

The Impact of Social Media Usage on Self-Esteem and Body Image among University Students

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Maaz Khan

BS Research Student, Department of Psychological Studies,
University of Swat

Email: maazkhanst3@gmail.com

Kalsoom Gul

BS Research Student, Department of Psychological Studies,
University of Swat

Email: kalsoomgul82@gmail.com

Maryam Kausar

Lecturer, Department of Psychological Studies,
University of Swat

Email: mkausar475@gmail.com

Abstract

The influence of Social media on individual perceptions regarding their bodies and sense of self-worth has emerged as a main area of exploration in current psychology. Social media websites like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter provide mediums to communicate, self-expression, and exchange of information, but these platforms also create issues regarding self-image and self-perception. This study tends to explore the relationship between social media and how individuals perceive self in terms of self-worth and body image, and the relationship of the time spent on such platforms with these psychological variables. These variables (social media usage, self-esteem and body image) were measured using psychological instruments like the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). A sample of 165 University of Swat students was assessed by the use of these psychological instruments to examine how social media usage exacerbates self-esteem regarding body image. According to statistical analysis, there were insignificant gender-based differences in self-esteem; however, male participants' self-esteem was slightly higher than that of female participants. The study also showed that idealized body image had a significant impact on female participants, and they were more unsatisfied with their bodies. In contrast, male participants were more satisfied with their body image. Additionally, statistical analysis also showed that those individuals who were married were more satisfied with their body image. People who are unmarried are more unsatisfied as compared to those people who are married. In addition to that, statistical analysis also showed that social media usage was negatively correlated

with body image and self-esteem, showing that high social usage is linked with low self esteem and negative body perception. Conversely, a positive relation between body image and self-esteem was found, suggesting that people who have higher self-esteem also have a more positive perception of their physical appearance.

Keywords: Social Media, Self-Esteem, Students.

Introduction

Social media sites expanded significantly in the 20th century, changing the way people communicate with each other and how they perceive themselves. These days, social media platform plays an important role in the lives of the young generation. They use these sites to communicate with each other and with global communities and create social relationships. These platforms are the main source of social interaction, learning, and personal growth. Teenagers, for example, widely use social media to connect with people worldwide through shared interests in sports, celebrities, and hobbies (Boyd, 2007).

Social media is a platform for social interaction and self-expression, but it can also have negative effects in the form of stress, anxiety, and self-doubt. When people are totally dependent on social media for the evaluation of their perception and evaluation we can determine what possible consequences it has for those people (Koutamanis, 2015). The developmental needs of kids and teenagers do not evolve with the pace of technology, which means that we need to understand how such platforms can affect the well-being of the young generation (Orth, 2018).

For centuries, researchers have examined self-esteem as a main element of psychological well-being. Its roots can be traced back to the 18th century, when Scottish philosopher David Hume was one of the first individuals who wrote about self-esteem. Hume proposed in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) that excessive pride or vanity is a sign of a weakness, while modesty, but self-esteem, is a virtue (Hume, 1740). People's behavior, motivation, and mental health are all significantly influenced by their self-esteem.

The term "body image" for the first time used by Austrian neurologist Paul Schilder in *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body*, published in 1935. It explains the way people think, feel, and act in relation to their bodies, as well as how they see their physical appearance. Accepting and appreciating one's body is a sign of a positive body image, while distress and dissatisfaction are signs of a negative one. Body image has always been a key concept in understanding the psychological effects of social media use due to the promotion of idealized body standards on social media (Schilder, 1935).

Sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have widely changed how people deal with body image-related issues in the current digital era. These websites are now the sources of where people compare themselves, create

identities, and exchange values rather than just showing ideal looks. Frequent exposure to digitally modified images encourages continual comparison, which causes psychological issues and widespread body dissatisfaction throughout the globe.

Depending on individual exposure, social media can have both positive and negative effects on kids, according to research. Peer pressure and self-esteem have a significant effect on children of all races. Most of the early research mainly focuses on Western populations, especially women. By examining the effects of friends and media representations on social media on the body image of children from Generation Z—the largest generation with a climbing purchasing power—this study tends to close the gap. The objective is to find the extent to which children's perceptions of their bodies are influenced by their friends and self-worth on social media, as well as the effectiveness of social media in this respect.

Literature Review:

The emerging social media has created a new type of addiction, which is now acknowledged as a serious behavioral addiction. Misuse can have adverse consequences on mental health, especially in teens and young adults. According to the research conducted between 2015 and 2020, excessive use of social media is associated with eating disorders, impulsive behaviors, low self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction (Kumar, 2023). False information, lack of media literacy, and false body image promoted through online means are major contributing factors. Because they are still in developmental phases and still sensitive to peer comparison, especially adolescents, they are at a huge risk.

According to another study conducted on young adults, social media has a major influence on cultural norms, eating behavior, self-worth, and physical dissatisfaction. In a sample of 100 people (50 men and 50 women), higher levels of social media addiction were associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Parvin, 2022). Additionally, it shows that a more positive body image is associated with higher levels of self-esteem. However, the impact of social media differs depending on how it is used by individuals. Feelings of Sadness, negative self-talk, and decline in psychological well-being are due to frequent and excessive misuse and unhealthy habits and continual comparisons (Fortunato, 2023). On the other hand, normal use may improve connections, self-expression, and social support.

In addition to that, studies suggest that the effects of different platforms on individual health vary. Twitter, with its text and real sharing, tends to increase positive emotions and life satisfaction, while Facebook and Instagram, with their ideal and highly visual content, tend to decrease well-being (Laplante, 2022).

In conclusion, current research shows the complex relationship among body image, self-esteem, and social media use. Social media provides

numerous ways to communicate, self-expression, and education, but it can also bring adverse consequences for individual mental health, especially if the use is excessive or is in such a way that prompts unhealthful comparisons. Different factors, including the platform being used, the type of content being consumed, and how prone people are to comparing themselves to others, influence how social media affects self-esteem and body image.

According to Tiggemann and Slater (2013), an increase in exposure to social media is linked with the creation of negative perception of own body . In addition to that , Meier and Gray (2014) expressed that continuous exposure to such social media content that mainly focuses on external appearance leads to negative body perception. . According to Cash and Pruzinsky (2004) and Grammas and Schwartz (2009), body image is an individual evaluation of own self subjectively which has dramatic impact on individual psychological health. This idea includes different domains which are cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and behavioral dimension that affect the way people's interacts with their surroundings and how they feel about their external looks (Croll, 2005; Phillips, 2005).

Adolescence is one the most important time in which one develops individual perception, regarding one's body, according to Croll (2005). Puberty, which occurs at this phase, continuously affect maintaining a positive body image (Mulgrew et al., 2014; Kantanista et al., 2015). In terms of psychology, adolescence is also the time of the development of morals and social values (Balistreri et al., 1995).A positive body image is also linked with a strong interpersonal relationship and a strong interpersonal identity (Jermisittiparsert, Sriyakul, & Pamornmast, 2012; Wängqvist & Frisén, 2013). Furthermore, how body image develops, is strongly influenced by the cultural norms and by the expectations of the society regarding the body (Voelker et al., 2015; Ismail, Sabran, & Ariffin, 2018; Benton & Karazsia, 2015; Rafindadi & Kondo, 2018).Social circles, such as family, friends, and partners mainly support these cultural values (Voelker et al., 2015).

Especially,pressure from friend is also contributing factor in the promotion of body dissatisfaction through different means, such is social exclusion, comparison, discussions related to appearance, teasing, and criticism (Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014).Standard of beauty in many Western societies mainly focuses on muscularity for men and slimness for women (Croll, 2005; Benton & Karazsia, 2015; Rauf, 2016). According to Koyuncu et al. (2010), these ideals are mainly influenced by the media, portraying unattainable body standards, which are reaffirmed by athletes, celebrities, influencers, and fashion models again and again through commercials. Teenagers who are continuously exposed to these ideal standards –such as the muscular ideal for men and the slender ideal for girls–through music videos, movies, and television shows are more likely to experience dissatisfaction with their bodies (Croll, 2005; Ferguson et al., 2014).

Body image, which is defined as how people perceive their physical

appearance, is considered an important element of psychological health and self-worth over the course of an individual's lifespan (Harter, 1998; Altabe & Thompson, 1996). It is related to topics like identity, sexuality, self-worth, and familial ties. According to Thompson et al. (1999), one's internal and personal representation of their external body is known as their body image. It is closely related to self-esteem, even it overlaps with other elements of identity. A lot of studies have shown an association between low self-esteem and a negative body image. Self-esteem, which includes feeling worthy of happiness and believing that one can deal with life's challenges (Branden, 1969). Low self-esteem and feelings of insecurity can contribute to negative body image. Moreover, self-esteem is a strong predictor of overall mental health and well-being (Jackson, 1993; Harter, 1998).

Additionally, research shows that low self-esteem or body dissatisfaction are frequently linked to a rise in eating disorder rates. These subjective conflicts frequently cause disordered eating as a behavior used as a coping mechanism (Button et al., 1997; Mitchell, 1996). According to psychology, one's perception, thoughts, and feelings regarding their physical body are all part of their body image, which is a cognitive and emotional domain. Body dissatisfaction is a mirror of negative attitudes and feelings toward one's looks, which are majorly influenced by social and cultural factors, such as how one is portrayed in the media (Grogan, 1998). Negative body image beliefs are linked with poor emotional health in both men and women. Some people may have the capacity to control their emotions, but others may experience serious psychological issues that may affect their daily functioning (Cash, Ancis, & Strachan, 1997).

Negative body image or low self-esteem can also be the cause of rise in certain psychological disorders like bulimia or anorexia, which can be seen in adolescent girls (Croll, 2005; Field et al., 2001). Studies also shows that physical appearance are very important because it shapes individual self worth. (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2006). Moreover, studies have also shown that media influence is also a leading of disturbances in body perception and give rise to certain disorders like eating disorders (Altabe & Thompson, 1996). Between other platforms magazine have faced significant criticism because of promoting thinnes as a beauty standard and it's totally unhealthy (Wolf, 1990). Pollack-Sied (1989) also noted that women who are fat they are rarely represented as socially acceptable individuals, while Cash and Prunzinsky (1990) found that women who are thin are shown as beautiful and successful.

The concept that media can build women's self-esteem and body image is not a new one . For years, female celebrities who are more known for their looks and not for their talent—have become ideals broadcast around the world. These achievable beauty standards are internalized and perused by the general public, especially young women. Researches also shows that around 60% of women engages diets and exercises to attain the type of body they have seen in the social media (McCabe et al., 2007).

Radford's (2007) review suggests that social media influences the mental health of American women by showing them unattainable bodies, like the "perfect" body like that of Barbie doll, leading a continuous struggle with weight and self-esteem among individuals. Despite widespread debates and discussions, these claims lack deep critical analysis. Studies show mixed evidences about that whether women are attracted to models like Kate Moss because of their thinness or this attraction can be because of other factors.

Aim

This study tend to explore the impact of mass media on body image and self-esteem among young adults aged 18 to 35. Additionally, it seeks to find whether men experience body image concerns at levels comparable or lower than that of womens.

Operational Definition:

Self-esteem in this study will be measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a widely recognized instrument for evaluating overall self-worth. The scale contains 10 statements rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The range is from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). A total score between 10 and 40 will be calculated by combining the items score of each individual, higher totals indicating greater self-esteem.

Body Shape Questionnaire-16 (BSQ-16) is a psychological tool used to find concerns about body shape and related issues. For this study, body shape related concerns were operationalized using the BSQ-16, which includes 16 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 6 = Always). Scores will be calculated by adding the responses of each participant. Higher scores will show greater concerns with body shape.

Research Objectives:

To determine the strength of the relationship between self-esteem levels among different populations.

To measure the gender differences on self-esteem and body satisfaction.

Hypotheses:

There will be a positive correlation between self-esteem and body image.

Their will be a strong difference in the self-esteem levels between male and female participants.

Marital status will have an impact body image, with single and married women showing noticeable difference in body image perceptions.

Media exposure will have negatively influence on image. participants who engage more in social media are likely to report lower body image.

Their will be a positive relationship between body image and self-esteem; individuals with a more positive body image are more likely to have higher self-esteem.

Their will be negative relationship between media usage and self-esteem, where individuals with greater media consumption may have low self-esteem.

Sample:

In this study, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used on a total of 92 participants, comprising 43 males and 49 females. This data distribution suggests a balanced participation of both genders in the assessment of self-esteem. On the other hand, the Body Shape Questionnaire-16 (BSQ-16) was given to 73 participants, most of the participants were female. This shows that the body shape concern assessment mostly contained female participants. Combining the data from both instruments, the overall study included 165 participants in total, with 58 males and 107 females. This distribution highlights a gender imbalance, particularly with a dominance of female participants in the body shape satisfaction assessment.

The sampling technique which was used is convenience sampling because participants were selected on the basis of their easy availability.

The criteria of inclusion required participants to be current students at the University of Swat and the age range has to be 18 to 35 years. Additionally, participants were asked to provide informed consent to be part of the study. Individuals who did not fulfilled the criteria were excluded from the study. This include Those people who were not currently enrolled in the university of swat and also those people who were out of the age range were excluded from the study sample. In addition to that, those students were also excluded from the study who were unable to provide consent, to be part of the research. This reason behind this approach was to ensure that the sample is an actual representation of the student population within the defined age range and also capable of providing accurate data for the study.

Measures:

I have used two questionnaires:

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES):

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is psychological instrument used for the assessment of individual self-esteem. It has 10 items that measure positive and negative feelings of an individual about own self. The scale is developed for the assessment of overall self-perception by asking research participants to reflect on their feelings of worthiness.

Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-16B):

The Body Shape Questionnaire-16 (BSQ-16) is a psychological instruments used for the assessment of concerns and preoccupations individual have regarding their body shape, which can be a possible indication of body dissatisfaction. Their are total of 16 items of the BSQ-16, rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 6 = Always):

Procedure:

The main purpose of the study is to find the effects of social media on individual self-esteem and body shape concerns, by using the Self-Esteem Scale and the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ).

The Self-Esteem Scale was converted into an online survey and distributed among male and female participants, while the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) was also transformed into a separate Google Form and administered to both male and female participants. The informed consent was obtained prior to survey completion.

Data Collection:

The scales were shared through Google Form links via social media (whatsApp). And provided clear instructions on how to complete the surveys and emphasize the importance of honest responses. And data collection is done from both Google Forms and ensure that they are saved and organized and data is verified to complete and meets the sample size requirements. Confidentiality is maintained and protect participant data throughout the research process.

Results:

Table-1: Mean difference on the score of the The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) between the male and female participants.

| Variables | N | Mean | SD | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------|----|-------|------|----------|----------|
| Male | 43 | 35.09 | 5.25 | 0.57 | 0.56 |
| Female | 49 | 34.51 | 4.50 | | |

It was assumed that there would be a significant difference between male and female self esteem. As shown in table-1, the result revealed no significant difference between male and female participants self esteem with $t(90) = 0.57$, $p > .05$. However, there was a mean difference between male and ($M = 35.09$, $SD = 5.25$), and female participants ($M = 34.51$, $SD = 4.50$).

Table-2: Mean difference on the score of the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ).between the single and married participants.

| Variables | N | Mean | SD | <i>t-value</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------|----|-------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Single | 46 | 37.73 | 16.82 | 0.20 | 0.84 |
| Married | 27 | 36.69 | 15.12 | | |

It was assumed that there would be a significant difference between married and single people Body Shape concern . As shown in table-2, the result revealed no significant difference between between married and single people Body Shape concern with $t(90) = 0.20$, $p > .05$. However, there was a mean difference between single and ($M = 37.73$, $SD = 16.82$), and married participants ($M = 36.69$, $SD = 15.12$).

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Table-3: Mean difference on the score of the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ).between the male and female participants.

| Variables | N | Mean | SD | <i>t-value</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------|----|-------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Male | 15 | 28.33 | 12.46 | 1.54 | .14 |
| Female | 58 | 35.67 | 14.47 | | |

It was assumed that there would be a significant difference between male and female body shape concern . As shown in table-3, the result revealed no significant difference between male and female participants body shape concern with $t(90) = 1.54$, $p > .05$. However, there was a mean difference between male and (M =44.33, SD = 20.46), and female participants (M = 35.67, SD = 14.47).

Table-4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation among Social media, self esteem and Body image (N=238)

| Variables | Social media | self esteem | Body image |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| Social media | - | -.28 | -.033 |
| self esteem | | - | .044 |
| Body image | | | - |

$p > 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$

Table 4, The table presents Pearson correlation coefficients among Social Media Usage, Self-Esteem, and Body Image for a sample of 238 participants, showing negative correlations between Social Media Usage and both Self-Esteem (-0.28) and Body Image (-0.33), and a positive correlation between Self-Esteem and Body Image (0.44).

Discussion:

This research on the effects of social media on self-esteem and body image shows a slight difference in self esteem based on gender. Specifically, the findings shows that male self-esteem generally remains a bit higher compared to the self-esteem of female counterpart in the context of social media exposure, but the relationship is not significant according to statistical operations. This contradicts with existing literature, which often highlights the impact of social media on male self-esteem (Smith & Duggan, 2020). The results also shows that man less likely to be influenced by idealized body. The reason behind this is is that society pay less attention to the appearance man (Perloff, 2014).

Conversely, women are more susceptible to losses their self-esteem because of their frequent encounter with idealized body shown to them on social media . This finding aligns with established researches which shows that women engages in social comparison and internalize unrealistic beauty standards often showed on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, this comparison leads to decline in self-esteem(Fardouly et al., 2015).

The research also suggests that when women and man are exposed to

idealized images it affect women more in terms of body image as compared to men. Women are highly vulnerable due to social comparison and the pursuit of external validation, which is because of idealized portrayals seen online (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017).

Single individuals are affected by these idealized images because they seek approval and validation through social media, leading to greater body dissatisfaction when faced with unachievable beauty standards. In contrast, married people enjoy a more stable support system and they rely less on appearance-driven validation, which can be helpful in controlling some of the negative effects of social media exposure (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017).

The research shows relationships between social media use, self-esteem, and body image. Findings highlight a negative correlation between social media usage, self-esteem and body image, showing that higher social media use might be the cause of low self-esteem and increased body related concerns. A slightly positive correlation was also found between self-esteem and body image, suggesting that greater self-esteem is associated with a more positive body image. However, none of these correlations were significant statistically ($p > .05$), indicating that the results may be because of chance. These trends point in the expected direction but require further researches stronger evidences to confirm meaningful associations. The results also highlight the role of individual differences in how social media affects people.

Conclusion:

1. This study mainly aimed to explore the relationship among social media usage, self-esteem, and body image, considering gender and marital status as main factors. The data showed trends which are consistent with existing literature, which shows that women are more vulnerable. When they encounter idealized portrayal on social media it leads to declines in self-esteem and body image. But this observed correlations was not statistically significant. It was revealed that male self-esteem appeared slightly higher than female self-esteem in the context of social media exposure, and it contradicts with previous findings that suggests negative impacts on male self-perception. This discrepancy may be because of the less emphasis by the society on male appearance.
2. The findings also suggest that women are more prone to comparison and also to internalizing unrealistic beauty standards, leading to high body dissatisfaction. Additionally, individuals who are single they are more susceptible to validation based appearance, whereas those individuals who are married may benefit from protective social support systems that acts as a shield against these effects.
3. However, the correlations between social media usage, self-esteem, and body image followed expected patterns. There was a negative associations between social media use and both self-esteem and body

image, and there was a positive association between self-esteem and body image—but none of these relations were statistically significant. These results show these trends need further investigation with larger and more diverse samples to establish conclusions.

4. Overall, the study highlights the importance of considering individual differences, especially gender and marital status, when trying to determine the psychological impact of social media. Future researches should mainly focus on clarifying these relationships and explore potential protective factors that can control the adverse effects of idealized media imagery.

Limitations:

1. This study also has several limitations that may have influenced the results. Firstly, the sample size was of 165 participants, 107 females and only 58 males, which might have been too small to provide tangible conclusions. Additionally, this sample represents only a small portion of the total young population aged 18-35 at the University of Swat. A larger sample size could have provided different results and offered a more accurate representation of the population.
2. Participants were recruited via social media platforms, which may introduce selection bias.
3. The study sample was from students of the University of Swat which is a single institution (University of Swat), which may not be representative of other populations.
4. Previous researches on this topic often used methods where participants were directly exposed to social media images and then immediately assessed for body image and self-esteem using questionnaires. In contrast, the current study measured participants' self-reported media usage and compared it with their body image and self-esteem scores from separate questionnaires. This methodological difference could have significantly influenced the findings.
5. Another limitation is that the study relied entirely on self-reported data. The results assume that participants answered all questions truthfully and accurately, honestly reflecting their feelings, habits, and experiences throughout the questionnaires addressed media usage, there is a possibility that participants responded in a socially desirable manner rather than truthfully. This response bias could have influenced the accuracy of their answers, thereby introducing bias into the overall research findings.



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