



Social Media Usage and Body Image Perception in Young Adults:

A Correlational Study

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Abstract

This study explores the correlation between social media usage and body image satisfaction among young adults, focusing on mediating factors such as self-esteem and perceived social support. A sample of 200 participants aged 18-30 years was analyzed using Pearson correlation to assess relationships between variables. Results revealed a weak negative correlation between social media use and body image satisfaction (-0.12), suggesting that increased social media use is associated with a slight decline in body image satisfaction. Self-esteem (-0.24) and perceived social support (-0.21) also demonstrated weak negative correlations with body image satisfaction. The findings are contextualized using Social Comparison Theory and Cultivation Theory, highlighting that social media fosters unrealistic

comparisons, leading to dissatisfaction. However, individual responses vary, indicating the need for mental health interventions promoting critical thinking about social media content. Future research should explore longitudinal studies and experimental designs to further investigate these relationships and the role of emotional regulation and social support types in mitigating negative effects on body image.

Keywords: *Social Media Usage, Body image perception, young adults*

Introduction

The Impact of Social Media on Body Image

Social media has fundamentally altered how young adults perceive their bodies. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok promote idealized versions of beauty, impacting users' self-perception. According to Cash and Pruzinsky (2002), body image is an individual's thoughts and feelings about their appearance, which becomes influenced by comparisons with curated online images. Tiggemann and Slater (2013) argue that constant exposure to idealized bodies can lead to body dissatisfaction among young adults, requiring theories to explain these effects.

Social Comparison Theory, developed by Festinger (1954), states that people tend to evaluate themselves by comparing to others. On social media, users often make upward comparisons against idealized images, leading to feelings of inadequacy (Fardouly et al., 2015). The interactive nature of these platforms, as noted by Brown and Tiggemann (2016), intensifies this impact, as users actively participate in reinforcing these ideals.

Self-Discrepancy Theory by Higgins (1987) adds that social media widens the gap between individuals' real and ideal selves, resulting in body dissatisfaction (Perloff, 2014). For young adults still developing their self-concept, this discrepancy can be particularly harmful, often increasing feelings of shame.

Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) explains how women especially view themselves through an external perspective, leading to self-objectification and body shame, especially under social media's visual pressures. This can result in negative outcomes such as anxiety and eating disorders, as women internalize appearance-based evaluations (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012).

Cultivation Theory by Gerbner and Gross (1976) also applies, suggesting that social media constantly reinforces narrow beauty ideals. Through repeated exposure, young adults start perceiving these unrealistic body types as normal (Aubrey, 2006). Similarly, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains that young adults may seek social validation on social media, tying their self-worth to appearance (Valkenburg et al., 2006).

Theories like Sociocultural, Cognitive Dissonance, and Tripartite Influence further underscore how social media shapes body image, creating a complex web of external pressures. These frameworks reveal the powerful, often negative role of social media in body image issues, highlighting a need for interventions that promote self-acceptance and resilience.

The Future of Body Image in the Digital Age

With advancements in social media, the influence on body image continues to grow, introducing new challenges via virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). These technologies blur reality and fantasy, potentially increasing pressures to adhere to unrealistic

beauty ideals. Although some social platforms are experimenting with measures like hiding "likes" to reduce appearance-based validation (Cohen et al., 2019), more efforts are needed to lessen social media's negative body image impact.

Media Literacy as a Key Tool

In a world dominated by social media, media literacy has become essential. This skill enables individuals to critically assess media content, understand its construction, and resist the often-deceptive portrayals of beauty online. By fostering media literacy, people can identify manipulated images and develop a healthier view of beauty (Levy, 2019). Educational initiatives in schools and communities are critical to teaching young adults about the realities of social media content, promoting resilience against body dissatisfaction.

Parental Guidance's Role in Body Image

Parental support is crucial in combating social media's effects on body image. Open communication about self-acceptance and the unrealistic nature of online images helps children maintain a positive body image. Modeling healthy behaviors and promoting body-positive content also reinforce positive self-views (Miller & Pruitt, 2020).

Impact of Peer Relationships

Peer relationships can deeply influence body image, particularly during adolescence. Supportive friendships act as a buffer against social media's pressures, while negative peer interactions, like appearance-related teasing, exacerbate body dissatisfaction. Encouraging body-positive peer groups can foster healthier self-images and help young adults resist harmful social comparisons (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

Intersectionality and Body Image Perception

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), is key to understanding body image perceptions. Social identities—such as race and gender—shape individual experiences of body image. Marginalized groups, especially women of color, often feel pressured by dominant beauty standards that don't reflect their cultural heritage (Lewis et al., 2021).

Policy and Regulation's Role

Combating social media's body image impact also requires regulatory efforts. Platforms bear responsibility for user well-being and should promote positive environments. Policies like the UK's Online Safety Bill represent steps toward mitigating social media's mental health impact. However, regulations must balance safety with freedom of expression, requiring collaboration among mental health experts, educators, and policymakers (Cohen et al., 2019).

In conclusion, addressing body image concerns involves fostering critical awareness, body positivity, and supportive communities. Empowering individuals to embrace diversity and self-acceptance is vital in minimizing social media's negative effects on body image perceptions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tiggemann and Slater (2014) examined the relationship between Facebook use and body image concerns in 1,087 adolescent girls (ages 13-15). They found that Facebook users, comprising 75% of the sample, had significantly higher body image concerns, indicating that Internet exposure contributes to internalizing the thin ideal and body dissatisfaction.

Perloff (2014) explored how social media affects body image among young adult women in the U.S., highlighting the role of peer interactions and visual content in fostering negative social comparisons. The study proposed a model emphasizing individual vulnerability, social media usage, and psychological mediators that influence body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, while also addressing male body image and the intersectionality of ethnicity.

Fardouly et al. (2015) investigated the impact of Facebook usage on women's mood and body image, comparing it to browsing an online fashion magazine and a neutral website. Results showed that women who used Facebook experienced a more negative mood and increased dissatisfaction with appearance, particularly among those prone to appearance comparisons. This underscores the need for more research on Facebook's influence on body image.

De Vries and Kühne (2015) focused on the indirect relationship between Facebook use and self-perceptions through negative social comparison, revealing that Facebook usage correlates with higher levels of negative comparisons, which adversely affect self-perceived social competence and physical attractiveness, especially among less happy individuals.

Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) reviewed research linking social media use, particularly Facebook, with body image concerns. They noted that appearance comparisons significantly mediate this relationship, and while experimental studies found limited effects of brief Facebook exposure on body image, longitudinal studies suggest the association may strengthen over time.

Brown and Tiggemann (2016) examined how maternal attachment anxiety and peer relationships influenced self-compassion and body appreciation among 1,306 first-year college women. Their model explained 40% of the variance in body appreciation,

demonstrating the importance of self-compassion in mediating relationships between attachment anxiety and body image.

Holland and Tiggemann (2016) studied the effects of posting fitspiration images on Instagram, finding that participants who posted such content exhibited higher rates of disordered eating behaviors and exercise compulsions compared to those posting travel images, indicating potential risks for clinical eating disorders.

Frison and Eggermont (2016) investigated how different types of Facebook use affect perceived online social support and depressed mood in 910 adolescents. The study found that passive Facebook use was linked to negative effects primarily in girls, while active use correlated with perceived support and reduced depression.

Cohen et al. (2017) explored the relationship between selfie-related activities and body concerns among 259 young women (ages 18-29). They found that engagement in selfies, rather than general social networking, was associated with increased body dissatisfaction and bulimia symptoms, suggesting targeted interventions could help address these issues.

Hendrickse et al. (2017) examined the relationship between Instagram photo activities, appearance-related comparisons, and outcomes like drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction among female university students. Their findings indicated that Instagram engagement positively predicted body dissatisfaction, emphasizing the harmful effects of social comparison on this platform.

METHODOLOGY

AIM

To study the relationship Social Media Usage and Body Image Perception in Young Adults - A Correlational Study

OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the relationship between the amount of time spent on social media and body image perception among young adults.
2. To investigate the impact of different types of social media content (e.g., fitness, fashion, lifestyle) on body image satisfaction.
3. To explore the role of social comparison on social media in shaping body image perception.
4. To identify potential moderating factors such as gender, self-esteem, and social support.

HYPOTHESES

1. **H1:** There is a negative correlation between the amount of time spent on social media and body image satisfaction among young adults.
2. **H2:** Social comparison on social media mediates the relationship between social media usage and body image satisfaction.
3. **H3:** Higher levels of self-esteem buffer the negative impact of social media usage on body image satisfaction.
4. **H4:** Higher perceived social support buffers the negative impact of social media usage on body image satisfaction.

SAMPLE AND ITS SELECTION

The current study included a group of 200 participants. From the data of 200 participants 200 participants were included. The following questionnaires were used in the current study, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, Social Media Use Scale, Multidimensional

Scale of Perceived Social Support. Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale. The questionnaires were kept confidential.

LOCALE OF THE STUDY

The sample was collected from the people of Delhi (NCR) region.

VARIABLES

Dependent variable: Body Image Perception

Independent variable: Social Media

TOOL DESCRIPTION

The study utilized several tools to measure various constructs: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (10 items) showed internal consistency (0.77-0.88) and test-retest reliability (0.82-0.85), indicating strong validity; the Social Media Use Scale (20 items) had internal consistency (0.70-0.90) and test-retest reliability (0.75-0.85); the Multidimensional Social Support Scale demonstrated high internal consistency (0.85-0.95) and test-retest reliability (0.72-0.85); and the Body Image Satisfaction Scale displayed internal consistency (0.80-0.95) and test-retest reliability (0.70-0.90).

Description of Tools Employed:

- 1. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** A widely used 10-item scale assessing global self-worth on a 4-point Likert scale, capturing both positive and negative self-perceptions.
- 2. Social Media Use Scale (SMUS):** Measures social media frequency, intensity, and impact, assessing time spent, emotional connection, and behavioral dependency.
- 3. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** Evaluates perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others.

4. Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS): Assesses individuals' satisfaction with their body image.

Procedure

Participants were given a structured questionnaire and time to thoughtfully respond in a one-on-one setting. Responses were tabulated, with each statement recorded. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for all participants, and individual scoring was performed to identify significant variations across responses.

ANALYSIS OF RESULT

The present study was conducted to assess the The Impact of Gaming Behaviour on Social Cognition and Emotional Intelligence in Youth.

The age group of the undergraduate students ranges from 18-30 years. For this purpose, a group of 200 were asked to participate out of which 200 were screened.

4.1 CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES

TABLE 1: *Correlation for Self-Esteem, Social Media Use, Perceived Social Support and Body Image Satisfaction in Youth*

Pearson Correlation	Self-Esteem	Social Media Use	Perceived Social Support	Body Image Satisfaction
Self-Esteem	1	-0.03	0.20	-0.24
Social Media Use	-0.03	1	0.14	-0.12
Perceived Social Support	0.20	0.14	1	-0.21

Body Image Satisfaction	-0.24	-0.12	-0.21	1
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Table 1 presents key correlations among self-esteem, social media use, perceived social support, and body image satisfaction. Self-esteem shows a very weak negative correlation with social media use (-0.03), indicating no significant relationship, while it has a weak positive correlation with perceived social support (0.20) and a weak negative correlation with body image satisfaction (-0.24). Social media use has a weak positive correlation with perceived social support (0.14) and a weak negative correlation with body image satisfaction (-0.12). Perceived social support also shows a weak negative correlation with body image satisfaction (-0.21). Overall, higher self-esteem is linked to better body image satisfaction, and greater perceived social support may improve body image satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The study supports the hypothesis of a negative correlation between time spent on social media and body image satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of -0.12 suggesting that increased social media usage is associated with a slight decline in body image satisfaction. This relationship aligns with Social Comparison Theory, which posits that individuals evaluate their self-worth through comparisons with others. The curated images on social media often lead to feelings of inadequacy, supported by research indicating that such comparisons negatively affect self-esteem and body satisfaction (Vogel et al., 2014). Additionally, Cultivation Theory suggests that repeated exposure to idealized body images distorts perceptions of normality, contributing to body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). While the weak correlation indicates variability in individual responses to social media, it underscores the importance of raising awareness about its potential negative impacts. Mental health professionals and educators could implement

workshops that promote critical thinking regarding social media's influence on self-image. Future research should include longitudinal studies to observe changes in body image satisfaction over time concerning social media use, focusing on different engagement types, such as passive versus active use.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The weak correlation between social media use and body image satisfaction could be understood through social comparison as a mediating factor. Individuals engaging in unfavorable comparisons on social media may experience dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Simple correlations may not fully capture this indirect relationship; thus, mediation analyses would be beneficial. Theoretical frameworks supporting this mediation hypothesis include Cultivation Theory, which highlights how constant exposure to idealized media shapes perceptions of normality, and Self-Discrepancy Theory, which suggests that comparing one's actual self to idealized images creates dissatisfaction. Limitations include variability in individual responses to social comparison, influenced by personality traits. Future research should manipulate exposure to social media content to assess its effects on social comparison and body image satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Analysis of the correlation of -0.24 between self-esteem and body image satisfaction indicates that higher self-esteem is linked to better body image. However, the -0.03 correlation with social media use suggests self-esteem does not significantly correlate with social media usage. Self-Discrepancy Theory posits that individuals with higher self-esteem have smaller discrepancies between their actual and ideal selves, leading to better body image evaluations. The data indicate that self-esteem is crucial for a positive body image but may not fully buffer against social media's negative effects, highlighting the need for interventions that foster self-acceptance.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Analysis reveals a -0.21 correlation between perceived social support and body image satisfaction, indicating that greater perceived social support is associated with better body image satisfaction. However, the positive correlation with social media usage (0.14) suggests a complex relationship that requires further investigation. The Buffering Hypothesis posits that social support can protect against stressors, while Attachment Theory highlights the role of secure relationships in enhancing self-esteem and body image satisfaction.

The data suggest that perceived social support contributes to body image satisfaction but may not significantly buffer against social media's negative impacts, indicating a need to focus on the quality of social interactions in online environments. Future research should examine different types of social support and their varying impacts on body image in the context of social media use.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings from the current study highlight the intricate relationship between social media usage and body image satisfaction in young adults, providing mixed support for the hypotheses posed. While some hypotheses were fully or partially supported, others suggested complex dynamics that merit deeper exploration. The study supports the hypothesis that social media usage is negatively correlated with body image satisfaction, with a weak correlation of -0.12. This implies that higher social media use slightly decreases body image satisfaction, aligning with Social Comparison Theory, which suggests that individuals often compare themselves to idealized portrayals online, leading to feelings of inadequacy. Cultivation Theory also suggests that prolonged media exposure can foster unrealistic body ideals. However, the weak correlation indicates that not everyone experiences body

dissatisfaction due to social media, suggesting moderating factors like resilience or media literacy.

The study's second hypothesis proposed that social comparison mediates the relationship between social media usage and body image satisfaction. Although direct evidence of mediation is lacking, theories like Self-Discrepancy emphasize that social comparisons can amplify gaps between actual and ideal self, leading to dissatisfaction. This suggests that interventions should focus on reducing negative social comparisons, rather than merely limiting social media usage. Programs promoting media literacy can help individuals better understand and resist the constructed nature of social media content.

The third hypothesis, which suggested self-esteem could buffer the negative impact of social media on body image, was not fully supported. While self-esteem positively correlated with body image satisfaction (-0.24), it had little impact on the relationship between social media use and body image. This challenges the view that self-esteem alone can mitigate social media's influence. The data imply that self-esteem needs reinforcement from resilience, coping mechanisms, and media literacy to better counteract social media's effects.

The fourth hypothesis, which posited that perceived social support would buffer against social media's impact, received partial support. While social support correlated positively with body image satisfaction (-0.21), it did not significantly buffer against social media's negative effects. The positive correlation between social support and social media use (0.14) suggests a complex relationship—social support may enhance body image satisfaction but could also lead to increased social media engagement, exposing individuals to harmful comparisons. The study highlights social comparison as a key mediator in the relationship between social media and body image satisfaction. Individuals prone to comparing themselves to idealized images online may experience greater dissatisfaction,

suggesting that interventions should focus on reducing social comparisons rather than just social media use. While self-esteem and social support contribute to body image satisfaction, they do not fully buffer against social media's effects. This study underscores the need for targeted interventions, including media literacy programs, to promote body positivity and healthy social media habits.

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