



Examine the Relationship between Social Media Usage, Self-esteem, and Body Image among Young Adults

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Abstract: To examine the relationship between social media usage, self-esteem, and body image among young adults. Social media has significantly impacted the way individuals interact and perceive themselves, particularly among young adults. This study aimed to explore the relationship between social media usage, self-esteem, and body image, using theoretical frameworks such as Social Comparison Theory, Self-Discrepancy Theory, and Objectification Theory. Data were collected from 100 participants aged 16-25, and Pearson's correlation analysis was applied. The results showed significant negative correlations between social media usage and both self-esteem ($r = -0.707, p < .05$) and body image ($r = -0.638, p < .01$). These findings suggest that increased social media use is associated with lower self-esteem and greater body dissatisfaction. The study emphasizes the need for media literacy and healthy online habits to mitigate these negative effects.

Keywords: *Social Media, Self-esteem, Body Image, Young Adults*

1. Introduction

In the contemporary social realms, social platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook have evolved past updating one's status. They serve as virtual platforms where individuals showcase and brand themselves to others. For countless young adults, social media isn't just a digital tool; it's deeply ingrained in everyday life. Furthermore, these challenges also offer a sense of self-expression alongside identifying oneself. Beneath the veneer of polished

selfies and the latest internet fads lies a complex story—where affection can feel ditched, appreciation can feel enslaved, and where rejection can put them in a suffocating silence.

Platforms of social network have the capability to let an individual share their opinions but can also globalize what is referred to as beauty or success in today's society. One cannot help but start comparing themselves to others when constantly scrolling through seemingly flawless feeds. With the never-ending grew of 'highlight reels', young adults look at the overexposed selfies, filtered bodies and airbrushed faces, leading them to severely doubt their self-worth. The enduring question of 'who am I', that they try to contemplate as they transition into adulthood, alongside this exposure to social media affects them emotionally. Algorithms give a new dimension to this. They don't merely show us what we like; they keep us watching by increasing the amount of superficial content that is tailored to rigid beauty standards. This does not only affect how we view others, but how we view ourselves over time. Our reflections start to blend in with our profile pictures. Self-esteem becomes something that can be quantified in followers and measured through emojis. For a lot of people, the screen turns into a mirror—and this mirror tends to deceive.

Breaking Down the Concepts: Social Media, Self-Esteem, and Body Image

As we consider the impact on mental health, particularly for younger people, three ideas require further exploration: how we engage with social media, self-perception, and one's physical body. These are not just vapid ideas. They are profound lived realities shaped by the digital sphere every day.

Social media: Beyond the Hours Spent on a Screen

Social media usage involves much more than simply checking one's devices for a certain amount of time. It includes how people engage with others, the reasons they post, and even what they hope to achieve as they browse the web. For some, social media platforms are a means of keeping in touch and a medium of case expression. Others may passively watch without engaging. This passive consumption has been linked to feelings of envy, disconnection, and dissatisfaction.

The patterns emerge at the intersect of psychology and technology. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) is a reminder that our self-perception often relies on comparisons to others—even social media provides a never-ending supply of comparison figures. Then there's Self Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) explaining discomfort that arises when people's perceptions of themselves don't align with the curated reality they present to the world and see around them.

As proposed by Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), we may resort to social media to obtain emotional satisfaction such as feeling acknowledged or entertained. However, if our self-esteem begins to depend on the number of likes and comments received, those needs are not met at a more profound level. Consider the addition of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). That makes it more complicated to disconnect from social media, even when staying online makes us feel worse.

And let's not ignore the chemistry of the brain that fuels all of this. The Dopamine Reward Theory indicates that every like or comment provides a hit of pleasure—and ensures a return for more—addictive phone use has become the norm. These platforms are designed to keep us hooked.

Self-Worth: The Narrative We Create for Ourselves

Self-esteem refers to our perception of our own value. When it's powerful, we sense assurance, competence, and safety. When it's at a low point, even minor difficulties can seem insurmountable. Social media holds a complex position in this context. On one side, affirmative feedback can enhance our self-esteem. Conversely, when our self-esteem begins to rely on the opinions of others—particularly those we do not know—it may turn vulnerable and unpredictable.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory (1965) emphasizes the influence of external feedback on our self-perception. On social media, such feedback is ongoing and visible to all. Not receiving likes may seem like an evaluation. A harsh remark can wound more than we realize.

Cooley's idea of the Looking-Glass Self (1902) proposes that we develop our identities according to our perceptions of how others perceive us. In the era of selfies and stories, that viewpoint is altered—quite literally. We start to craft not only our posts but also our identities, moulding ourselves to appear more “appealing,” frequently sacrificing genuine self-expression.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) highlights that esteem—encompassing self-respect and regard from others—is essential to our humanity. Social media provides a quick route to that affirmation, but also a swift decline when acceptance is lacking. As time passes, individuals might find it challenging to acknowledge their worth beyond the context of their online persona.

Body Image: The Reflection Isn't Always Truthful

The perception of one's body extends well beyond just its looks. It's our perception of our bodies—how we contemplate, evaluate, and communicate with ourselves when we gaze into the mirror. When social media inundates our feeds with flawless, altered depictions of beauty, it can distort our perceptions of what's typical and what's “acceptable.”

Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) describes how society frequently reduces individuals—particularly women—to their physical appearance. On the internet, that objectification is internalized. We begin to view ourselves in the manner we believe others perceive us. We examine, contrast, and evaluate our own physiques through the perspective of societal acceptance.

Once more, Social Comparison Theory and Self-Discrepancy Theory illustrate how this can undermine body confidence. The more we measure ourselves against unrealistic benchmarks, the more we sense that we don't measure up. Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) suggests that media not only mirrors reality but also shapes it. Additionally, on social media, that truth is frequently altered and false.

However, it's not entirely negative. In recent times, initiatives such as body positivity and self-love have begun to take back space on the internet. Both influencers and regular users are contesting harmful beauty standards, welcoming vulnerability, and honouring diversity. These changes indicate that social media can serve as a platform for healing, truthfulness, and empowerment.

A Fresh Perspective

At its essence, social media serves as a tool—but like any tool, its effects rely on our method of usage. For young adults, it can serve as a mirror that reveals insecurities, a megaphone that heightens pressure, and a magnifying glass that alters reality. However, it can also serve as a medium for self-expression, a link to community, and a platform for social change. Grasping the connection between social media use, self-esteem, and body image allows us to comprehend the broader context. Behind each profile is an individual. In a world that frequently demands our performance, opting to present ourselves as our true selves is a significant act of defiance—and self-acceptance.

2. Review of Literature

Raymer (2015) examined the relationship between Facebook use and self-esteem among college students, focusing on gender differences. Given that around 90% of college students use Facebook for 30 minutes to over two hours daily, the study aimed to assess how this usage impacts self-esteem and body image. Participants completed surveys including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Body Esteem Scale, Facebook Intensity Scale, and Eating Attitudes Test-26. Analysis revealed that females spend more time on Facebook and have more Facebook friends than males. Additionally, females reported lower body satisfaction and a stronger drive

for thinness, suggesting that greater Facebook use may negatively impact body image and self-esteem, particularly among women.

Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) research linking social media use, especially Facebook, to body image concerns, particularly among young men and women. Correlational and longitudinal studies suggest a growing association over time, with appearance comparisons contributing to this link. However, experimental studies show that brief exposure to one's Facebook account may not significantly impact appearance concerns. The paper highlights the need for more diverse samples, exploration of other platforms like Instagram, and further longitudinal and experimental research to identify which aspects of social media most affect body image.

Jan, Soomro and Ahmad (2017) investigated how Facebook use affects self-esteem among IoBM students. Through surveys and interviews with 150 participants, it was found that 88% engaged in social comparisons on Facebook, and nearly all of these (98%) were upward comparisons. Statistical analysis using SPSS revealed a strong negative correlation between Facebook usage and self-esteem. Specifically, each extra hour spent on Facebook daily was linked to a 5.574-point drop in self-esteem, indicating that increased time on the platform may significantly lower individuals' self-worth.

Burnette, Kwitowski and Mazzeo (2017) explored the relationship between social media use and body image among early adolescent girls (ages 12–14) through six focus groups (N = 38). Thematic analysis revealed that while social media use was high and some appearance concerns and peer comparisons were present, many girls demonstrated media literacy, body confidence, and an appreciation of differences. These protective traits were attributed to positive parental guidance and a supportive school environment. The findings support an ecological approach to preventing body dissatisfaction, highlighting the influential roles of family and school in shaping healthy media attitudes during early adolescence.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

To examine the relationship between social media usage, self-esteem, and body image among young adults

3.2 Research Objectives

- a) To identify a relationship between social media usage and self-esteem.
- b) To identify a relationship between social media usage and body image

3.3 Hypothesis

H1. There is a relationship between social media usage and self esteem

H2. There is a negative correlation between social media usage and body image.

3.4 Sampling Technique

The sampling technique employed will be convenience sampling, allowing for the recruitment of participants from various clinical settings and online forums to investigate how social media usage influences self-esteem, and body image among young adults.

3.5 Sample Size

The study will recruit about 100 individuals aged 18 to 25 years to investigate the relationship between social media usage and its influences on self-esteem, and body image among young adults.

3.6 Measures

The respective are the tools used in the conduction of the research:

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS): The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is a psychometric instrument designed to assess symptoms of social media addiction. Developed by Andreassen et al. (2016), the scale is grounded in the core components model of addiction proposed by Griffiths (2005), which includes salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. The BSMAS operationalizes these six components in the context of social media use. The scale comprises six items, each corresponding to one of the aforementioned addiction components. Respondents are asked to reflect on their social media use over the past year and rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very rarely) to 5 (very often). Higher total scores on the BSMAS indicate a stronger presence of addictive-like behaviours related to social media use. The BSMAS has demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically exceeding 0.80 in various cultural and linguistic contexts. It is widely regarded as a reliable and valid instrument for both clinical screening and academic research into problematic social media use, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale:- Developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965, the scale includes 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, measuring overall feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance. It has demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.77 to 0.88, indicating good internal consistency, and test-retest reliability coefficients between 0.82 and 0.85 over time. The scale also shows solid validity; construct validity is supported through its positive correlations with self-worth and negative correlations

with depression and anxiety. Additionally, criterion and convergent validity are well established, and the RSES has been shown to maintain its psychometric properties across different cultural contexts, making it a robust tool for both clinical and research purposes.

The Body Appreciation Scale-2: It is a widely used and psychometrically robust instrument developed by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) to assess positive body image. It consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = always), measuring individuals' acceptance, respect, and appreciation for their bodies, regardless of actual physical appearance. The BAS-2 demonstrates excellent reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically exceeding 0.90 across diverse samples, indicating high internal consistency. In terms of validity, the scale has strong construct validity, correlating positively with self-esteem and intuitive eating, and negatively with body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors. It also shows cross-cultural validity, having been validated in numerous countries and languages, making it a reliable tool for research and clinical assessments related to body image across different populations.

4. Result

Table 1: *Correlation between Social Media Usage & Self Esteem*

		Self Esteem
Social media usage	Pearson Correlation	-0.707**

There is a significant negative relationship between social media use and self-esteem ($r = -0.707, p < .05$), indicating that higher levels of social media use are associated with lower levels of self-esteem among young adults.

Table 2: *Correlation between Social Media Usage & Body Image*

		Body Image
Social media usage	Pearson Correlation	-0.638**

There is a significant negative relationship between social media use and body image ($r = -0.638, p < .05$), indicating that higher levels of social media use are associated with lower levels of body image among young adults.

5. Discussion

In today's digital age, social media plays a central role in the everyday lives of young adults. From sharing life updates to browsing curated content from friends, influencers, and celebrities,

social media platforms have become more than just tools for communication—they’ve evolved into spaces where identity, self-worth, and body image are often negotiated. While these platforms offer opportunities for connection and self-expression, growing evidence suggests they may also have a darker side, particularly when it comes to mental and emotional well-being. This study aimed to better understand how time spent on social media relates to self-esteem and body image among young adults. The findings offer meaningful support for the first hypothesis (H1), which suggested that there is a relationship between social media usage and self-esteem. Specifically, a strong negative correlation was found ($r = -0.707$, $p < .05$), meaning that individuals who spend more time on social media tend to report lower self-esteem levels. This is an important insight, as it reinforces concerns about the emotional toll that social media can have, especially when it becomes a space for constant comparison.

Platforms like Instagram and TikTok often highlight idealized versions of life—perfect bodies, flawless skin, luxurious lifestyles—which may cause users to compare themselves unfavourably, leading to feelings of inadequacy or low self-worth. This pattern of comparison is well-explained by Social Comparison Theory, which suggests that people evaluate themselves based on how they measure up to others. On social media, these comparisons are often not realistic, since users mostly post highlights of their lives rather than their full, authentic experiences. Similarly, Self-Discrepancy Theory provides a lens to understand these findings: when individuals perceive a gap between their “actual self” and their “ideal self”—a gap that social media tends to widen—they may experience dissatisfaction, guilt, or reduced self-esteem. These theories help explain why a tool meant for connection can end up diminishing a person’s sense of self-worth.

The second hypothesis (H2) predicted a negative relationship between social media usage and body image, and the data supported this as well. A moderately strong negative correlation was observed ($r = -0.638$, $p < .01$), indicating that as time spent on social media increases, satisfaction with one’s body image tends to decrease. This result aligns with a growing body of research that links social media use to body dissatisfaction, especially among young people who are still forming their sense of identity and appearance. Many users are frequently exposed to appearance-focused content—“fitspiration,” edited selfies, beauty tutorials—that subtly (or sometimes overtly) promote unrealistic beauty standards. This often leads to negative self-perceptions, particularly when individuals feel they do not or cannot measure up.

In conclusion, this research contributes to a growing field of inquiry that calls attention to the psychological risks of social media use. It emphasizes that while social media can connect and inspire, it can also distort reality and negatively influence how individuals see themselves.

Understanding these dynamics is a crucial step toward helping young adults navigate their digital worlds with more confidence, self-awareness, and compassion.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant relationship between social media usage and psychological well-being, particularly focusing on self-esteem and body image among young adults. The results indicate a strong negative correlation between social media engagement and both self-esteem ($r = -0.707$) and body image ($r = -0.638$), suggesting that increased social media usage is associated with lower self-esteem and greater body dissatisfaction. These findings align with existing psychological theories such as Social Comparison Theory, Self-Discrepancy Theory, and Objectification Theory, which help explain how exposure to idealized portrayals on social media can distort self-perception and contribute to negative mental health outcomes.

In conclusion, this study underscores the need for a more nuanced approach to social media consumption—one that empowers individuals to navigate the digital landscape with a critical eye, cultivating positive self-esteem and body image in the process.

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