

Social Media Fitness Influencers and Youth Identity Formation in Kuwait: The Roles of Source Credibility, FoMO, and Objectified Body Consciousness

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Abstract

Social media fitness influencers have become prominent sources of health and lifestyle cues for young adults; however, the mechanisms linking influencer content to attitudes, behavior, and identity remain insufficiently understood. This study tested a theoretically grounded, cross-sectional model using a Kuwait-based sample of young adults aged 18–29 ($N = 301$). Participants reported their exposure to fitness-influencer content, perceived source credibility, role congruence, fitness attitudes, self-reported adoption, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), objectified body consciousness, and identity clarity. Analyses included descriptive statistics, correlations, multiple regression, and bootstrapped indirect-effects tests using 5,000 resamples, while controlling for age and gender.

Results indicated that self-reported fitness adoption was strongly associated with favorable fitness attitudes and perceived source credibility, whereas role congruence did not show a significant unique association after adjustment. Fitness attitudes were also strongly associated with source credibility. Although role congruence did not independently predict attitudes, it was strongly associated with perceived credibility, highlighting the importance of the communicator in shaping message influence. Regarding identity processes, FoMO was associated with greater objectified body consciousness and lower identity clarity. Objectified body consciousness partially mediated the association between FoMO and identity clarity.

Overall, the findings identify perceived source credibility as a central mechanism linking fitness-influencer content to favorable attitudes and reported behavior. At the same time, social comparison pressures may weaken identity clarity through body-image-related processes. These findings have implications for health communication strategies that rely on credible creators while also considering the potential psychological risks associated with body-focused social media content. Because of the cross-sectional design, all findings should be interpreted as associational rather than causal.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers; Source Credibility; Fomo; Identity Clarity; Objectified Body Consciousness