

The Effects of Social Media on Body Image among adolescent girls

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Abstract- The rapid growth of social media platforms has significantly influenced how adolescent girls perceive their bodies. This study investigates the impact of social media usage on body image dissatisfaction among adolescent girls aged 14 to 17. Drawing on social comparison theory and objectification theory, the research explores how exposure to idealized images and peer feedback affects self-perception and body esteem. A mixed-methods approach, combining survey data from 200 participants with in-depth interviews, reveals a strong correlation between frequent social media use—especially platforms focused on visual content such as Instagram and Ticktock-and increased body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and disordered eating behaviors. The findings highlight the role of unrealistic beauty standards and the reinforcement of appearance-based validation in shaping negative body image. This study underscores the need for media literacy education and supportive interventions aimed at promoting positive body image among adolescents.

Keywords: Body image, social media, adolescent girls

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of our daily lives, with billions of people using various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and many others to connect, share information, and entertain themselves. While social media has many benefits, such as staying connected with friends and family, it has also been associated with various negative effects, including its impact on body image (Huang, Peng, and Ahn, 2021). Social media platforms are filled with images of people with what seems to be the "perfect" body, often manipulated through editing and filters. These images create unrealistic beauty standards and can lead to individuals feeling insecure about their bodies. Social media use has been linked to body dissatisfaction, negative body image, and disordered eating behaviors (Olanrewaju et al., 2020).

Social media platforms are often criticized for not doing enough to regulate and remove harmful content, such as images promoting extreme weight loss or unhealthy body standards. As a result, many people have become advocates for body positivity, encouraging people to love their bodies regardless of their shape or size (Appel et al., 2020). Social media's impact on body image is a complex issue, with both positive and negative effects. While social media has the potential to promote body positivity and self-love, it can also perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards and contribute to body dissatisfaction (Baker, Ferszt, and Breines, 2019).

Adolescence is an important period of development, with the main physical, social, cognitive, and emotional changes and identity formation occurring. Adolescence is also a time when young people begin to use social media, Internet platforms that enable social interaction by creating individual online profiles and sharing photos, videos, and other media on sites or apps such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook (Vall-Roqué et al., 2021). Social media has been found to have both positive and negative effects on the lives of Adolescence. Positive aspects of social media use include increased peer contact and support, and learning opportunities (Mahon & Hevey, 2021). Research has largely reported negative effects from Adolescent use of social media, which contributes to mental health difficulties including increased depression, anxiety, self-harming behaviors, decreased social and emotional well-being, low self-esteem, and negative body image (Hogue & Mills, 2019). For girls, the combination of reaching puberty, changing their bodies, the importance of peer approval, and the formation of romantic relationships can increase stress exposure to a negative body image. There is a growing body of research suggesting that there is a relationship between body dissatisfaction and time spent on social media in adolescents, Social media use is associated with

increased body dissatisfaction, several studies have found that spending more time on social media is linked to higher levels of body dissatisfaction in adolescents. This may be because social media often presents unrealistic beauty standards that can be difficult to achieve, leading to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with one's appearance)Sukanto, Hamidah and Fajrianthi, 2019

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Harris & Griffiths, 2023), Celebrities can have a significant impact on the lives of adolescents, especially in terms of their appearance and body image. Adolescents often look to celebrities as role models and may strive to emulate their appearance and style. This can lead to pressure to conform to unrealistic and often unhealthy beauty standards. For example, many celebrities are known for their extremely thin or muscular bodies, which can result in adolescents feeling pressure to lose weight or build muscle to achieve a similar appearance.

Kaplan, and Mazurek (2018), stated that there are also potential negative effects of social media on adolescents. These can include Cyberbullying: Adolescents may be bullied or harassed online, which can have serious consequences for their mental health and well-being. Lack of privacy: Adolescents may not always understand the importance of protecting their personal information online and may be at risk of having their privacy violated. Comparison: Seeing others' carefully curated and often unrealistic online personas can lead adolescents to compare themselves to others and feel inadequate. Social isolation: Spending too much time on social media can lead to reduced face-to-face social interactions and a feeling of disconnection from the real world.

(Bakeer, 2018) Adolescents need to understand that the images they see of celebrities in the media are often highly edited and do not reflect reality. They should focus on their own health and well-being, rather than trying to conform to societal beauty standards. It's also important for parents, teachers, and other adults to encourage adolescents to embrace their individuality and to help them develop a positive self-image.

(Appel et al 2020) Body image is the way that a person perceives, thinks about, and feels about their own body. It can be influenced by a variety of factors, including cultural and societal messages, personal experiences, and relationships. A person's body image can affect their self-esteem, confidence, and overall mental and emotional well-being. A healthy body image is when a person feels comfortable and confident in their own body and can appreciate their natural shape and size. An unhealthy body image is when a person has negative thoughts and feelings about their body, and may feel self-conscious or dissatisfied with their appearance.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

Adolescence is a period of significant physical, emotional, and psychological development. Social media platforms often showcase idealized and unrealistic body standards, leading to negative body image perceptions among adolescents. This can result in low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and mental health issues. Understanding these effects helps healthcare professionals, including nurses to identify and address body image concerns and enhancing adolescents mental health.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the use of social media and body image among high school female students.
2. To identify if the device used, most common content of social media, most common platform, time spent on social media, and social media can predict their body image.

Hypothesis

1. Increased social media use is associated with higher level of body dis-satisfactions among adolescents, indicating negative effect o social media use on body image.

Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design. A phenomenological approach is employed to understand the lived experiences of the participants, where the researcher focuses on a specific topic and, without making any assumptions, derives findings offering support for future research. This further helps

in fostering an environment conducive to reflection, offering a systematic and logical framework for analyzing by the researcher (Moustakas,1994). Body image as a construct is subjective, and every individual has a different experience with their body image. Studying this concept from a phenomenological perspective helped in comprehending the participants' perspectives about their body image.

Participants

The participants were adolescent girls in the age group of 14–17 years, who studied at a public school in the Mumbai Maharashtra. The study used purposive non-probability sampling to select 200 participants, where the responses were collected from only 18 due to data saturation. Further, as per inclusion criteria, the participants who shared personal concerns about their body image with either their school counselor or class teacher were contacted to become a part of the study.

Instruments

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants, which were 30–40 minutes long. There were Pre-determined questions based on the previous literature, including open-ended exploratory questions that were asked during the interview. These questions were constructed to gain an understanding of how participants think and perceive their body image. The open-ended questions utilized in the study explored the perspectives of participants on their body image, whether they actively engaged in content related to physical appearance (i.e. following celebrities and influencers), whether they ever made comparisons to others based on physical appearance, and how people their age responded to the appearance-based content shared by the participants. These were some of the themes that were explored in interviews. Further, follow-up questions were asked to bring out the positive or negative experiences of the participants with their body image.

DATA ANALYSIS

Following the steps provided by Creswell (2014) in data analysis, the researcher first began with creating and organizing data files. To accomplish this, the researcher transcribed and organized the recorded interviews individually. Accordingly, the participants' interviews were labeled chronologically. In the next step, the researcher read the transcribed interviews and

highlighted the answers expressed by the participants. This helped in understanding the underlying reflective tone and overall meaning.

The third step involved describing and classifying the data into meaningful codes, which were used in producing various themes that originated after a thorough examination of the participants' responses. Further quotes and narratives were used to describe the “what” and “how” experienced by the participants, highlighting the textual and structural description of the phenomenon under research. This was accomplished by utilizing the quotes and narratives of the participants, who expressed positive and negative perspectives on how social media influences their body image. In the final step, the data was interpreted to extract the meanings answering the research questions and check their alignment with the past studies.

Moustakas (1994) explained Husserl's Epoche, whereby following the process of bracketing, the researcher was able to leave aside prejudged ideas and avoid previous experiences to engage in a more direct and unbiased exploration of the phenomenon. To further maintain the reliability of the data, the researcher rechecked the transcripts and coded data for any transparent mistakes.

LIMITATIONS

The study had notable limitations considering it was conducted in a single school setting. The participant pool was restricted to samples who were from similar socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to a broader population, particularly those from low-income groups. Future research should aim for a more inclusive participant selection from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds to enhance the study's external validity.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals a dynamic interplay of individual experiences, societal pressure, and the negative impact of social media on the body image of adolescent girls. Most of the girls compared their appearance with celebrities and peers, reflecting feelings of body dissatisfaction. The study also reveals a stark contrast between positive online interactions and real-world

instances of body shaming and discrimination. The participants also pursued unhealthy eating habits, extreme diets, and hard work out routines. To empower adolescent girls, schools should strategize educational workshops and build support networks with the help of school counselors and family members to cultivate a positive body image. Future research studies should focus on understanding the coping strategies of Indian adolescent girls to mitigate the detrimental influence of social media on their body image.

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