



IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SELF-ESTEEM AND EATING ATTITUDES IN YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to analyse and understand the relationship in terms of likelihood of social media impacting an individual's self-esteem and eating patterns and behaviour. The study comprises of 200 participants, in which 100 are male and 100 are females. The data was collected with the help of self-report tools, consisting of Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE). According to the findings, there is a significant and positive relationship between social media consumption and Self Esteem Issues, and similarly, there is a significant and positive relationship between social media consumption and eating

attitudes of young adults. The temptation to portray a perfect picture online, along with continual comparison to others, can exacerbate self-esteem issues and bad eating habits. The correlation between these characteristics and emotions of inadequacy, comparison, and low feelings of worth highlights the need of promoting positive self-perception in young adults and supporting appropriate social media practices.

Keywords: *Social Media, Self Esteem, Eating Attitudes, Young Adults*

INTRODUCTION

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle once said, “*Man is by nature a social animal, an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual.*” But in today’s time, unsocial is the natural, as society stops preceding the individual and technology becomes his best friend.

Çınar (2023) discussed that young individuals worldwide devote approximately six hours a day to internet usage. With the prevalent utilization of social media, communication has grown faster and more accessible. The allure of social media lies in its ability to facilitate rapid communication and the sharing of content, particularly appealing to the younger demographic. Adolescents, especially those aged 12 to 22, are immersed in a technological world from an early age, resulting in distinct internet usage patterns compared to adults and the elderly.

For young individuals, social media serves not only as a source of information but also as a platform to “exist” in the digital world. Greenhow (2011) highlights that adolescents prioritize being present on social media over obtaining news or following agendas. The need to establish identity and gain approval inherent in adolescence fuels the significance of likes, comments, views, and follower counts on social media platforms (Boyd, 2008). These metrics

contribute to a sense of confidence and validation, tailoring attractiveness of social media for young users.

Social media's influence on self-esteem and eating behaviours in young adults is a topic of growing concern and research interest. The pervasive nature of social media platforms has transformed how individuals perceive themselves and make food choices, especially among the younger demographic. Research has indicated that excessive or inappropriate usage of social media is linked to risky behaviour, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction (Dhoke et al., 2023; Filippone et al., 2022b; Vincente-Benito & Del Valle Ramírez-Durán, 2023)

Social media platforms serve as a medium through which young adults are exposed to unrealistic beauty standards and idealized body images, leading to feelings of inadequacy and self-judgment. The constant comparison to carefully curated social media content can contribute to a negative impact on self-esteem, as individuals strive towards meeting unattainable beauty ideals portrayed online (Filippone et al., 2022; Vincente-Benito & Del Valle Ramírez-Durán, 2023). This exposure can create a culture of body dissatisfaction and self-criticism, particularly among adolescents who are more susceptible to these influences. Specifically, it might be argued that the idea of the "idealised body image" has been harmful to people's perceptions of themselves, particularly young women's. Unrealistic expectations of what young people should look like and act like are fostered and reinforced by the constant dissemination of widely accessible edited pictures. When these expectations are unavoidably unfulfilled, the negative effects on one's self-esteem can be so severe that, according to a recent study by the Royal Society of Public Health, 90% of young girls report they are dissatisfied with their appearance (Royal Society of Public Health, 2022),

The displacement hypothesis, which is also known as the displaced behaviour theory, postulates that social media use can take the place of or displace time spent on other activities, especially in-person social contacts (Hall & Liu, 2022). This theory posits that the more time individuals devote to social media, the less time they have for real-world social engagement, which may lead to negative consequences for their well-being.

The displacement hypothesis is based on the idea that human time and attention are limited resources. When individuals allocate a significant portion of their time to social media use, they could've less time and energy available for other important activities, such as in-person social interactions, physical exercise, or engaging in hobbies and interests.

It is significant to remember that there are many different facets and a complex relationship between using social media and wellbeing. The quality of social media interactions, an individual's motivations to utilise social networking sites, and their entire social support network may all have an impact on how social media use affects well-being. The displacement hypothesis contends that using social media can have negative effects by taking time away from other important activities (Hall & Liu, 2022).

Additionally, the displaced behaviour theory proposes that excessive social media use can displace time spent on other important activities, particularly face-to-face social interactions, which may lead to negative consequences for well-being. However, the empirical evidence supporting this theory is mixed, and social media use and wellbeing have a complicated relationship that is influenced by several variables.

Moreover, social media plays a significant role in shaping young adults' eating behaviours. Food-related posts on social media, especially those that evoke strong emotional responses, can influence attitudes towards advertised products and trigger higher orthopractic eating tendencies. The portrayal of idealized body images and food choices on social media

can contribute to an increase in food cravings and a desire to eat regardless of satiety cues. (Filippone et al., 2022b; (Rounsefell et al., 2019). This exposure has the potential to cause compulsive exercise, strict food regimens, and restrictive eating habits to meet social norms for beauty.

Research has also highlighted the impact of social media on food choices and cravings among young adults. Peers' posts on social media about food consumption can influence individuals' eating habits, leading to increased food preoccupations and a desire to eat regardless of hunger cues. The comparison culture fostered by social media can heighten feelings of body shame and appearance anxiety, further exacerbating issues related to self-esteem and body image (Filippone et al., 2022b; Rounsefell et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the association between social media, self-esteem, and eating behaviours in young adults is complex and multifaceted. People's perceptions of themselves and the foods they eat can be greatly influenced by the continual exposure to social media platforms that feature idealised body images, food-related information, and peer comparisons. To address the negative effects and encourage young adults to adopt healthy attitudes towards their bodies and eating habits, it is imperative to comprehend these dynamics.

Further research and awareness are essential to mitigate the detrimental effects of social media on self-esteem and eating behaviours in this vulnerable population. It's also critical to keep in mind the variety of ways that teenagers use social media. Being able to raise awareness, interact with people worldwide, and share special memories can be encouraging and motivating for some. Teens are also less likely to allow those messages to damage their self-esteem because many of them are aware that the images they see are edited extracts rather than true depictions of reality.

METHOD

Research Design

The study used a correlational analysis method to look at how social media affects both Self-Esteem and Eating Behaviours in Young Adults (18-25 years old). This correlational design made it possible to look how usage of social media affects the young adults.

Sample

The sample for this study was collected through a method called “snowball sampling”, via an online form, where in people ranging from the ages of 18-25 were eligible to fill the form. The total number of people who filled the form were 200, in this 100 were male and 100 were females.

Tests and Tools

To determine the effects of social media on self-esteem and eating attitudes among the participants, following self-report measures were used to collect the data:

- ***Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)***

One well-known instrument for gauging self-esteem is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), which was created in 1965 by sociologist Morris Rosenberg. The self-worth and self-acceptance of an individual are assessed using this 10-item measure. The RSE was first created to evaluate high school students' self-esteem. Since then, it has been modified for use with a variety of populations, including adults, and its adaptability has been increased by the establishment of norms specific to these groups (Rosenberg, 2006). Respondents use a four-

point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, to indicate how much they agree with each of the ten statements. The statements cover several aspects of self-esteem, including overall positive self-regard, self-worth, and self-confidence.

- ***Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26)***

A popular self-report tool for determining the likelihood of eating disorders is the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26), which evaluates attitudes, feelings, and eating-related behaviours (Garner & Garfinkel, 1982). The EAT-26 was created in 1979 by David M. Garner and Paul E. Garfinkel as a screening instrument to assess eating attitudes. The 26 items on the questionnaire are divided into three main categories: oral control, bulimia and food obsession, and dieting. The frequency with which respondents have engaged eating behaviours or had eating-related thoughts, such as food restriction, binge eating, and body image worries, is indicated by the responses.

Procedure

After creating the google form, it was distributed and the subject's permission was taken before filling the form, and the data for the study was collected. The subjects were told about their roles and responsibilities as they part in the study. people who took part in the study their personal information as also collected and they were assured that the answers will remain confidential. And if they are comfortable with the same then they would proceed to fill the form.

Statistical Analysis

To obtain valuable insights, the gathered data was subjected to a thorough analysis procedure using the proper statistical methodologies. To compile and display the demographic and research variable characteristics, descriptive statistics were computed. To compare the impact of social media on self-esteem and eating behaviours a correlational analysis was conducted. All the statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS.23.

RESULT

Demographic Details

The participants comprised of a total of 200 participants out of which 100 were male and 100 were female, the population sample belonged to urban locality and the sample belonged upper middle class in terms of socio-economic status. The sample belonged to 18- 25 years of age. No participants with any existing known disability were a part of the study.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variables	Items	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Self-Esteem	10	10-40	29.047	8.229
Eating Attitudes	26	0-78	16.094	15.831
Social Media	3	1-13	8.66	2.392

Table 2*Correlational Analysis*

Variables	Self Esteem	Eating Attitudes	Social media
Self-Esteem	-		
Eating Attitudes	.109	-	
Social media	.256**	.123*	-

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics of the study variables, which comprise of Self-Esteem, Eating Attitudes and social media for young adults. Through this we can comprehend that Self-Esteem had a mean of 29.047 (SD= 8.229), Eating Attitudes for 16.094 (SD=15.831) and social media for 8.66 (SD=2.392).

Table 2 represents the correlational analysis for the study between social media and, Self-Esteem and Eating Attitudes. According to this social media and self-esteem is significant and positive with .259**. A coefficient of 0.256 indicates a strong and positive correlation. The p value is significant ($p < 0.01^{**}$). In social media and eating attitudes it is .123, which is also positive and significant ($p < 0.05^{*}$). A coefficient of 0.05 shows a positive correlation.

DISCUSSION***Social Media and Self Esteem***

Social media, while a powerful tool for connectivity and self-expression, has increasingly become a double-edged sword, with its pervasive influence often leading to

detrimental effects on the self-esteem of young adults, particularly in the realm of body image perception and validation-seeking behaviours.

The study focuses on how social media affects young individuals' self-esteem and eating attitudes. Social media is increasingly considered a vital aspect of the life of young adults, with all information accessible at the tip of a finger. Given that studies often reveal a diverse pattern of associations and meta-analyses typically find small but substantial statistical effects, the relationship between social media and self-esteem is complex. This suggests that the relationship between social media use and self-esteem is person-specific, depending upon individual susceptibilities and uses (Cingel et al., 2022).

Increased social media consumption can lead to self-esteem issues among young adults in a variety of ways, according to study. Social networking platforms typically encourage social comparison, validation through likes and comments, and cyberbullying, all of which can have a significant impact on self-esteem and confidence (Irmer & Schmiedek, 2023).

Constant exposure to idealized and often inflated standards of beauty on social media may result in feelings of inadequacy, comparison, and low self-esteem, especially among women and men who read beauty-related information (The Learning Network; The New York Times, 2022).

Social media has self-strengthening characteristics. It operates by releasing dopamine, a "feel-good chemical" involved in enjoyable activities such as sexual intercourse, exercise, music listening, meditation, sun exposure, and social interactions, from the brain's reward center. The platform intends to be addictive, and it has been associated with health concerns such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and sleep disturbances. The self-reinforcing effect serves as a recurring mechanism for achieving intended outcomes when using social media.

Furthermore, the pressure that comes from posting a perfect picture online, being preoccupied with likes and comments, and dread of missing out on events reported on social media can all lead to tension, anxiety, and an adverse self-image.

Furthermore, retaining an idealized online persona can be more difficult when social acceptance and approval are assessed by likes, comments, and followers on social media. This can result in unhealthy behaviors and unfavorable comparisons to others (Smith, 2023).

The statistic that 60% of social media users stated that social media produced a negative impact on their self-esteem indicates that a sizable majority of people link social media use to adverse effects on their self-image (Naslund et al., 2020).

For 87% of women and 65% of men who monitor beauty-related information on social media, the propagation of unattainable beauty standards can have a detrimental effect on one's sense of self-worth (Laughter et al., 2023).

Research shows that teens' usage of social media can lead to a decline in self-esteem, with girls between the ages of 10 and 14 being the most affected (How social media Can Affect Teenage Self-Esteem, Lesson Bee, 2022).

In conclusion, there are a variety of factors that contribute to the negative effects of increased social media usage on young people's self-esteem, including social comparison, exposure to inflated expectations, cyberbullying, and the need for validation and approval. These elements work together to cause low self-worth, comparison anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy, which accentuates the importance of encouraging young adults to develop healthier social media habits as well as positive perceptions of oneself.

Social Media and Eating Attitudes

A major public health concern is the impact of social media on eating attitudes and behaviors, particularly among young women. Young adults' daily lives now revolve around social media practice, especially for young women. However, there is growing worry about the impact of social media on eating attitudes and habits related to public health. Increasing social media use has been linked to higher rates of disordered eating attitudes, maladaptive eating practices, and body dissatisfaction, according to a number of research.

Young women's drive for thinness, disordered eating habits, and higher body dissatisfaction have been attributed to exposure to social media's idealized body images and fitness contents. Unfavorable social comparisons might result from seeing unattainable body standards advocated by peers and influencers (Marrero & Bradford, 2021).

Young women with higher levels of eating pathology may be more likely to model unhealthy eating behaviors on social media and seek negative feedback that maintains their disorder³. Individuals with eating concerns found fictional social media profiles depicting disordered eating behaviors as less concerning and more acceptable (Smith, 2017)

In vulnerable young adults, particularly young women, appearance-focused material, social comparison, and representations of disordered eating on social media all play a role in developing and maintaining of poor eating attitudes and practices. Young women who are exposed to social media fitness information and idealized body ideals are more likely to have disordered eating habits, a drive for thinness, and greater dissatisfaction with their bodies. Friends and influencers who promote unrealistic physical standards may trigger unfavorable social comparisons (Sawant et al., 2024).

Frequent viewing of food-related content on social media may heighten feelings of self-judgment about one's own body and food choices². Seeing peers' posts about weight loss can

be motivating but also induce shame about one's own body. Social media use can distract from mindful eating and lead to poorer food choices, as viewing frequent food posts can trigger hunger or eating restraint². Participants felt social media increased their food choices (Rounsefell et al., 2020).

Research indicates a robust and persistent correlation between the usage of social media and eating disorders, disordered eating ideas, and behaviors in kids as young as 11–13 years old. Disordered eating can be worsened by social media-fueled problems such as idealizing unachievable standards, comparing oneself to peers, and being met with cruel remarks about one's weight (Sarah Garone, How Does Social Media Affect Eating Habits, 2021)

In conclusion, social comparison, appearance-focused subject matter, and social media advertising of disordered eating all play a role in the development and persistence of unfavorable eating attitudes and behaviors among young adults who are vulnerable, particularly women. Health practitioners ought to be informed about these dangers and provide recommendations on how to use social media in a safe manner.

In the end, and to sum up both (Eating Attitudes and Self Esteem), greater use of social media can significantly affect young adults' eating attitudes and self-esteem. Feelings of inadequacy, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating behaviors can result from exposure to idealized body images and food-related content on social media. Social media use can also distract from mindful eating and lead to poorer food choices.

Additionally, pursuing approval from likes and comments on social media can exacerbate emotions of loneliness, melancholy, anxiety, and inadequacy, many of which can have a detrimental impact on one's self-esteem. Constant continual comparison to others and the pressure to project a flawless online persona can worsen eating disorders and low self-

esteem. Individuals, particularly young adults, need to be mindful of these possible drawbacks and adopt positive social media practices to minimize them.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, young adults' eating habits and self-esteem are greatly impacted by social media use, particularly by young women. Higher levels of social media use have been linked to unhealthy eating habits, disordered eating attitudes, and body dissatisfaction, according to research. Maladaptive eating behaviours are encouraged by exposure to idealised body images, involvement in social comparisons, and the search for approval through likes and comments. These factors all contribute to feelings of inadequacy. Research indicates a connection between increased social media use and the emergence of disordered eating patterns, highlighting the necessity of policies that take social media's influence on eating habits into account (Smith, 2017).

Additionally, the impact of social media on self-esteem is profound, with excessive use leading to negative self-perception, emotional issues, and body image concerns. The pressure to present a perfect image online and seek external validation through likes and comments can further exacerbate self-esteem issues. Overall, the effects of social media on eating attitudes and self-esteem highlight how crucial it is to encourage positive social media behaviours and cultivate intrinsic self-worth to counteract these detrimental consequences (Sawant et al., 2024).

Limitations

It is important to consider the following limitations when interpreting the study's results. The tiny sample size of this study may make it difficult to apply and generalise the findings to other contexts. Additionally, self-report measures were used, which are susceptible to reaction bias and the social need to appear well in public.

Implications

This study has important implications for both professional practice and further research. From a clinical perspective it shows how important it is to understand the effects that usage of social media has on an individual's self-esteem and eating attitudes. This helps in becoming aware for the different screening and intervention techniques and becoming aware the individual's needs, this will help in improvement of self-esteem and eating attitudes. Additionally, it can also help in building programs and groups with similar issues.

Future Recommendations

Large-scale investigations using a variety of sample sizes ought to be explored in future research in order to improve the results' generalizability and reinforce statistical validity. Furthermore, combining objective measurements with self-reporting ones would provide a deeper understanding of social media's consequences on eating attitudes and self-esteem. This would ensure that future research and data collection more accessible and inclusive in the society. Finally, research on psychological interventions for abnormalities of the eating process, eating attitudes, body image, and self-esteem is crucial to the creation of more inclusive effective treatment plans.

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