



The Impact of Social Media Addiction on Body Image and Relationship Satisfaction in Young Adults

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Abstract

In today's digital world, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook expose us to an endless stream of content through reels, posts, and stories, shaping how we perceive ourselves and our relationships. This study investigates the impact of social media addiction on body self-image and relationship satisfaction among 152 young adults (18 to 25 years) from diverse states in India. The sample comprised 102 females, 49 males, and 1 non-binary participant, with 98 currently in romantic relationships and 54 with past romantic experiences. Using standardized tools, the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) assessed addictive behaviours related to social media, while the Body Self-Image Questionnaire - Short Form (BSIQ-SF) evaluated participants' perceptions of their body image, and the Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSAT) measured their satisfaction in romantic relationships. The results revealed no significant correlation between relationship satisfaction and body self-image ($r = -0.029$), or between relationship satisfaction and social media addiction ($r = -0.011$). However, a significant positive correlation was observed between social media addiction and body self-image ($r = 0.267$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of social media usage are linked to improved perceptions of one's body image. These findings

challenge conventional assumptions about the negative effects of social media on self-perception and highlight the complex dynamics at play. Future research should explore mediating factors such as self-esteem and cultural influences to deepen understanding of these relationships.

Key Words: *Social Media Addiction, Relationship Satisfaction, Body Image*

Introduction

Social media has become an inseparable part of modern life, deeply influencing how individuals perceive and present themselves. As Jason, a junior from a public university, insightfully put it, "I think social media is kind of like a book cover: it can show what you are, but then also people can cover up themselves of what they are. Make themselves look better." This quote perfectly captures the dual nature of social media. It provides a space for self-expression but also creates an environment where people feel pressured to present curated and often exaggerated versions of their lives. Over the years, researchers have raised concerns about whether social media promotes self-expression and connection or contributes to negative outcomes, such as dissatisfaction with body image and romantic relationships. These concerns have spurred significant interest in understanding the nuanced ways social media impacts individuals.

Existing research highlights both the benefits and challenges of social media use. For instance, Xiong (2023) points to the role of social media in promoting unrealistic beauty standards through filtered content and curated realities, which often lead to social comparisons and dissatisfaction with body image. Similarly, Trajković (2022) found that engaging with appearance-focused accounts on platforms like Instagram and Facebook exposes users to idealized representations of the human body, heightening comparison and negatively influencing self-perception. These findings suggest that media literacy, which fosters critical

engagement with social media content, may be key to mitigating these effects. The influence of social media on relationships is equally complex. Rainey and Arney (2022) describes how social media behaviours can produce both positive and negative outcomes for romantic relationships. While it can strengthen connections through improved communication and shared interests, it also fosters challenges such as conflict, mistrust, and unrealistic expectations, which lower satisfaction. Moreover, intentional misuse, such as addiction or unfaithfulness, further complicates how social media affects romantic relationships, underscoring the need for deeper investigation. This study seeks to explore the relationship between social media addiction, body image, and romantic satisfaction among young adults. By reviewing the literature and conducting empirical research, we aim to uncover how social media use shapes self-perception and interpersonal relationships. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of these dynamics and provide insights into how individuals can engage with social media more constructively.

Relationship Satisfaction

Fallis et al. (2016) defined relationship satisfaction as, “a subjective sense of relational quality that arises from evaluations of the positive and negative dimensions of one’s romantic relationship (adapted from Lawrence & Byers, 1995).” According to Rusbult (1983), “romantic relationship satisfaction can be defined as a person’s internal evaluation of their partner’s positive feelings and the attractiveness of their relationship.”

Legkauskas and Ališkauskaitė (2023) studied the links between body satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction among young adult women in Lithuania. The study involved 162 women aged 20–35 of whom 119 were in romantic relationships, while 43 were single. Body satisfaction was assessed using the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire, and relationship satisfaction was measured through the Couple’s Satisfaction Scale. The

findings indicated that women with romantic partners perceived themselves as more physically attractive and were more satisfied with their individual body parts compared to single women. However, women in relationships also reported greater concerns about their body weight suggesting that being in a relationship may intensify weight-related self-consciousness. Furthermore, the study found a partial connection between body satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Women who evaluated their physical appearance more positively and were content with their specific body parts reported greater emotional and behavioural satisfaction in their romantic interactions, additionally, indicated higher overall relationship satisfaction.

Satici et al. (2021) investigated the association between social media addiction and romantic relationship satisfaction, focusing on the mediating role of psychological distress. The study involved 334 undergraduate participants from four mid-sized universities in Turkey. The researchers employed the Relationship Assessment Scale, the Social Media Disorder Scale, and the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale to measure the variables. The findings revealed significant correlations among social media addiction, psychological distress, and relationship satisfaction. Depression, anxiety, and stress were found to partially mediate the negative impact of social media addiction on relationship satisfaction. The study utilized a bootstrapping procedure and confirmed that social media addiction indirectly influenced relationship satisfaction through heightened levels of psychological distress. Participants with higher social media addiction levels reported lower relationship satisfaction, primarily due to increased psychological challenges.

Body Image

Mason et al. (2020), defined body image as, “a multidimensional construct that refers to a person's subjective appraisal of his or her own physical characteristics and qualities.” According to Slade (1988), the term ‘body image’ is used to refer to the picture we have in our

minds of the size, shape and form of our bodies; and to our feelings concerning the size, shape and form of our bodies, and its constituent parts.”

Lee (2016) conducted a study to explore the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction, particularly investigating the mediating role of sexual satisfaction and perceived partner evaluations. The study involved 251 heterosexual couples, with each partner completing an online self-report questionnaire independently. The findings showed that individuals with body dissatisfaction often perceived that their partner shared these negative views about their body, regardless of the partner's actual feelings. Moreover, perceived partner dissatisfaction with the respondent's body led to lower sexual satisfaction, which in turn, contributed to decreased relationship satisfaction.

Al Saud et al. (2023) conducted a cross-sectional study to examine the association between body image, body mass index (BMI), and social media addiction among female students at Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University in Saudi Arabia. The study explored the impact of social media advertisements which often target women on their body image perceptions. The research also investigated the role of obesity as either a risk factor or a cause of negative body image. The study included 307 female students selected through a multistage systematic random sampling technique with every ninth eligible student participating. Data were collected using a comprehensive survey which included socio-demographic characteristics, the Social Media Addiction Scale adapted from Young's Internet Addiction Test, a body image questionnaire, and direct measurement of participants' weight and height. The findings revealed that 73% of the participants perceived a negative body image, while 50.1% were moderately addicted to social media.

A statistically significant association was observed between social media addiction and BMI, suggesting that higher BMI levels may be linked to greater social media addiction.

However, no significant association was found between body image and social media addiction. The authors concluded that while BMI and social media addiction are significantly related, body image and social media addiction do not appear to be directly linked in this sample. They emphasized the importance of further research to identify the causes of social media addiction and its potential negative consequences.

Social Media Addiction

Griffiths (2000) and Starcevic (2013) defined social media addiction as, “a form of internet addiction characterized by excessive compulsion to use social media.” According to Zivnуска et al. (2019), Social media addiction can be defined “as the overuse of social media platforms and forming habitual behavior.”

Arshad and Akhtar (2024) conducted a study to explore the relationships between social media addiction, body satisfaction, and subjective well-being among adolescents. The research was conducted on 300 participants (139 boys and 161 girls) aged 10-19 from various colleges and universities in Faisalabad. The study utilized a correlational research design and employed a range of validated instruments, including the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (Andreassen et al., 2016), the Body Shape Questionnaire (Cooper et al., 1987), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Work & Social Adjustment Scale (Marks et al., 2002), and the ICP Subjective Well-Being Scale (Diener, 1984). The results of the study revealed a significant negative relationship between social media addiction and body satisfaction, indicating that excessive social media usage adversely impacts adolescents' body image. Additionally, body satisfaction and subjective well-being were found to be positively correlated, emphasizing the importance of a positive body image for adolescents' mental well-being. However, no significant relationship was observed between social media addiction and subjective well-being, suggesting that other mediating factors might play a role in this dynamic.

Porter et al. (2012) conducted a study to explore the effects of social media use and addiction on relationship satisfaction in interpersonal relationships. The study involved 219 participants aged between 18 and 25 years, all of whom were social media users. The participants completed an online questionnaire to assess their satisfaction with their closest interpersonal relationship. The findings of the study revealed a negative correlation between social media use and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that higher social media engagement may lead to decreased satisfaction in close relationships. Furthermore, social media withdrawal also exhibited a negative correlation with relationship satisfaction.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how social media addiction affects body image and relationship satisfaction among young adults

Hypothesis

H1: There would be no significant relationship between relationship satisfaction and body self-image.

H2: There would be a significant relationship between social media addiction and body self-image.

H3: Social media addiction would be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

Methodology

Sample

The study comprised 152 young adults (18 to 25 years) recruited from various states across India. The sample included 102 females, 49 males, and 1 non-binary individual ensuring diversity in gender representation. In terms of relationship status, 98 participants reported being in a current romantic relationship, while 54 participants were not currently in a relationship but had prior romantic experience.

Measures

Bergens Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS): The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), developed by Andreassen et al. (2016), was used to measure the extent of participants' addictive behaviours related to social media usage. This scale assesses how social media impacts daily functioning, emotional well-being, and personal priorities, making it highly relevant for understanding its influence on body image and relationship satisfaction. The BSMAS includes six items, with responses rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Very Rarely" = 1 to "Very Often" = 5. The BSMAS has shown strong reliability and validity and has been effectively utilised in research on social media addiction across diverse populations.

Body Self-Image Questionnaire - Short Form (BSIQ-SF): The Body Self-Image Questionnaire - Short Form (BSIQ-SF) was developed by Rowe (2005) to assess body self-image in young adults. The BSIQ-SF consists of 27 statement items, with each statement reflecting a participant's self-perception of their body. These items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from, "Not at all true of myself" = 1 to "Completely true of myself" = 5. The scoring range of the BSIQ-SF is 27 to 135, with scores above 115 indicating strong body image satisfaction, scores between 86-114 indicating moderate satisfaction, and scores below 85 indicating dissatisfaction with body image.

Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSAT): The Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSAT) was developed by Burns in 1988 as a self-report inventory to assess relationship satisfaction across various domains. The scale measures satisfaction in areas such as communication, openness, caring and affection, conflict resolution, intimacy, closeness, and satisfaction with roles within the relationship. The short version of the scale consists of 7 items and utilises a 7-point Likert scale (0-6), where 0 indicates "very dissatisfied" and 6 indicates

"very satisfied." The total score ranges from 0 to 42, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction and lower scores suggesting dissatisfaction. The RSAT demonstrates strong internal consistency with a coefficient alpha of 0.94. It also shows significant validity, with substantial correlations to other established measures of relationship satisfaction, such as the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test ($r = 0.80$), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale ($r = -0.89$), and the Norton Quality of Marriage Index ($r = 0.91$) (Heyman et al., 1994).

Procedure

A Google Form was created to collect data and was disseminated through various social media platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, LinkedIn, and Instagram, targeting young adult networks. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods ensuring accessibility and encouraged participants to share the form within their circles, thereby increasing the reach and diversity of the sample. Participants first provided informed consent, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, their voluntary involvement, and the confidentiality of their responses. Then they filled the google form divided into the three sections. After completing the google form, participants were thanked for their time and contributions to the research.

Analysis of Results

Result

TABLE 1: *N, Mean & SD of variables*

	Relationship Satisfaction	Body Self Image	Social Media Addiction
N	152	152	152
Mean	29.7	73.8	15.3
Median	34.0	73.5	15.0
Standard Deviation	11.9	17.3	5.68

TABLE: 2 *Correlation between Relationship Satisfaction, Body Self Image and Social Media Addiction*

	Relationship Satisfaction	Body Self Image	Social Media Addiction
Relationship Satisfaction	—		
Body Self Image	-0.029	—	
Social Media Addiction	-0.011	0.267***	—
Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$			

The descriptive statistics for the three variables namely Relationship Satisfaction, Body Self-Image, and Social Media Addiction are presented in Table 1. The mean scores for Relationship Satisfaction, Body Self-Image, and Social Media Addiction were 29.7, 73.8 and 15.3, respectively with standard deviations of 11.9, 17.3 and 5.68. Table 2 displays the correlation between the three variables. There was no significant correlation between Relationship Satisfaction and Body Self-Image ($r = -0.029$) or between Relationship Satisfaction and Social Media Addiction ($r = -0.011$). However, a significant positive correlation was observed between Social Media Addiction and Body Self-Image ($r = 0.267$, $p < .001$).

Discussion of Results

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the complex relationships between social media addiction, body self-image, and relationship satisfaction. While the findings partially supported the proposed hypotheses, they also revealed several unexpected patterns that warrant further exploration. Hypothesis 1, which predicted no significant

relationship between relationship satisfaction and body self-image, was supported ($r = -0.029$, $p > .05$). This suggests that, in this sample, body self-image does not directly influence perceptions of relationship satisfaction.

These results differ from previous studies, such as Lee (2016), which highlighted the mediating role of perceived partner evaluations and sexual satisfaction in linking body dissatisfaction to romantic satisfaction. Lee found that individuals with body dissatisfaction often misinterpreted their partners' perceptions of their appearance as negative, undermining their sexual satisfaction and, consequently, their relationship satisfaction. Similarly, Legkauskas and Ališauskaite (2023) found a partial link between body satisfaction and romantic satisfaction, noting that a positive body image enhances emotional and behavioural satisfaction in relationships. A possible explanation for the divergence in findings could be the absence of mediating variables, such as perceived partner evaluations, in this study's design. Additionally, cultural or demographic factors specific to the sample may moderate the relationship between body self-image and relationship satisfaction, as prior research often highlights the influence of societal norms and relational dynamics. Hypothesis 2, which predicted a significant relationship between social media addiction and body self-image, was supported ($r = 0.267$, $p < .001$). This significant positive correlation suggests that higher levels of social media addiction are associated with better body self-image. This finding challenges the prevailing expectation of a negative impact of social media addiction on body image, as reported in studies like Arshad and Akhtar (2024), which found a negative association between social media addiction and body satisfaction. One possible explanation for this positive correlation could be that individuals who engage more with social media might have greater exposure to body-positive content or communities, influencing their perceptions of their bodies in a more favourable light. This unexpected result calls for further investigation into how different types of social media content affect body self-image. Hypothesis 3, which predicted

a negative relationship between social media addiction and relationship satisfaction, was not supported ($r = -0.011$, $p > .05$). The lack of significant influence indicates that social media addiction did not adversely affect relationship satisfaction in this sample. This finding contrasts with previous research by Porter et al. (2012) and Satici et al. (2021), which found significant negative correlations between social media addiction and relationship satisfaction. For instance, Porter et al. observed that higher levels of social media use were associated with decreased satisfaction in close relationships. The absence of support for Hypothesis 3 may reflect the lack of mediating variables such as psychological distress or communication patterns critical to understanding the nuanced effects of social media on relationships. Overall, these results underscore the complexity of the relationships among social media addiction, body self-image, and relationship satisfaction. While some hypotheses were supported, others were not, suggesting that the effects of social media addiction may differ based on individual contexts and cultural factors.

Limitations & Future Directions

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, reliance on self-reported data may have introduced biases such as social desirability bias or under-reporting by participants regarding their experiences with social media addiction or relationship satisfaction. This limitation can affect the reliability of the findings. Future studies could adopt a multi-method approach by incorporating interviews or behavioural observations to cross-validate self-reported data. Second, the study did not account for key moderating variables like cultural background or personality traits that could significantly influence individuals' experiences with social media use, body image, and relationships. Including these variables in future research could yield more nuanced findings. Lastly, the sample was limited to young adults aged 18 to 25 years, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other age groups. Addressing

these limitations could enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between social media addiction, body self-image, and relationship satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationships among social media addiction, body self-image, and relationship satisfaction among young adults. The findings revealed no significant correlation between body self-image and relationship satisfaction; thus indicating that other factors such as perceived partner evaluations might play a more prominent role in determining romantic satisfaction. However, a significant positive correlation was observed between social media addiction and body self-image, suggesting that higher levels of social media usage are linked to improved perceptions of one's body image. Conversely, social media addiction did not significantly influence relationship satisfaction, indicating that its effects on romantic relationships may be mediated by factors such as communication patterns or psychological distress, the variables which were not included in this study. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing social media usage and its implications for self-perception and overall well-being. Interventions promoting digital literacy and body positivity could mitigate potential negative effects associated with excessive social media use on body image. Future research should explore mediating variables such as cultural norms and communication patterns to provide deeper insights into the interplay among these factors.

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