



A Study on Social Media, Body Image and Appearance Anxiety among College Students

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Abstract: Social media can expose users to hundreds or even thousands of images and photos every day, including those of celebrities and fashion or fitness models, which we know leads to an internalization of beauty ideals that are unattainable for almost everyone, resulting in greater dissatisfaction with body weight and shape. Body image is a combination of the thoughts and feelings that one has about their body. Body image may range between positive & negative experiences, and individuals may feel at different times, positive or negative or a combination of both. Appearance anxiety, a general fear of negative evaluation, and perfectionism have each been proposed as risk factors for both social anxiety disorder and the eating disorder. The aim of the research was to study social media, body image and appearance anxiety among college students. Standardized scales were used to measure social media effects on body image & appearance anxiety among college students. The sample of college students ranged between 18-25 years. The results found out that there was no significant relationship between body image, social media and appearance anxiety. Various approaches can be adopted to reduce the effects of social media that are limit your time on social media, embrace the offline world, block and unfollow negative applications, posts, seek out positive content, promote and share positive images and ideas.

Keywords: *Social media, Body image, Appearance anxiety*

1. Introduction

If you mindlessly scroll through Instagram or Facebook whenever you get a few seconds of downtime, you far from alone. But have you ever wondered how all those images of other people's bodies-whether your friends holiday snap or a celebrity gym selfie, could be affecting how you view your own?

Much has been made over the years about how mainstream media presents unrealistic beauty standards in the form of photoshopped celebrities or sick- thin fashion models. Now that influencers fill up our feeds, it's easy to imagine that social media too, is all bad when it comes to body image. But the reality is more nuanced, and there may be ways to curate your Instagram feed to make you feel happier in your own skin - or, at least, stop you feeling worse. It's important to note that research into social media and body image is still in its early stages, and most studies are correlational. This means we can't prove whether, for example Facebook causes someone to have negative feelings about their appearance, or whether people who are concerned about their appearance are more likely to use Facebook.

1.2 Social Media

Social media has a significant effect on body image, both positive and negative. On one hand, social media can provide a platform for both positivity, community support and health and fitness inspiration. But it can also contribute to unrealistic beauty standards and unhealthy comparisons. Social media platforms often feature images of people with seemingly perfect faces and bodies, often using filters and photo editing tools to enhance their appearance. Social media can create a toxic culture of comparison and competition, where individuals compare their bodies to others and strive to meet the same beauty standards. In fact, social media has led to a condition known as "Snapchat dysphoria" in which people are desperate to look like the filtered version of themselves.

Many people tend to post only their best photos, which may not be representative of their everyday appearance.

Social media can be a breeding ground for cyber bullying where people are attacked for their body size, shape, or appearance. This can have a damaging effect on body image and self-esteem. People living with Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) are typically preoccupied with at least one nonexistent or slight defect in their physical appearance, and experience repetitive and compulsive behaviors around their appearance such as mirror checking and reassurance seeking. These symptoms can be excessively worsened by social media.

The authors of a 2018 research paper states that several plastic surgeons have shared that they have encountered people requesting to look like a ‘filtered’ Snapchat picture. A 2018 Pew Research Centre survey found that 59% of U.S. teens have personally experienced cyber bullying. This includes offensive name calling and the spreading of false rumors, among other types of bullying.

1.3 Body Image

Body image is a combination of the thoughts and feelings that one has about their body. Body image is influenced by internal (e.g. personality) and external (e.g. social environment) factors. The four aspects of body image includes, (a), the way you see your body is your perceptual body image (b)the way you feel about your body is your affective body image, (c) the way you think about your body is your cognitive body image (d) the behaviors you engage in as a result of your body image are your behavioral body image.

The American Psychological Association (2022) defined body image as “the mental picture one forms of one’s body as a whole, including its physical characteristics and one’s attitudes

toward these characteristics.” National Eating Disorders Association defined body image as “how you see yourself, how you feel physically in your body.”

A study conducted by Cohane et al. (2001) stated that boys generally displayed less overall body concern than girls, many boys of all ages reported dissatisfaction with their bodies, often associated with reduced self-esteem. Whereas girls typically wanted to be thinner, boys frequently wanted to be bigger. A study conducted by Holmstrom (2004) stated that thin women may have little to no effect on viewers. However, images of thin women seem to have a positive effect on women’s body image.

1.4 Appearance Anxiety

Social appearance anxiety is positively correlated with measures of social anxiety and negative body image. It refers to social anxiety surrounding overall appearance including body shape and fear of negative evaluation by others. It is potentially relevant to those with bulimia nervosa as both social anxiety and body image disturbance are commonly experienced by patients. Social appearance anxiety is defined as “the fear that one will be negatively evaluated because of one’s appearance” (Hart, 2008).

A study conducted by Turel et al. (2018) suggested that participants who reported dissatisfaction with their bodies, eating disorder risk was higher among females than males. While there were differences between men and women, they showed quite similar self-report ratings on most of the measures.

Thompson (2000) revealed antecedents for developing an eating disorder existed in all maturational group, although no health risk behaviors regarding nutritional status were observed.

2. Purpose

The purpose is to study social media, body image and appearance anxiety among college students.

2.1 Hypothesis

- a) There will be a positive correlation between appearance anxiety and body self-image.
- b) There will be a positive correlation between social media and appearance anxiety.

2.2 Method

2.2.1 Sample

A total of 30 students participated across different colleges and universities in the age 19-25 years.

2.2.2 Measures

Social Media Addiction Scale: SMA as given by Rehman et al (2020) consist of 21 questions, each rated on a 7-point scale from ‘strongly disagree to strongly agree.’ Used as an instrument for the assessment of social media addiction.

Body Self-Image: BSIQ-SF as given by Rowe et al. (2005) consist of 27 questions, each rated on a 5-point scale from “not at all true myself” to “completely true of myself.” Used as an instrument for the assessment of body self-image.

Appearance Anxiety Scale: AAI as given by Veale et al. (2014) consist of 10 questions each rated on a 4-point scale from ‘not at all to all the time’. Used as an instrument for the assessment of appearance anxiety scale.

2.2.3 Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaire were filled through google forms, each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

3. Analysis of data

The responses of the students were analyzed using t-test to see effects of social media among the university students. Mean and standard deviation data is presented in table 1, table 2 shows the correlation between body image, social media and appearance anxiety.

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard deviation*

	Appearance Anxiety	Body Self-Image	Social Networking Addiction
N	30	30	30
Mean	11.1	69.3	62.1
Standard deviation	8.60	19.3	24.8

Table 2: *Correlation between body image, social media and appearance anxiety*

	Appearance Anxiety	Body Self- Image	Social Networking Addiction
Appearance Anxiety	—	—	
Body Self Image	0.037	—	
Social Networking Addiction	0.212	0.266	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

3.1 Discussion of Results

The results found out that there is no significant relationship between appearance anxiety, body self-image and social networking addiction. Contrary to previous studies conducted by Salomon et al. (2019) indicated that greater levels of self-objectifying social media use predicted greater body shame among youth, and this was mediated by an associated increase in body surveillance. A study conducted by Lee et al (2014) showed that social media use for information about body image is negatively related to body satisfaction while social media for self-status seeking regarding body image is positively related to body satisfaction and body satisfaction has direct impact and indirect positive effects on psychological well-being.

Conclusion

Social media can expose users to hundreds or even thousands of images and photos every day, including those of celebrities and fashion or fitness models, which we know leads to an internalization of beauty ideals that are unattainable for almost everyone, resulting in greater dissatisfaction with body weight and shape.

Body image is a combination of the thoughts and feelings that you have about your body. Body image may range between positive & negative experiences, and one person may feel at different times positive or negative or a combination of both.

Appearance anxiety, a general fear of negative evaluation, and perfectionism have each been proposed as risk factors for both social anxiety disorder and the eating disorder.

The objective of this study was to find out how social media affects our body image. Standardized scales were used to measure social media effects on body image & appearance anxiety among college students. The sample of college students ranging between 18-25 years was

used. The results found out that there is no significant relationship between body image, social media and appearance anxiety.

To reduce the negative effects of social media, limit your usage, embrace offline activities, block and unfollow negative content, seek positive content, and share uplifting ideas. Curate your feed to avoid content that makes you feel bad. Instagram and TikTok often showcase idealized body images using filters, so it's important for users to push back against this trend. "Be mindful of how each creator, image, and account makes you feel," advises Kite. Tiffany Shlain, an artist and filmmaker, suggests taking a one-day break from devices each week. She turns off her devices every Friday evening for a 24-hour "tech shabbat. She and her family began this tradition 13 years ago when her children were young. Turn off notifications and set limits on social media app usage. To limit social media to an hour a day, start by tracking time spent on each app. Engage with people who share similar interests and values. The world has many individuals doing noteworthy things. Kite mentions she unfollows those who make her feel uncomfortable and replaces them with activists.

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