



EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BODY IMAGE DISSATISFACTION AMONG TEENAGERS

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Abstract

Teenagers today are highly engaged with social media and are often influenced by the content they consume, particularly content related to beauty, fitness, and appearance. This influence can significantly shape their perceptions of body image. Motivated by previous research in this area, the present study aims to analyze the relationship between social media usage and body image dissatisfaction among teenagers, with a specific focus on engagement with appearance-related content. A sample of 118 teenagers from various schools of Patiala, Punjab, was collected through Google Forms. The data was gathered using investigator-constructed scales measuring general social media usage, engagement with specific content, and body image dissatisfaction. Statistical techniques including one-way ANOVA, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and t-tests were employed for data analysis. The results indicated no significant difference in body image dissatisfaction across low, medium, and high levels of general social media usage. However, a significant positive correlation was found between engagement with specific social media content (e.g., beauty, fitness, fashion) and body image dissatisfaction, suggesting that higher engagement with such content is associated with greater dissatisfaction. Additionally, no significant gender differences were observed in the relationship between content engagement and body image dissatisfaction.

Key words: Social media usage, social media content engagement, body image dissatisfaction

Introduction

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a dominant force shaping how individuals perceive themselves and others. Among the most impressionable users of these platforms are teenagers—an age group that is navigating critical developmental milestones in identity formation, self-concept, and emotional regulation. With the increasing popularity of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube, adolescents are now continuously exposed to curated images and videos that often idealize beauty, fitness, and lifestyle standards. These platforms, originally designed for connection and self-expression, have evolved into powerful tools of social comparison, subtly influencing how teenagers evaluate their own physical appearance and curate their body image.

Body image refers to how an individual perceives or thinks about their own physical appearance." Cash (2003) emphasizes that body image is actually body images which encompasses one's body related self perceptions and

self attitude including thoughts, believes, feelings and behaviours. It refers to the figure that individuals form of their bodies in their mind.

During adolescence, this perception is particularly malleable due to ongoing physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. The societal and peer influences that originated primarily from family, school, and traditional media have now been supplemented by social media. Teenagers are not only consumers of media but also active participants who create, share, and receive feedback on visual content. This interactivity can amplify both the positive and negative consequences of body image perceptions. A negative self-perception can result in individuals feeling unhappy with their bodies. According to Albukrani et al. (2024), body image satisfaction is shaped by influences from both social media and family. This dissatisfaction often stems from the pressure to meet societal ideals and expectations regarding physical appearance.

Numerous studies suggest a significant association between social media use and body dissatisfaction. According to the Tripartite influence model developed by Thompson et al. (1999), the body dissatisfaction results when individual perceive discrepancy between their physical appearance and the beauty ideal transmitted by media, family and peers. These beauty ideals are first learned through social comparisons and then become internalized. Social media has a big role in social comparisons and idealized appearance internalization. Ideal and attractive celebrities, influencers and even peers lead individuals to compare their own body to what they see on screen. This comparison slowly turns them to dislike their own body.

This phenomenon of body dissatisfaction is more prominent in adolescents. It is due to the physical, social, and psychological changes they go through at this age. Adolescent girls are found to be more vulnerable because of the changes in their body during and following puberty. Quittkat et al. (2019) found body dissatisfaction higher in females than in males. Even the importance of appearance is found to be higher in females.

The mechanisms of influence of social media are multifaceted: social comparison, exposure to unrealistic beauty ideals, cyberbullying, validation through likes and comments, and the pervasive use of filters and photo-editing tools all contribute to a distorted perception of body norms. Platforms often reward appearance-centric content with visibility and engagement, reinforcing the notion that physical attractiveness equates to social value. This can lead to increased body surveillance, internalization of thin or muscular ideals, and ultimately, low self-esteem, anxiety, disordered eating behaviors, and even depression.

Review of previous literature

Rounsefel et al. (2019) examined how regular use of social media and exposure to appearance-focused content influence body image and eating behaviors in healthy young adults aged 18 to 30. The review included 30 studies. The results indicated that both frequent social media use and viewing image-centric content were linked to increased body dissatisfaction and some poor dietary habits. Additionally, young adults who participated in negative social media behaviors—such as engaging in body-related comparisons, seeking validation, negative body talk, or self-objectification—or who were frequently exposed to idealized images of peers, celebrities, or fitness influencers, were found to be more vulnerable to negative outcomes related to body image and food choices.

Gioia, Griffiths & Boursier (2020) evaluated the uncharted predictive role of body shame on Social networking Sites (SNS) use, testing the intervening effect of body image control in photos on SNS. A total of 693 Italian adolescents participated in the study, which could only partially confirm the direct effect of body shame on uncontrolled SNS use but could strongly predict body image control in SNS photos, leading indirectly to both male and female adolescents' troublesome social media use as its cause.

Vuong,et al. (2021) explored how social media use is related to thin and muscular internalization and body dissatisfaction among a sample of 1153 adolescent boys and girls. It found that social media use is positively correlated with body dissatisfaction in both the genders. Adolescents face unhealthy standards of strong and skinny paradox on social media. They internalize a construct about the body which is both strong and skinny. As a result slowly they develop dissatisfaction with their own body.

Phan & Dinh (2023) conducted a survey to evaluate the body satisfaction of high school students before and after viewing images of popular influencers. Through the results, they concluded that while both genders' body satisfaction was negatively affected by social media, young women were influenced more prominently than young men. This study significantly shows how social media can be used as a method to promote the ideal body standard.

Dane and Bhatia (2023) reviewed 50 studies in 17 countries to establish the relation of social media usage with body image and eating disorders among young people. It found that social media usage leads to body image concerns, eating disorders and poor mental health via the mediating pathways of social comparison, ideal internalization and self objectification. Exposure to specific elements such as social media trends or appearance-centered platforms intensifies this connection. Factors like pre-existing body image issues, gender, or a high BMI further contribute to its impact.

Sanzari et al. (2023) conducted a survey of two demographically varied groups of undergraduate students in 2015 and 2022 to examine changes in social media use, disordered eating behaviors, and body image satisfaction. The findings revealed that, by 2022, students reported higher levels of body image disturbance and increased time spent on social media. However, it was the type of content viewed—rather than the duration of use—that was linked to body image concerns and disordered eating. Specifically, exposure to weight loss-related content was associated with decreased body appreciation and more frequent binge eating episodes. In contrast, viewing positive or neutral content did not offer any protective benefits for body image.

Choukas-Bradley et al. (2024) in their handbook of children and screen, outlines the literature regarding social media usage and concerns regarding body image and disordered eating among adolescence. It highlights that social media provide opportunities to the adolescents to engage in comparison with celebrities, influencers or even attractive peers. This leads to self body image dissatisfaction which concerns both males and females.

Suhag and Rauniyar (2024) reviewed the relation between social media usage and undesirable body image judgments. Social media platforms highlight physical attractiveness. Admiring and following celebrities and social media influencers can promote disordered eating behaviors as adolescents strive to match their beauty and fitness ideals. This often results in the development of a negative body image and reduced self-worth. The study emphasizes the potential risks social media poses to adolescents' physical and mental health by encouraging unhealthy eating patterns and damaging self-perception.

Significance of the study

Social media engagement can be understood in two primary ways: the duration of time users spend on these platforms, and the nature of the content they interact with. While social media use spans all age groups—including adults and older individuals—it has a particularly strong influence on adolescents.

Teenagers are in a critical developmental phase where their values, attitudes, and interests are still taking shape. This period is also marked by major physical, emotional, and social changes, making them more susceptible to environmental influences. Consequently, social media can affect teenagers more deeply than it does other age groups, often impacting their body image in harmful ways.

So the researchers wanted to study whether duration or the type of content consumed affect the body image of the adolescents.

Present Study

The present study analyzes the effect of social media on body image dissatisfaction among teenagers by examining the relationship between participants' responses to two sets of questionnaires. The first set focuses on social media usage, including statements such as frequently encountering content related to fitness, beauty, and fashion; following influencers, celebrities, or brands; and perceptions of social media portraying unrealistic beauty standards. It also includes feelings of pressure to conform to these standards and engaging in appearance-altering behaviors influenced by social media. The second set assesses body image dissatisfaction through responses to statements such as confidence in one's body image, feelings of being ignored due to looks, desires for a perfect body, and reliance on external validation. Additional items explore negative self-perceptions, body respect through healthy habits, critical attitudes toward physical features, engagement in practices like dieting or fasting, inspiration from idealized celebrity bodies, and feelings of physical intimidation by others. Together, these questionnaires aim to uncover how social media may contribute to body image concerns among adolescents.

Objectives

1. To study the main effect of social media usage in terms of body image dissatisfaction among teenagers.
2. To study the relationship between social media content engagement and body image dissatisfaction among teenagers.
3. To study the difference in body image dissatisfaction between teenager girls and boys.
4. To study the difference in social media content engagement between girls and boys teenagers

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in social media usage in terms of body image dissatisfaction among teenagers.
2. There is no significant relationship between specific social media content engagement and body image dissatisfaction among teenagers.
3. There is no significant difference in body image dissatisfaction between teenager girls and boys.
4. There is no significant difference in specific social media content engagement between teenager girls and boys.

Sample

A sample of 118 teenage students was selected from the population of students studying in various schools of Patiala, Punjab. A Google form was prepared and mailed to teenagers studying in various schools of Patiala to collect the data.

Tools used

1. Scale of social media effect constructed by investigators,
2. Scale of body image dissatisfaction constructed by investigators.

Procedure and Data Collection

The research aimed to examine the impact of social media usage on body image dissatisfaction among teenagers. A survey method was employed to collect data for the study. A sample of 118 teenage students was selected, and data were gathered regarding their social media usage and body image dissatisfaction.

To facilitate data collection, the researchers developed two standardized scales—one to measure social media usage and the other to assess body image dissatisfaction. The collected data were then analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Based on the analysis, results were interpreted and conclusions were drawn.

Statistical tools used

One way ANOVA and Pearson's coefficient of correlation technique and t-ratio were used to analyze the data.

Analysis

1. To study the main effect of social media usage in terms of body image dissatisfaction among teenagers. This objective was tested using the hypothesis, 'there is no significant difference in social media usage in terms of body image dissatisfaction among teenagers'. One way ANOVA was computed and F- value was calculated.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of body image dissatisfaction

Groups	N	M	SD	SEm
L	41	28.83	5.422	.847
M	53	29.57	5.648	.776
H	24	29.13	6.202	1.266

Table 2: One way ANOVA of body image dissatisfaction

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	F	Significance level
Between groups	12.822	2	6.411	.198	NS
Within groups	3719.449	115	32.343		
Total	3732.271	117			

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation values for the groups low, medium and high social media usage. The mean values for low, medium and high social media usage groups are 28.83, 29.57 and 29.13 respectively and standard deviation values are 5.422, 5.648 and 6.202 respectively. The F- value shown in table 2 is found to be .198 which is not significant at .05 level. Hence the hypothesis, 'there is no significant difference in social media usage in terms of body image dissatisfaction among teenagers' may be accepted. This means that there is no difference in body image dissatisfaction for low, medium and high social media usage among teenagers.

2. To study the relationship between specific social media content engagement and body image dissatisfaction among teenagers.

This objective was tested using the hypothesis, 'there is no significant relationship between specific social media content engagement and body image dissatisfaction among teenagers'

Table 3: Coefficient of correlation between social media content engagement and body image dissatisfaction

Variable	N	M	SD	R	Significance level
Specific Social Media content engagement	118	15.07	3.040	.446	.01
Body Image Dissatisfaction	118	29.22	5.648		

Table 3 shows the coefficient of correlation value between specific social media content engagement and body image dissatisfaction. **The mean values for** social media content engagement and body image dissatisfaction are 15.07 and 29.22 respectively and the standard deviation values are 3.040 and 5.648 respectively. The coefficient of correlation value is .446 which is significant at .01 level. This shows that more the specific social media content engagement more will be the body image dissatisfaction.

3. To study the significant difference in body image dissatisfaction between teenager girls and boys. The present objective was tested using the hypothesis, 'there is no significant difference in body image dissatisfaction between teenager girls and boys'. The difference in mean values of body image dissatisfaction between girls and boys was analysed by finding t-ratio value through the following table:

Table 4: Difference in mean values between girls and boys teenagers for body image dissatisfaction

Group	N	M	SD	SEm	Df	t-value	Significance
Girls	75	30.01	5.694	.657	116	2.041	.05
Boys	43	27.84	5.354	.816			

Table 4 shows the difference in mean values of body image dissatisfaction between girls and boys teenagers. The mean values are found to be 30.01 and 27.84 and standard deviation are 5.694 & 5.354 for girls and boys respectively. The difference in means, that is, t-value is 2.041 for 116 degrees of freedom. This is significant at .05 level. Hence the hypothesis, 'there is no significant difference in body image dissatisfaction between girls and boys teenagers,' may not be accepted. Since the mean value for girls is more than boys so girls encounter more body dissatisfaction than boys.

4. To study the significant difference in specific social media content engagement between teenager girls and boys.

The present objective was tested using the hypothesis, 'there is no significant difference in specific social media content engagement between teenager girls and boys'. The difference in mean values of body image dissatisfaction between girls and boys was analysed by finding t-ratio value through the following table:

Table 5: Difference in mean values of specific social media content engagement between girls and boys teenagers

Group	N	M	SD	SEm	Df	t-value	significance
F	75	15.51	2.718	.314	116	2.101	.05
M	43	14.30	3.433	.524			

Table 5 shows the difference in mean values of specific social media content engagement between girls and boys teenagers. The mean values are found to be 15.51 and 14.30 and standard deviation values are found to be 2.718 & 3.433 for girls and boys respectively. The difference in means, that is, t-value is 2.101 for 116degrees of freedom. This is significant at .05 level. Hence the hypothesis, ‘there is no significant difference in specific social media content engagement between girls and boys teenagers,’ may not be accepted. Since the mean value for girls is more than boys so girls specific social media content engagement is more than boys.

Results and Discussion

The present study aimed to understand the impact of social media on body image dissatisfaction among adolescents. Specifically, it sought to examine two aspects: first, whether the duration of social media usage affects body image dissatisfaction, and second, whether exposure to specific types of content—such as those related to beauty, health, fitness, brands, and celebrities—has an influence. Three key objectives were investigated:

- the effect of the duration of social media usage,
- the relationship between specific social media content and body image dissatisfaction, and
- gender differences in both body image dissatisfaction and social media content consumption.

To address the first objective, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether body image dissatisfaction differed significantly across groups with low, medium, and high levels of social media usage. As indicated in the results, the amount of time spent on social media does not significantly influence body image dissatisfaction among adolescents. A possible explanation to this finding is that adolescents engage with social media for various purposes—such as academic learning, social interaction, and entertainment—and not all usage is appearance-focused. Therefore, duration alone may not be a sufficient indicator of exposure to harmful or appearance-centric content.

The second objective explored the relationship between specific social media content engagement -particularly content related to beauty, fitness, brands, and celebrities- and body image dissatisfaction. The results (Table 3) showed a moderate positive correlation ($r = .446$, $p < .01$) between consumption of such content and body image dissatisfaction. This indicates that greater exposure to appearance-oriented social media content is associated with increased body image dissatisfaction. These findings are consistent with prior research conducted by Castellanos Silva & Steins (2023) and Zhu (2023) suggested that idealized images and unrealistic beauty standards often portrayed on social media contribute to negative self-perceptions and body dissatisfaction, especially among impressionable adolescents. Also Czubaj et al. (2025) found that exposure to fitspiration content on social media negatively affect the self esteem and body image perception among adolescents especially women.

Gender differences were examined in the third objective. As shown in Table 4, girls reported significantly higher levels of body image dissatisfaction than boys ($M = 30.01$ vs. $M = 27.84$; $t = 2.041$, $p < .05$). Quittkat et al. (2019) and Ganesan et al.(2018) also found body dissatisfaction higher in females than in males. The higher dissatisfaction among girls may be attributed to heightened societal and media pressures on female appearance, as well as greater internalization of beauty ideals.

Also girls reported higher consumption of social media content related to appearance ($M = 15.51$) compared to boys ($M = 14.30$), with this difference being statistically significant ($t = 2.101$, $p < .05$). This aligns with the previous finding and suggests that girls are not only more exposed to such content but may also be more influenced by it, thereby experiencing greater dissatisfaction.

Overall, the study highlights that while the amount of social media use does not directly influence body image dissatisfaction, the type of content consumed—particularly appearance-oriented content—has a significant impact. Gender differences further suggest that girls are both more exposed to and more affected by such content than boys. These findings underscore the importance of promoting media literacy and encouraging healthier social media habits among adolescents, particularly in terms of curating the types of content they engage with.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the nuanced relationship between social media use and body image dissatisfaction among teenagers. While overall social media usage was not significantly associated with body image dissatisfaction, the type of content consumed played a critical role. Specifically, teenagers who engaged more frequently with appearance-focused content—such as beauty, fitness, and fashion posts—reported higher levels of body image dissatisfaction. This suggests that it is not the amount of time spent on social media, but rather the nature of the content that influences body image perceptions. Furthermore, the absence of significant gender differences indicates that both male and female teenagers are similarly affected by engagement with appearance-related content. These results underscore the need for increased awareness among teenagers, educators, and parents about the potential psychological impacts of curated social media content. Interventions promoting media literacy and encouraging critical engagement with online content may help mitigate the negative effects on body image during this formative developmental stage.

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