



**‘FILTERS AND FIGURES’: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON
AN ADOLESCENT BODY IMAGE**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the complex relationship between social media usage and adolescent body image, aiming to shed light on the multifaceted influences and potential consequences associated with online platforms and their role in promoting unrealistic beauty standards, fostering comparison behaviours, and facilitating body-related content consumption. Furthermore, it delves into the impact of social media on self-esteem, body satisfaction, and the development of body dysmorphic tendencies among adolescents. In addition, the study explores potential moderating factors such as gender, age, and individual susceptibility, as well as the implications for mental health and well-being. By elucidating the complex dynamics underlying the relationship between social media and body image, this research aims to inform interventions and strategies for promoting healthier online behaviours and fostering positive body image among adolescents in the digital age.

Keywords: *Adolescent, Social Media, Body image, self esteem*

INTRODUCTION

The widespread integration of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have significantly impacted our daily lives. Young adults and adolescents, especially women, have been the primary target audience due to which a pertinent inquiry into the potential effects of social media on self-perception and body image is crucial. The bulk of research on body dissatisfaction has concentrated on women, revealing a strong connection between female body dissatisfaction and anxiety and depression. Consequently, this issue has garnered significant media attention from a female perspective, with notable actions like fashion houses banning size zero models to combat unrealistic body standards. Conversely, the correlation between body dissatisfaction and anxiety and depression in adult males has received less recognition. However, there's been a surge in media depictions of male models, actors, and action figures with young, tall, and muscular physiques, erroneously portraying these characteristics as the ideal norm. It's suggested that men who rigidly adhere to these portrayed norms are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction, underscoring the seriousness of this issue.

Social Media

Social media provides a platform for people to communicate, share, and connect with each other via online groups and networks. It includes a variety of platforms, such as social networking sites, microblogging platforms, discussion forums etc. Concerns have arisen regarding the excessive use of social media by teenagers and its potential effects on their physical and mental health. The Mayo Clinic identifies various issues associated with this, including distractions, disturbances in sleep patterns, exposure to cyberbullying and rumours, unrealistic depictions of others' lives, and susceptibility to peer influence.

Social media platforms enable teenagers to establish online personas, engage in conversations with peers, and construct social circles. However, the distinction between healthy and unhealthy social media usage is often subtle, with certain types of content on these platforms linked to self-harm and, in extreme cases, fatalities. How adolescents engage with social media is more significant than the amount of time they spend on it.

For example, exposure to material that promotes self-harm, unlawful activity, or eating disorders like purging or restrictive eating might increase the likelihood of mental health concerns, especially for individuals who are currently experiencing them. Furthermore, experiencing cyberbullying, hate speech, or prejudice online can raise the risk of developing anxiety or depression.

Body Image

Body image is the term used to describe how people feel about their own physical appearance. These opinions can change over time and be influenced by both positive and bad experiences. It is influenced by both internal factors like personality and external factors such as social influences and may significantly impact our overall well-being.

Positive body image, also known as body acceptance, refers to a state in which individuals embrace, value, and respect their bodies. It surpasses mere satisfaction and involves recognizing and honouring the body despite perceived flaws. Positive body image plays a crucial role in protecting against the development of eating disorders.

Conversely, persistently having negative thoughts and feelings about one's body is a sign of body dissatisfaction. It results from both internal workings and outside factors like cultural ideals of beauty. People who are unhappy with their bodies may turn to inappropriate weight-control strategies, which raises their risk of eating disorders.

Factors that may contribute to body dissatisfaction include age, gender, mental health, personality traits and personal experiences. Karazsia et al., (2013) stated that Internalization of cultural norms surrounding physical attractiveness—that is, internalizing the mesomorphic ideal for men and the slim ideal for women—is a well-researched and significant risk factor for maladaptive behaviours related to body modification and body dissatisfaction.

Body Dissatisfaction and Health

According to Kelman, it's crucial to understand that when someone expresses feeling "fat," it's not actually a feeling but rather a manifestation of dissatisfaction with one's body. This dissatisfaction can extend to overall dissatisfaction with oneself, affecting mental and emotional well-being. Low self-esteem can result from it, which can encourage unhealthy habits like binge eating, excessive exercise, or social disengagement. In addition to exacerbating problems, low self-esteem can also raise the risk of depression, impair relationships, impair performance at work or school, and induce tension, worry, and loneliness.

Additionally, physical health can also be compromised by an eating disorder that is fuelled by a negative body image. Restrictive eating behaviours may result in malnourishment, cardiac abnormalities, gastrointestinal issues, muscle loss, and osteoporosis, while binge eating behaviours can lead to high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, or high blood pressure.

Media literacy was found to have strong, substantial unfavourable relationships with internalization, appearance comparisons, and body dissatisfaction. There were correlations between media literacy and internalization, body dissatisfaction, and appearance comparisons (McLean, Paxton & Wertheim, 2013)

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are characterized by persistent disruptions in eating patterns, accompanied by distressing thoughts and emotions, which can significantly impact physical, psychological, and social well-being. Behaviours associated with eating disorders include restricting food intake, avoiding certain foods, binge eating, purging through vomiting or laxative misuse, and engaging in compulsive exercise.

Several common eating disorders include Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa and Binge Eating. Anorexia nervosa involves maintaining a significantly low body weight, fearing weight gain intensely, and having a distorted perception of one's weight. Bulimia is defined by periods of uncontrollably excessive eating, or bingeing, that are followed by purging actions like overindulging in laxatives or vomiting while Binge eating involves consuming a large amount of food in a short period, feeling unable to control the behaviour.

Social Media and Eating disorders

Young people have started internalizing the beauty standards portrayed on social media as a result of their increased use of these platforms. The idea of the “perfect” body has changed over the years and has become even less attainable. Today's generation often holds the misconception that everything displayed on social media is authentic.

Yet, beneath the surface of these portrayals lie extensive use of filters, editing, and unspoken truths. It begins with observing actors and models showcasing an idealized and coveted physique, leading to their fame and admiration from viewers. Failure to meet these societal standards set on such platforms can trigger feelings of inadequacy, ugliness, and unworthiness. To emulate the desired physique and attention received by actors and models, both girls and boys often hastily turn to unhealthy methods of weight loss. This involves

altering eating habits, exercise routines, and resorting to substances such as cigarettes and weed. This unhealthy pursuit can lead to the onset of mental health issues, physical ailments, eating disorders, and addiction.

Exposure to idealized photos of women has been shown in experimental research to raise body image disturbance. In a study by Krawczyk and Thompson (2015) 437 men and women were randomized to watch ads connected to appearance or non-appearance that sexually objectify women and depict appearance ideals. The findings showed that, although this effect was greater for women, state body dissatisfaction increased in both men and women exposed to commercials that sexually objectified women.

Another study where 177 male undergraduate students completed self-report questionnaires measuring their level of body dissatisfaction related to muscularity, negative verbal comments about appearance, peer and paternal weightlifting modelling, and body-change behaviors aimed at increasing muscularity found that peer pressure to get up and critical verbal remarks from peers were significant markers of body dissatisfaction (Galioto et al., 2012)

Holmqvist and Frisén (2012) In this qualitative study, the researcher looked at beauty standards from the viewpoint of teenagers (N=29) who were 14 years old and had a favourable body image. According to a thematic analysis, teenagers who had a favourable body image were very sceptical of contemporary values, calling them unreal and unnatural and accusing the media of selectively portraying images that supported the goals and harbouring ulterior motives in the process. Rather, the teenagers propagated the idea that personality outweighs appearance, emphasized the value of seeming like "oneself," and provided a broad and flexible definition of beauty. Another common theme was the idea that beauty is a subjective concept.

RATIONALE OF STUDY

The rationale for conducting this study encompasses several key factors:

- ***Vulnerability of Adolescents:*** Adolescence represents a crucial stage of identity formation and susceptibility to external influences. Adolescents, therefore, are particularly susceptible to the messages conveyed through social media, which can significantly influence their perceptions of beauty and self-worth.
- ***Prevalence of Social Media Use:*** Adolescents are heavy users of social media platforms, dedicating substantial amounts of time to engaging with content related to appearance and body image. Understanding how this exposure affects their body image development is essential for fostering positive self-esteem and mental well-being.
- ***Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disorders:*** Research indicates a strong correlation between exposure to idealized body images on social media and body dissatisfaction among adolescents. Eating disorders including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder can be attributed to this discontent.
- ***Long-Term Psychological Impact:*** Negative body image during adolescence can have enduring psychological ramifications, including diminished self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. Examining the influence of social media on adolescents' body image enables researchers to identify risk factors and potential interventions to alleviate these consequences.
- ***Social Comparison Theory:*** Social media platforms facilitate continuous comparisons with peers and influencers, fostering upward social comparison and feelings of

inadequacy. Understanding how adolescents engage in these comparison processes on social media is vital for addressing negative body image concerns.

- ***Educational and Intervention Strategies:*** Findings from this research can inform the development of educational initiatives and interventions aimed at enhancing media literacy skills and promoting positive body image among adolescents. By equipping adolescents with the ability to critically evaluate media messages and challenge unrealistic beauty standards, interventions can help counteract the adverse effects of social media on body image.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate how social media influences the body image of adolescents.

Research Objectives

To assess the relationship between social media usage and adolescents' body image perceptions, including their attitudes towards their own bodies, perceptions of beauty ideals, and levels of body satisfaction.

Sample

For the purpose of this study, a sample of 100 adults in the age bracket of 18-25 years voluntarily participated in the study. The sample consisted of 53 females and 47 males. Data was collected using google forms in the region of Delhi-NCR.

Hypothesis

- There is a positive correlation between increased social media usage and heightened levels of body dissatisfaction among adolescents.

Measures

Social Media Engagement Scale for Adolescents (SMES-A): The Social Media Engagement Scale for Adolescents (SMES-A) is a research tool created to evaluate various aspects of adolescents' interactions with social media platforms. Developed by researchers, this scale aims to gauge adolescents' behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions concerning their use of social media. Comprising 11 items or questions, the SMES-A encompasses different dimensions of social media engagement, including frequency of use, types of platforms utilized, interactions with content, and emotional responses to social media activity. SMES-A questionnaire demonstrated strong reliability. Specifically, all three factors yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70, meeting the standard criterion for measurement reliability.

Body Shape Questionnaire 34 (BSQ-34): The Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-34) was developed by Cooper in 1987 as a self-report instrument aimed at evaluating concerns regarding body shape and weight. It comprises 34 items, each rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always." Covering various facets related to body image concerns, the

questionnaire addresses issues like preoccupation with weight, fear of weight gain, and dissatisfaction with body shape. Higher scores on the BSQ-34 indicate increased levels of body dissatisfaction and worry regarding weight and shape, rendering it a valuable tool for assessing body image disturbances and monitoring treatment progress among individuals with eating disorders. Typically, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the BSQ-34 have fallen within the range of 0.85 to 0.97, indicating robust reliability.

Procedure

This study adopted a correlation design to explore the impact of social media on an adolescent's body image. Utilizing a quantitative approach, the study involved administering validated scales including Social Media Engagement Scale for Adolescents (SMES-A) and Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-34) to a convenience Sample of 100 students.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 1

Pearson's correlation between study variables

		1	2
1	Social media engagement	-	.333**
2	Body shape	.333**	-

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to study the impact of social media on an adolescent's body image. It was done using the Social Media Engagement Scale for Adolescents which is a research instrument designed to measure various aspects of adolescents' engagement with social media platforms. Developed by researchers, the scale aims to assess adolescents' behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions related to their use of social media. The SMES-A consists of 11 items or questions that cover different dimensions of social media engagement, such as frequency of use, types of platforms used, interactions with content, and emotional responses to social media activity.

The other tool used was *Body Shape Questionnaire* which was developed by Cooper in 1987. It is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess concerns about body shape and weight. It consists of 34 items, each rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always". The questionnaire covers various aspects related to body image concerns, including preoccupation with weight, fear of weight gain, and dissatisfaction with body shape.

The result was deduced using the method of Correlation and was proved to be significant at 0.01 level. Table one represents the coefficient of correlation between Social media engagement and Body shape. There is a strong and favourable correlation between body form and social media use. This suggests that if social media engagement score increases then body shape score also significantly increases.

While a wealth of literature exists regarding the impact of mainstream media on the body image concerns of young adult women in the United States, there is a dearth of theoretically motivated study concerning the mechanisms and outcomes of social media on the self-perceptions and body image of young women. However, considering how frequently young adults—especially women—use social media and how much they rely on it, it's critical

to recognize the ways in which social media might affect how people see their bodies and the disorders associated with them. The current research outlined a number of concepts and a framework to direct future study on how young adult women's body image issues are impacted by social media, drawing on theories of communication and social psychology. Body image concerns can be greatly influenced by social media through negative social comparisons, transportation, and peer normative processes, as suggested by the interactive format and content features of social media, such as the strong peer presence and exchange of a multitude of visual images (Perloff, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The Pearson's correlation analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between social media engagement and body shape perceptions among the study participants.

This finding suggests that there is a modest yet meaningful relationship between the extent of adolescents' engagement with social media platforms and their perceptions of body shape. In other words, as adolescents spend more time on social media, they are more likely to develop specific perceptions or ideals regarding body shape.

The positive correlation indicates that higher levels of social media engagement tend to be associated with a greater emphasis on body shape among adolescents. This aligns with previous research suggesting that exposure to images and messages on social media, which often promote unrealistic beauty standards, can contribute to heightened body consciousness and dissatisfaction among young people.

However, it's important to note that correlation does not imply causation. While this correlation highlights a statistical association between social media engagement and body shape perceptions, it does not establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship. Other factors,

such as peer influences, cultural norms, and personal experiences, may also contribute to adolescents' perceptions of body shape.

Overall, these findings underscore the need for further research to better understand the mechanisms through which social media influences body image perceptions among adolescents. To lessen the possible detrimental effects of social media on body image issues, interventions targeted at fostering good body image and media literacy skills in young people may also be necessary.

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