. Empirical investigations that simultaneously examine the tendency of ability-and opinion-based comparisons within the framework of multidimensional fatigue remain limited, especially in short-form video platforms characterized by algorithmic content distribution (Montag et al., 2021). Addressing this gap, this study examined the Social Comparative Orientation of disposition as a predictor of multidimensional social media fatigue among Generation Z TikTok users.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed to examine the associations between Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) and Social Media Fatigue (SMF) in TikTok users from Generation Z. Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling with maximum likelihood estimation was applied to evaluate both the measurement and structural models. The use of covariance-based SEM enables the simultaneous assessment of measurement and structural models, allowing relationships between constructs to be evaluated in a systematic and comprehensive manner (Hair et al., 2019).

Participants

The study participants were individuals aged 18–25 years old who were classified as Generation Z and were active users of TikTok. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with inclusion criteria: (1) using TikTok for at least one hour per day for the past six months, (2) being between 18–25 years old, and (3) willing to participate voluntarily.

The calculation of sample needs was carried out using G*Power 3.1 assuming a two-way correlation test ($\alpha = 0.05$; power = 0.80; effect size = 0.30), which showed the need for at least 84 participants. A total of 248 respondents participated in this study. After a screening process to remove incomplete and inconsistent responses, 13 data were eliminated so that the final number of participants analyzed was 235 people. This sample size has met the minimum recommendations for covariance-based SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

The mean age of the participants was 22.51 years (SD = 2.51; range = 18–26 years). No data was lost on the age variable. The range showed that all participants were in the early adult category relevant to the characteristics of Generation Z as the target study population. Most participants use TikTok every day (92.3%). Based on the duration of use, 41.7% use TikTok for 1–3 hours per day and 32.8% for more than 3 hours per day. These findings show that the majority of participants have a high intensity and duration of TikTok use.

Research Instruments

SCO was measured using an adaptation of *the Iowa–Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure* (INCOM) developed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999). The scale consists of 11 items in a five-point Likert format (1 = very inappropriate to 5 = very appropriate). Some items are *reverse* and have been *reverse scored* before analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed using *parallel analysis* with promax rotation to identify factor structures in the context of the study sample. The structure of the factor is then confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The evaluation of the measurement model was carried out by considering *the standardized factor loading* and the model feasibility index. The internal reliability of each dimension is above 0.78.

SMF was measured using a scale adaptation developed by Zhang et al. (2021), which includes three dimensions: cognitive fatigue, emotional fatigue, and behavioral fatigue. The EFA shows a three-factor structure that is consistent with the theoretical model. The CFA further confirmed the three-dimensional structure. The internal reliability value for each dimension is above 0.80.

Procedure

Data collection is done online through Google Form. Participants read the research explanation and gave consent through electronic *informed consent* before filling out the questionnaire. The data were checked to ensure completeness and consistency of responses before being analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 26 and JASP. The initial stage includes descriptive analysis and Pearson correlation to see the initial relationships between variables.

The factor structure was tested through EFA using *parallel analysis*, then confirmed through CFA using covariance-based SEM with ML estimation. The evaluation of the feasibility of the model was carried out using *the goodness of fit index*, namely the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The interpretation of the feasibility index model refers to the criteria recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999). Although the incremental fit indices (CFI and TLI) were slightly below the conventional 0.90 threshold, the absolute fit indices (RMSEA = 0.067; SRMR = 0.075) indicated acceptable model fit. Overall, the theoretically driven model adequately represented the empirical data.

Multivariate normality assessment using the Mardia coefficient showed moderate deviation from the normality assumption ($p < 0.001$). However, with a sample size of 235 participants, the ML estimate was still used because it was relatively robust to moderate deviations from normality (Kline, 2016).

The validity of the construct was evaluated through the values *of the Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) and *the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio* (HTMT) as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), while the reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha and *Composite Reliability*. Hypothesis testing was carried out through the analysis of standardized path coefficients (β), significance values (p), determination coefficients (R^2), and *effect size* (f^2).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Construct Correlation

Descriptive analysis showed that the average score of the ability-based comparison dimension (SCO_A) was 3.08 (SD = 0.88), while the opinion-based comparison dimension (SCO_B) had an average of 4.02 (SD = 0.67). In the Social Media Fatigue (SMF) variable, the average score of cognitive fatigue was 3.18 (SD = 0.79), emotional fatigue was 3.15 (SD = 1.00), and behavioral fatigue was 2.47 (SD = 0.94).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Construct Correlation

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. SCO_A	3.08	0.88	—				
2. SCO_B	4.02	0.67	.312***	—			
3. SMF_Cog	3.18	0.79	.263***	.223***	—		
4. SMF_Emo	3.15	1.00	.269***	.244***	.566***	—	
5. SMF_Beh	2.47	0.94	.270***	.062	.516***	.489***	—

Note. N = 235. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Pearson's correlation results showed that SCO_A was positively and significantly correlated with SMF_Cog ($r = 0.263$, $p < 0.001$), SMF_Emo ($r = 0.269$, $p < 0.001$), and SMF_Beh ($r = 0.270$, $p < 0.001$). SCO_B correlated significantly with SMF_Cog ($r = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$) and SMF_Emo ($r = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$), but not with SMF_Beh ($r = 0.062$, $p = 0.341$). The positive relationship between the social media comparison dimension and fatigue is consistent with the findings of Zhang et al. (2021), who showed that a tendency toward social comparison is associated with increased fatigue from social media use. No correlations between constructs exceeded 0.80, indicating no evidence of multicollinearity.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to test the factor structure of the instrument within the context of the study sample. On the SCO scale, a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value of 0.817 indicated good sample adequacy, and Bartlett's test yielded a significant result ($\chi^2 = 757.036$; $df = 45$; $p < 0.001$). Parallel analysis revealed a two-factor structure corresponding to the dimensions of comparison ability and comparison of opinions. One item was eliminated because it had a factor loading below 0.40.

On the SMF scale, a KMO value of 0.873 indicates excellent sample adequacy, and Bartlett's test yielded a significant result ($\chi^2 = 1622.009$; $df = 105$; $p < 0.001$). Parallel analysis revealed a three-factor structure consistent with the

theoretical model of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral exhaustion. These results are consistent with previous conceptualizations that define social media fatigue as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components (Zhang et al., 2021).

Table 2. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

A. SCO Scale

	Factor Loadings		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
SCO8	0.852		0.304
SCO9	0.687		0.524
SCO10	0.679		0.520
SCO7	0.676		0.588
SCO2	0.401		0.675
SCO4		0.777	0.376
SCO6		0.706	0.473
SCO1		0.678	0.551
SCO5_R		0.568	0.710
SCO3		0.521	0.601

B. SMF Scale

	Factor Loadings			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Uniqueness
SMF9	0.909			0.321
SMF8	0.884			0.279
SMF7	0.877			0.322
SMF10	0.615			0.487
SMF6	0.607			0.648
SMF14		0.931		0.300
SMF15		0.912		0.348
SMF13		0.609		0.591
SMF12		0.474		0.575
SMF1			0.895	0.391
SMF3			0.806	0.552
SMF2			0.680	0.404
SMF11			0.521	0.466
SMF4				0.765
SMF5				0.832

The difference in the contribution of the two dimensions of the SCO is in line with the conceptual separation between comparison of ability and comparison of opinion as explained by Gibbons and Buunk (1999).

Measurement Model (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the fit of the measurement model for the five constructs. The model demonstrated an acceptable level of fit with the observed data. The RMSEA and SRMR values fall within recommended limits, indicating adequate absolute model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Although additional fit indices are slightly below conventional cutoff values, this may reflect the complexity of the multidimensional latent structure examined in this study. Future refinements may include re-evaluating indicators with lower factor loadings or testing alternative measurement specifications. The standard loadings of all indicators range from 0.391 to 0.891 and are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Model Feasibility Index

Table of Contents	Value
χ^2 (df)	548.1 (265)
CFI	0.882
TLI	0.866
RMSEA	0.067
SRMR	0.075

The standardized loading of all indicators is in the range of 0.391–0.891 and significant at $p < 0.001$. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value and construct reliability are presented in the following table;

Table 4. Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability

Construct	AVE	CR	α
SCO_A	0.436	0.781	0.783
SCO_B	0.451	0.803	0.791
SMF_Cog	0.406	0.788	0.787
SMF_Emo	0.569	0.864	0.866
SMF_Beh	0.528	0.824	0.806

Although some AVE values are slightly below 0.50, the entire construct has a Composite Reliability above 0.70, which indicates adequate internal consistency.

Model Structural

Structural model analysis showed that SCO_A had a positive and significant effect on SMF_Cog (β = 0.357; p < 0.001), SMF_Emo (β = 0.317; p < 0.001), and SMF_Beh (β = 0.388; p < 0.001). In contrast, SCO_B showed no significant influence on all three dimensions of SMF (p > 0.05).

Table 5. Structural Model Analysis Results

Outcome	Predictor	β	p	R^2
SMF_Cog	SCO_A	0.357	< .001	0.164
SMF_Emo	SCO_A	0.317	< .001	0.144
SMF_Beh	SCO_A	0.388	< .001	0.133
SMF_Cog	SCO_B	0.100	.220	
SMF_Emo	SCO_B	0.123	.117	
SMF_Beh	SCO_B	−0.092	.265	

These findings are consistent with research conducted by Verduyn et al. (2020), which showed that comparing one's abilities on social media is more closely linked to psychological stress than comparing one's opinions.

The coefficient of determination indicates that the model explains 16.4% of the variance in SMF_Cog, 14.4% in SMF_Emo, and 13.3% in SMF_Beh. The amount of variance explained falls within a small-to-moderate range, which is common in social psychology research where various contextual factors influence the results (Cohen, 1988). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported, while Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Test of Normality Assumptions

The multivariate normality test using Mardia coefficient indicated a significant deviation from the normal distribution (p < 0.001). However, the sample size of 235 participants falls within the adequate range for Maximum Likelihood estimation, which is known to be relatively robust to violations of multivariate normality under conditions of adequate sample size (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, the analysis was continued using ML estimation. This decision was considered methodologically appropriate to maintain the stability and interpretability of the estimated model parameters.

DISCUSSION

The present findings indicate that comparisons based on ability play a more consistent role than comparisons based on opinion in predicting the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of social media fatigue. This pattern suggests that evaluative processes related to perceived competence may represent a central psychological mechanism underlying fatigue experiences in social media environments. Although the explained variance (13–16%) falls within the small-to-moderate range (Cohen, 1988), such effect sizes remain theoretically meaningful in dispositional research, as trait-based tendencies typically operate alongside multiple contextual determinants.

The stronger effect observed in the ability-based comparison may be attributed to the platform's visually driven and performance-oriented nature, where evaluative cues related to achievement and self-presentation are particularly prominent. Neuropsychological findings suggest that repeated exposure to TikTok may influence emotional processing and attentional mechanisms, potentially reinforcing evaluative self-monitoring during platform use (Wicaksono et al., 2024). In line with the two-dimensional conceptualization of the Social Comparative Orientation proposed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999), the current results suggest that competency-related comparative tendencies appear to be highly sensitive to algorithmically curated visual environment dynamics.

These findings expand on Social Comparative Theory (Festinger, 1954) by showing that the advantages of certain comparative domains can vary across technology-mediated social contexts. In line with research linking upward comparison to psychological stress (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007) and research highlighting system-based engagement dynamics in digital platforms (Qin et al., 2022), competency-based assessment appears to have a stronger psychological impact in visual and performance-oriented environments such as TikTok.

Consistent with prior cross-platform evidence, exposure to performative social norms has been associated with reduced subjective well-being in visually oriented social media environments (Vogel et al., 2014). Based on the literature, this study shows that such evaluative stress is not only associated with general psychological distress but also with specific multidimensional manifestations of social media fatigue.

Evidence from meta-analyses suggests that evaluative social comparison is a consistent predictor of social media burnout, alongside informational and social overload factors (Ou et al., 2023). The proportion of explained variance observed in this study (R^2 = 0.13–0.16) appears consistent with these broader findings, suggesting that the comparative tendency of social disposition is a significant psychological contributor to experiences of fatigue when operating within a multifactorial digital stress framework.

Based on these findings, the broader literature on problematic internet use suggests that repeated and personalized digital exposure can strengthen emotional engagement and activate the reward system, potentially increasing dependence on online interactions (Hall et al., 2022). From a psychological network perspective, subjective well-being and social media fatigue seem to be embedded in the process of interconnected emotional and behavioral adjustments (Kaur et al., 2021). Consistent with developmental research linking social media use to adolescent mental health dynamics (O'Reilly, 2020), further platform-specific analysis suggests that engagement-based

content distribution on TikTok can strengthen the process of evaluative social comparison (Montag et al., 2021).

In the Indonesian context, complementary evidence suggests that intensive TikTok exposure can be associated with changes in cognitive processing patterns and emotional responses, suggesting increased psychological sensitivity to digitally mediated social evaluations (Wicaksono et al., 2024). Complementary neuroimaging findings show reward-related nervous system activation during content consumption, reinforcing the interpretation of TikTok as an algorithmic environment that can reinforce the process of evaluative engagement (Su et al., 2021).

Fear of missing out may represent an additional reinforcement mechanism that intensifies problematic patterns of engagement and psychological tension during social media use (Alutaybi et al., 2020; Elhai et al., 2025; Rozgonjuk et al., 2020, 2021; Syahda & Harahap, 2025). Within this framework, constant exposure to online social evaluation can contribute to ongoing cognitive and emotional distress throughout developmental stages, thereby increasing susceptibility to fatigue-related experiences.

In the Indonesian context, social media use has been linked to the dynamics of psychological well-being and identity formation processes during early adulthood, highlighting the relevance of the development of digital engagement patterns (Kinanti, 2026). Previous research in the Indonesian context has also shown that the dynamics of subjective well-being in early adulthood are influenced by individual psychological resources and life circumstances, highlighting the broader relevance of intrapersonal factors in understanding the adjustment process of the digital age (Wicaksono & Utami, 2025). Evidence from higher education settings further suggests that digital overload contributes to social media fatigue depending on demographic characteristics and intensity of use (Khairati et al., 2025). Additional findings emphasize the role of social media in shaping the outcomes of self-regulation and psychological adjustment (Kinanti, 2026), while studies on the fear of missing out show a link with life satisfaction and psychological stress in the digital age (Syahda & Harahap, 2025). Collectively, these findings reinforce the contextual relevance of examining burnout as a specific psychological consequence among Generation Z TikTok users in Indonesia.

The stronger association between ability-based comparisons and behavioral fatigue suggests that evaluative stress may contribute to a tendency toward inactivity in the context of digital interactions. The conceptualization of social media fatigue suggests that prolonged fatigue can lead to withdrawal or reduced engagement on platforms (Zhang et al., 2021). Supporting this interpretation, network-based analysis indicates that psychological distress associated with social media use is linked to problematic behavioral patterns and adaptive coping processes (Conkey-Morrison et al., 2025). Furthermore, a competence-focused comparison has been shown to act as a mediator in the relationship between subjective well-being and social media addiction, highlighting broader behavioral implications (Steinberger & Kim, 2023).

This study contributes to the literature by integrating the comparative tendency of social dispositions into contemporary social media fatigue research, thus expanding a model that primarily emphasizes structural overload factors. The use of structural equation modeling allows for simultaneous examination of multidimensional latent relationships, offering clearer insights into the dynamics of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral fatigue. Although some constructs show Average Extracted Variance values below 0.50, the adequate reliability of the composite suggests that the measurement model remains internally consistent (Hair et al., 2019). Substantively, these findings highlight the tendency of social comparison as a relevant psychological risk factor, suggesting that prevention efforts can benefit from strengthening self-regulation capacity and adaptive coping strategies in the context of intensive social media (Purwaningtyas, 2025). Nevertheless, correlational design and reliance on self-report measures limit causal interpretation, underscoring the need for future longitudinal or experimental studies that incorporate protective variables such as compassion to advance more integrative digital well-being models (Qin et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that dispositional social comparison orientation particularly ability-based comparison significantly predicts multidimensional social media fatigue among Generation Z TikTok users, highlighting the role of intrapersonal vulnerability alongside structural and technological pressures in shaping digital psychological tensions. By integrating the dispositional comparison process with a multidimensional fatigue framework, this study contributes to expanding contemporary theoretical perspectives on social media fatigue and offers a more comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms of fatigue in visual performative platforms. In practical terms, the results suggest that prevention efforts should prioritize strengthening emotional regulation, self-awareness, and adaptive comparison strategies to mitigate the risk of burnout in the context of intensive social media. However, the correlational design and reliance on self-reported measures limit causal conclusions; therefore, future research is advised to employ longitudinal or experimental approaches and incorporate protective psychological variables to further refine the digital well-being model.

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