



Effect of Social Media Usage on Body Self-Image and Self-Esteem among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media has raised concerns regarding its potential influence on psychological well-being, particularly body self-image and self-esteem among young adults. The present study examined the effect of social media usage on body self-image and self-esteem among young adults. A quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative research design was employed. The sample consisted of 105 young adults aged 18 to 23 years, selected through purposive sampling. Participants were classified into high social media usage ($n = 52$) and low social media usage ($n = 55$) groups based on their self-reported average daily duration of social media use. Data were collected using a Social Media Usage Questionnaire, the Body Self-Image Questionnaire–Short Form (BSIQ-SF), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Independent-samples t -tests were conducted to compare body self-image and self-esteem between the two groups. The findings revealed no statistically significant difference in body self-image between participants with high and low social media usage, $t = -0.449$, $p = .657$. Similarly, no statistically significant difference was observed in self-esteem between the two groups, $t = 0.056$, $p = .955$. The results suggest that the daily duration of social media usage alone may not significantly influence body self-image or self-esteem among young adults. The findings highlight the importance of considering qualitative aspects of social media engagement, including the nature of online activities, content exposure, and individual psychological characteristics, rather than relying solely on the amount of time spent on social networking platforms. The study contributes to the growing literature on social media and psychological well-being and provides implications for future research, digital literacy, and mental health interventions.

Keywords: social media usage, body self-image, self-esteem, young adults, psychological well-being.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the ways in which individuals communicate, access information, and interact with others. Among these technological developments, social media has emerged as one of the most influential aspects of contemporary life, particularly for young adults. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and similar applications facilitate communication, entertainment, education, and self-expression while also providing opportunities for identity exploration and social connectedness. As the use of these platforms has increased substantially, researchers have become increasingly interested in their potential influence on psychological well-being, particularly on body self-image and self-esteem.

Young adulthood is a critical developmental period characterized by identity formation, increasing autonomy, emotional maturity, and the establishment of interpersonal relationships. During this stage, individuals become more conscious of their physical appearance and are often influenced by peer feedback, cultural expectations, and societal standards of attractiveness. The visual nature of contemporary social media platforms has intensified these influences by exposing users to carefully curated and digitally enhanced images that frequently portray unrealistic ideals of physical appearance (Perloff, 2014). Such exposure may encourage individuals to compare themselves with others, thereby influencing their perceptions of their own bodies and their overall evaluation of self-worth. According to Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals evaluate their own abilities and characteristics by comparing themselves with others, and social media provides an environment in which such appearance-related comparisons occur frequently.

Unlike traditional forms of mass media, social media encourages active participation through the creation, sharing, and evaluation of user-generated content. Features such as photographs, videos, comments, likes, and follower counts provide immediate social feedback and may reinforce appearance-related self-evaluations. Consequently, researchers have increasingly examined the relationship between social media usage and various indicators of psychological well-being, including body image, self-esteem, social appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and life satisfaction (Perloff, 2014; Rounsefell et al., 2019).

Body self-image refers to an individual's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward his or her own physical appearance. It encompasses the extent to which individuals are satisfied with their bodies and perceive their appearance positively or negatively. A positive body self-image is generally associated with greater confidence, psychological well-being, and self-acceptance, whereas a negative body self-image has been linked to body dissatisfaction, unhealthy eating behaviours, depressive symptoms, and reduced quality of life (Pop, 2016; Sharma, 2024). The increasing popularity of image-centred social networking platforms has heightened concerns regarding body self-image because users are frequently exposed to idealized representations of beauty that may encourage upward social comparison and unrealistic appearance expectations (Perloff, 2014; Pasande et al., 2023).

Self-esteem is another important psychological construct that reflects an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth and competence. According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem represents a relatively stable attitude toward oneself that influences emotional adjustment, interpersonal functioning, academic achievement, and overall psychological well-being. Individuals with high self-esteem generally demonstrate greater resilience, confidence, and life satisfaction, whereas those with lower self-esteem are more susceptible to anxiety, emotional distress, and negative self-evaluation. Previous studies have suggested that social media may influence self-esteem through processes such as appearance-based social comparison, dependence on online approval, and exposure to idealized lifestyles (Ahmad et al.,

2017; Hawi & Samaha, 2016). However, other investigations have reported that social media may also foster social connectedness, emotional support, and opportunities for self-expression, thereby contributing positively to self-esteem under certain conditions (Tian et al., 2019).

Body self-image and self-esteem are closely related constructs because perceptions of one's physical appearance often contribute to overall self-evaluation. Individuals who are satisfied with their physical appearance tend to report higher self-esteem, whereas dissatisfaction with appearance is frequently associated with lower self-worth and poorer psychological adjustment (Pop, 2016; Tiwari, 2014). Given the central role of physical appearance in social interactions during young adulthood, understanding the relationship between social media usage, body self-image, and self-esteem has become an important area of psychological research.

Although a substantial body of research has examined the association between social media use and psychological well-being, findings remain mixed. Several studies have reported that greater social media engagement is associated with poorer body-related perceptions and lower self-esteem (Perloff, 2014; Portugal & Siquara, 2022; Sharma, 2024), whereas others have found weak, inconsistent, or non-significant relationships after accounting for individual differences, cultural contexts, and patterns of social media engagement (Lawless, 2021; Vandenbosch et al., 2022). These inconsistencies suggest that the relationship between social media usage and psychological functioning is complex and may depend on multiple personal, social, and contextual factors.

Against this background, the present study examines the effect of social media usage on body self-image and self-esteem among young adults. By focusing on differences in the daily duration of social media usage, rather than problematic or addictive use alone, the study seeks to provide further insight into the psychological implications of routine social media engagement. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on social media and psychological well-being and to provide evidence that may assist psychologists, educators, counsellors, and other mental health professionals in promoting healthy digital media practices among young adults.

Review of Literature

Social Media Usage among Young Adults

The rapid expansion of digital technology has transformed the way individuals communicate, interact, and construct their identities. Among young adults, social media has become an indispensable part of everyday life, serving as a platform for communication, entertainment, education, networking, and self-expression. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Snapchat allow users to create, share, and consume content continuously, making them highly influential in shaping attitudes, behaviours, and psychological well-being.

Unlike traditional media, social networking platforms encourage active participation through posting photographs, videos, comments, and personal experiences while simultaneously exposing users to carefully curated representations of others' lives. Such interactions increase opportunities for social comparison, self-presentation, and external validation. Perloff (2014) argued that social media differs fundamentally from conventional media because users are not merely passive recipients of information but active participants who constantly compare themselves with idealized online representations.

Consequently, social media has become an important factor influencing individuals' perceptions of themselves and others.

Young adulthood is particularly sensitive to these influences because it is characterized by identity exploration, increasing independence, and heightened awareness of peer evaluation. During this developmental period, individuals frequently seek acceptance and validation from their social environment. Continuous exposure to digitally enhanced images, influencer culture, and appearance-focused content may therefore shape young adults' evaluations of their own physical appearance and personal worth.

Social Media Usage and Body Self-Image

Body self-image refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of his or her physical appearance, including perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and attitudes toward one's body. It reflects how individuals perceive their attractiveness, body shape, body size, and overall physical appearance in relation to personal expectations and sociocultural standards.

One of the most widely accepted explanations for the influence of social media on body self-image is the process of social comparison. According to Perloff (2014), social networking platforms expose users to highly attractive and often digitally manipulated images, encouraging upward comparisons that may contribute to dissatisfaction with one's own appearance. Because users frequently compare themselves with celebrities, influencers, and peers presenting idealized versions of themselves, repeated exposure may distort body-related evaluations and promote unrealistic appearance standards.

Several empirical studies support this perspective. Rekha (2012) reported that media advertisements portraying thinness as the ideal body type significantly influenced women's body dissatisfaction and perceptions of attractiveness. Similarly, exposure to idealized media images has been found to increase concerns regarding body weight, shape, and physical appearance, particularly among young women.

Visual social networking platforms appear to exert particularly strong influences on body-related perceptions. Rounsefell et al. (2019), in their systematic review, concluded that image-centred social media platforms contribute to body dissatisfaction and unhealthy eating behaviours by encouraging appearance comparisons and reinforcing unrealistic beauty ideals. Likewise, Park and Chun (2020) found that frequent exposure to fashion-related YouTube content influenced young women's perceptions of appearance by promoting the internalization of ideal body standards.

Recent research has further demonstrated the role of Instagram in shaping body self-image. Portugal and Siquara (2022) observed that greater Instagram use was associated with lower body satisfaction among young women. Similarly, Pasande et al. (2023) reported that extensive use of photo-editing applications on Instagram encouraged individuals to pursue unrealistic body ideals, thereby influencing evaluations of their own appearance. These findings suggest that visual editing tools and image enhancement features contribute to increasingly unattainable standards of beauty.

The influence of social media extends beyond dissatisfaction with physical appearance. Sharma (2024) reported that frequent exposure to idealized images on social networking platforms was associated with poorer body image, lower self-esteem, and increased social appearance anxiety among young adults. Such findings indicate that body-related concerns arising from social media may have broader implications for psychological well-being.

Nevertheless, social media does not invariably produce negative outcomes. Vandenbosch et al. (2022) argued that exposure to body-positive movements, diverse body representations, and supportive online communities may promote body acceptance and healthier body-related attitudes. These findings suggest that the impact of social media depends not merely on the duration of use but also on the quality and nature of the content consumed.

Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth and competence. It influences emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, academic performance, and psychological adjustment. Researchers have increasingly examined whether social media strengthens or weakens self-esteem through mechanisms such as social comparison, online feedback, and self-presentation.

Several investigations have reported negative associations between excessive social media engagement and self-esteem. Ahmad et al. (2017) found that greater Facebook usage predicted lower self-esteem because users frequently compared themselves with idealized portrayals of others. Similarly, Hawi and Samaha (2016) demonstrated that addictive social media use was negatively associated with self-esteem while simultaneously reducing life satisfaction. These findings suggest that dependence on external validation through likes, comments, and online approval may undermine individuals' evaluations of themselves.

Other researchers have emphasized the importance of social comparison in explaining these relationships. Parwin and Lone (2022) reported that problematic social media use and body image concerns jointly predicted lower self-esteem among university students. Likewise, Sarkar et al. (2022) observed a negative relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem among college students, although the strength of the association was relatively modest.

However, evidence regarding the psychological effects of social media remains mixed. Tian et al. (2019) reported that engagement with YouTube was positively associated with self-esteem and life satisfaction, whereas Instagram use demonstrated the opposite trend. These findings indicate that the psychological consequences of social media may vary depending on platform characteristics, users' motivations, and patterns of engagement rather than the amount of time spent online alone.

Body Self-Image and Self-Esteem

Body self-image and self-esteem are closely interconnected constructs that jointly contribute to psychological well-being. Individuals who evaluate their physical appearance positively generally experience greater confidence, higher self-worth, and better emotional adjustment, whereas dissatisfaction with one's body is frequently associated with diminished self-esteem.

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated this relationship. Tiwari (2014) found that greater satisfaction with one's body significantly enhanced self-esteem, suggesting that positive evaluations of physical appearance contribute substantially to overall self-worth. Similarly, Pop (2016) concluded that body image plays a significant role in determining self-esteem among university students, with individuals reporting more positive body evaluations also demonstrating higher self-esteem.

Further evidence has been provided by Kapoor et al. (2022), who observed that poor body image was associated with lower self-esteem and unhealthy eating behaviours among female college students.

Roque (2021) similarly reported that increased social networking site use during the COVID-19 lockdown contributed to body image disturbances and reduced self-esteem among adolescent girls and young women. These findings collectively indicate that body-related evaluations represent an important determinant of psychological well-being.

Existing Evidence and Inconsistencies

Although a considerable body of literature supports the association between social media use, body-related evaluations, and self-esteem, findings remain inconsistent. Numerous studies have reported that greater exposure to appearance-focused social media content predicts poorer body image and lower self-esteem (Perloff, 2014; Rounsefell et al., 2019; Portugal & Siquara, 2022; Sharma, 2024). Conversely, other investigations have observed weak, inconsistent, or non-significant relationships after considering demographic, cultural, and psychological factors (Lawless, 2021; Vandenbosch et al., 2022).

These inconsistencies may be attributed to several methodological differences. Previous studies have varied considerably with respect to participant characteristics, cultural settings, measurement instruments, research designs, and operational definitions of social media use. Many investigations have focused on social media addiction or general engagement without distinguishing between the duration of use and the nature of the content viewed. Furthermore, individual differences such as personality, resilience, body mass index, social support, and appearance-related social comparison may moderate the relationship between social media use and psychological outcomes.

Overall, the existing literature suggests that social media is neither inherently beneficial nor inherently harmful. Rather, its influence on body self-image and self-esteem appears to depend upon a complex interaction of individual characteristics, patterns of usage, and the nature of online experiences. These inconsistencies underscore the need for further empirical research examining the specific role of daily social media usage in shaping body self-image and self-esteem among young adults.

Research Gap

The existing body of literature demonstrates that social media has become an influential factor in the psychological well-being of young adults. Numerous studies have examined the relationship between social media usage and body image, self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, appearance-related social comparison, and mental health (Perloff, 2014; Rounsefell et al., 2019; Portugal & Siquara, 2022; Sharma et al., 2024). Although these studies have substantially advanced the understanding of the psychological consequences of social media use, several important gaps remain.

First, much of the existing research has focused on body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety, or body image disturbance, with comparatively limited attention given to body self-image as a broader psychological construct encompassing individuals' perceptions, evaluations, and attitudes toward their own physical appearance. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the relationship between social media usage and body self-image among young adults.

Second, previous investigations have largely examined social media addiction, problematic social media use, or overall engagement with social networking platforms. Comparatively fewer studies have explored whether the daily duration of social media usage itself is associated with body self-image and self-esteem. Since the amount of time spent on social media may influence the frequency of

exposure to appearance-focused content and opportunities for social comparison, examining differences based on daily usage represents an important area for investigation.

Third, findings concerning the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem remain inconsistent. While several studies have reported that greater social media use is associated with lower self-esteem (Ahmad et al., 2017; Hawi & Samaha, 2016), others have reported weak, mixed, or non-significant relationships after considering individual, contextual, and cultural factors (Lawless, 2021; Vandenbosch et al., 2022). These inconsistencies indicate that the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem requires further empirical clarification.

Fourth, a substantial proportion of the existing literature has been conducted in Western countries, with relatively limited evidence available from the Indian context. Cultural norms, beauty ideals, family influences, peer interactions, and patterns of social media engagement differ across societies and may influence how young adults perceive their bodies and evaluate their self-worth. Therefore, findings derived from Western populations cannot be generalized directly to Indian young adults without further empirical investigation.

Finally, although previous studies have independently examined social media usage in relation to body image or self-esteem, relatively few have investigated body self-image and self-esteem simultaneously as psychological outcomes of social media usage. Examining these two constructs together provides a more comprehensive understanding of the potential psychological implications of social media engagement among young adults.

Collectively, these gaps underscore the need for the present study, which examines whether differences in daily social media usage are associated with body self-image and self-esteem among young adults in the Indian context. By addressing these gaps, the study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the growing literature on social media and psychological well-being and to provide insights that may inform psychological practice, educational interventions, and future research.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine the effect of social media usage on body self-image among young adults.
2. To examine the effect of social media usage on self-esteem among young adults.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

- H1: There will be a significant difference in body self-image between young adults with high social media usage and those with low social media usage.
- H2: There will be a significant difference in self-esteem between young adults with high social media usage and those with low social media usage.

METHOD

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative research design to examine the effect of social media usage on body self-image and self-esteem among young adults. The study adopted a between-groups design, wherein participants were classified into high social media usage and low social media usage groups based on their average daily time spent using social media. Comparisons between the two groups were made using independent-samples *t*-tests to determine whether significant differences existed in body self-image and self-esteem.

The **independent variable** was **social media usage**, operationalized as the average number of hours participants spent using social media platforms per day. The **dependent variables** were **body self-image** and **self-esteem**.

Operational Definitions of the Variables

Social Media Usage: Social media usage refers to the amount of time an individual spends on social networking platforms for communication, entertainment, information sharing, and social interaction. In the present study, social media usage was operationally defined as the participants' self-reported average daily hours spent on social media, as measured using the Social Media Usage Questionnaire developed by the researcher. Based on their responses, participants were categorized into two groups:

- High Social Media Usage: More than four hours per day.
- Low Social Media Usage: Less than four hours per day.

Body Self-Image: Body self-image refers to an individual's subjective evaluation, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings regarding his or her own physical appearance and body characteristics. It reflects the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction individuals experience with various aspects of their physical appearance. In the present study, body self-image was operationally defined as the total score obtained on the Body Self-Image Questionnaire–Short Form (BSIQ-SF). Higher scores indicated a more positive body self-image.

Self-Esteem: Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth, competence, and self-acceptance. It reflects the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as capable, valuable, and worthy of respect. In the present study, self-esteem was operationally defined as the total score obtained on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Higher scores represented higher levels of self-esteem.

Participants

The sample comprised **105 young adults** aged between **18 and 23 years**. Participants were selected using a **purposive sampling technique** from educational institutions. Individuals who regularly used social media and voluntarily consented to participate in the study were included.

Based on their reported daily social media usage, participants were classified into two groups:

- **High Social Media Usage Group (more than four hours/day):** $n = 52$
- **Low Social Media Usage Group (less than four hours/day):** $n = 55$

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were included in the study if they:

- were between 18 and 23 years of age;
- were regular users of social media;
- were able to understand the questionnaire items; and
- voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded if they:

- were below 18 years or above 23 years of age;
- failed to complete all questionnaires; or
- did not provide informed consent.

Instruments

Social Media Usage Questionnaire: A Social Media Usage Questionnaire was prepared by the researchers of the study to obtain demographic information and details regarding participants' patterns of social media use. The questionnaire included items related to age, gender, educational status, preferred social media platforms, and average daily hours spent on social media. Responses regarding daily usage were used to classify participants into high and low social media usage groups.

Body Self-Image Questionnaire–Short Form (BSIQ-SF): Body self-image was assessed using the **Body Self-Image Questionnaire–Short Form (BSIQ-SF)** developed by Dr. David Rowe in 2015. The instrument is a standardized self-report measure designed to assess individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and feelings concerning their physical appearance. The questionnaire consists of 20 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all True of myself) to 5 (Completely True of myself). The overall internal consistency of the instrument, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.838, indicating good reliability. The total score represented the overall level of body self-image, with higher scores indicating a more positive evaluation of one's physical appearance.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965): Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale developed by Rosenberg in 1965 and is one of the most extensively used measures

of global self-esteem. The scale consists of 10 items answered on a four-point Likert-type scale, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Five items are positively worded and five are negatively worded, requiring reverse scoring. Total scores are obtained by summing item responses, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale has demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity across diverse populations and has been widely employed in psychological research involving adolescents and young adults.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the objectives and purpose of the study. They were assured that participation was entirely voluntary and that the information collected would remain confidential and be used solely for academic and research purposes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the administration of the questionnaires.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire package administered through Google Forms. The first section comprised demographic information and the Social Media Usage Questionnaire, followed by the Body Self-Image Questionnaire–Short Form (BSIQ-SF) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

After data collection, responses were carefully screened for completeness. Participants were classified into high and low social media usage groups based on their reported average daily duration of social media use. The collected data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. Independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine whether significant differences existed in body self-image and self-esteem between participants with high and low social media usage. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing psychological research. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and the collected information was used exclusively for academic purposes.

RESULTS

The present study was undertaken to examine the effect of social media usage on body self-image and self-esteem among young adults. Participants were categorized into high social media usage and low social media usage groups based on their average daily hours spent using social media. Independent-samples *t*-tests were performed to determine whether significant differences existed between the two groups on body self-image and self-esteem.

Objective 1: To examine the effect of social media usage on body self-image among young adults.

Hypothesis (H1): There will be a significant difference in body self-image between young adults with high social media usage and those with low social media usage.

Table 1

Comparison of Body Self-Image Scores between High and Low Social Media Usage Groups

Group	n	M	SD	t	p
High Social Media Usage	52	54.00	14.28	-0.449	.657
Low Social Media Usage	55	55.65	14.53		

Note: n = No. of Participants, M = Mean and SD = Standard Deviation

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare body self-image scores between young adults with high and low levels of social media usage. The results revealed that participants in the high social media usage group ($M = 54.00$, $SD = 14.28$) and those in the low social media usage group ($M = 55.65$, $SD = 14.53$) reported comparable levels of body self-image. The obtained *t*-value was -0.449, with a corresponding *p*-value of .657, which is greater than the predetermined level of statistical significance ($p > .05$). Therefore, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant, indicating that daily duration of social media usage did not significantly influence body self-image among the young adults included in the present study. Accordingly, the hypothesis (H1) was rejected.

Objective 2: To examine the effect of social media usage on self-esteem among young adults.

Hypothesis (H2): There will be a significant difference in self-esteem between young adults with high social media usage and those with low social media usage.

Table 2

Comparison of Self-Esteem Scores between High and Low Social Media Usage Groups

Group	n	M	SD	t	p
High Social Media Usage	52	14.90	4.27*	0.056	.955
Low Social Media Usage	55	14.72	4.43		

Note: n = No. of Participants, M = Mean and SD = Standard Deviation

An independent-samples *t*-test was performed to compare self-esteem scores between participants with high and low social media usage. The findings indicated that participants with high

social media usage ($M = 14.90$) and those with low social media usage ($M = 14.72$) demonstrated nearly identical levels of self-esteem. The obtained t -value was 0.056, with a corresponding p -value of .955, which exceeded the criterion for statistical significance ($p > .05$). Thus, no statistically significant difference was observed in self-esteem between the two groups. The findings suggest that differences in daily social media usage were not associated with significant differences in self-esteem among the participants included in this investigation. Accordingly, the hypothesis was rejected.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the effect of social media usage on body self-image and self-esteem among young adults. Specifically, it sought to determine whether young adults who reported high daily social media usage differed significantly from those with low social media usage on these two psychological variables. Contrary to the proposed alternative hypotheses, the findings indicated no statistically significant differences in either body self-image or self-esteem between the two groups.

The first objective of the study was to examine the effect of social media usage on body self-image. The results revealed that participants with high social media usage did not differ significantly from participants with low social media usage in their body self-image scores. Although numerous previous studies have suggested that prolonged exposure to appearance-oriented social media content contributes to body dissatisfaction and negative body evaluations (Perloff, 2014; Rounsefell et al., 2019; Portugal & Siquara, 2022; Sharma et al., 2024), the present findings indicate that the duration of social media usage alone may not be sufficient to influence body self-image.

One possible explanation is that psychological outcomes are influenced more by how individuals use social media than by how long they use it. Young adults engage with social media for diverse purposes, including academic learning, entertainment, professional networking, communication, and information seeking. Consequently, individuals spending similar amounts of time on social media may be exposed to substantially different types of content. Those who primarily interact with educational or informational content may experience fewer appearance-related comparisons than those who regularly engage with beauty, fashion, or fitness-related content. Thus, the quality and nature of online engagement may be more influential than the duration of exposure.

Another plausible explanation relates to individual differences in psychological resilience and self-concept. Body self-image is shaped by multiple developmental, familial, cultural, and interpersonal experiences. Family support, peer acceptance, personality traits, body mass index, previous life experiences, and coping strategies may buffer the potential influence of social media exposure. Consequently, prolonged social media use does not necessarily result in negative body self-evaluations for all individuals.

The second objective was to examine the effect of social media usage on self-esteem. Similar to the findings for body self-image, no statistically significant difference was observed between participants with high and low social media usage. This finding suggests that daily hours of social media use alone may not substantially influence global self-esteem among young adults.

Self-esteem is a relatively stable psychological construct that develops over time through accumulated experiences within family, educational, occupational, and social environments. Although online interactions contribute to self-evaluation, they represent only one of many influences on an individual's overall sense of self-worth. Personal achievements, interpersonal relationships, perceived

competence, emotional regulation, and social support are likely to exert stronger influences on self-esteem than the duration of social media engagement alone.

The present findings differ from several earlier investigations that reported negative relationships between excessive social media use and self-esteem (Ahmad et al., 2017; Hawi & Samaha, 2016). However, they are consistent with studies suggesting that the relationship between social media and psychological well-being is complex and moderated by contextual factors such as platform characteristics, user motivations, and patterns of online interaction (Lawless, 2021; Vandenbosch et al., 2022). These inconsistencies across studies suggest that social media should not be viewed as inherently harmful or beneficial; rather, its psychological effects depend on the ways in which individuals engage with digital environments.

An important contribution of the present investigation lies in its focus on daily social media usage rather than social media addiction or problematic use. Many previous investigations have examined excessive or compulsive social media engagement, whereas the present study focused specifically on the duration of daily use. The absence of significant findings suggests that time spent on social media, considered in isolation, may be an insufficient indicator of its psychological consequences.

Overall, the findings support a multidimensional understanding of body self-image and self-esteem. These constructs are likely influenced by a complex interaction of personal, interpersonal, cultural, and technological factors. Future investigations should therefore move beyond simple measures of screen time and examine qualitative aspects of social media engagement, including appearance-related social comparison, active versus passive use, emotional investment, content preferences, and online feedback experiences.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the effect of social media usage on body self-image and self-esteem among young adults. Using standardized measures of body self-image and self-esteem, participants with high and low social media usage were compared to determine whether differences in daily social media engagement were associated with differences in these psychological constructs.

The findings demonstrated that young adults with high social media usage did not differ significantly from those with low social media usage in either body self-image or self-esteem. Consequently, both null hypotheses were retained. These results suggest that the duration of social media usage alone is not a significant determinant of body self-image or self-esteem among the participants included in the present investigation.

The findings highlight the importance of considering the broader context of social media engagement. Rather than focusing exclusively on the number of hours spent online, future research should examine the nature of online activities, the type of content consumed, users' motivations, and individual psychological characteristics. Such an approach is likely to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital environments influence psychological well-being.

Despite its limitations, the study contributes to the expanding literature on social media and mental health by providing evidence from young adults and emphasizing that psychological outcomes associated with social media use are complex, multifactorial, and context-dependent.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study has several limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings.

1. The study employed a relatively small sample of young adults, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations.
2. Participants were selected using purposive sampling; therefore, the sample may not be fully representative of all young adults.
3. The cross-sectional research design does not permit conclusions regarding causal relationships between social media usage, body self-image, and self-esteem.
4. Social media usage was operationalized solely in terms of average daily duration. Other important characteristics, such as the type of platform used, purpose of use, active versus passive engagement, and content viewed, were not assessed.
5. Data were collected using self-report measures, making the findings susceptible to response bias, recall bias, and social desirability effects.
6. Potential confounding variables such as personality characteristics, body mass index, family environment, peer influence, mental health status, and socioeconomic background were not controlled statistically.
7. The study focused exclusively on young adults; therefore, the findings may not be applicable to adolescents, middle-aged adults, or older populations.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study has important theoretical, practical, educational and social implications.

1. **Theoretical Implications:** The findings contribute to the growing literature suggesting that the psychological effects of social media cannot be explained solely by the duration of usage. They support contemporary perspectives emphasizing the importance of qualitative aspects of online engagement, individual differences, and sociocultural influences in understanding body self-image and self-esteem.
2. **Practical Implications:** The findings suggest that interventions designed to improve psychological well-being should focus on promoting healthy and mindful patterns of social media engagement rather than merely reducing screen time. Mental health professionals may encourage individuals to critically evaluate online content, reduce appearance-based social comparison, and develop positive body self-image through cognitive and behavioural strategies.
3. **Educational Implications:** Educational institutions can promote digital literacy programmes that help students recognize unrealistic beauty standards, understand digital image manipulation, and develop healthier attitudes toward social media. Such initiatives may contribute to enhanced psychological well-being among young adults.

4. **Social Implications:** Parents, educators, counsellors, and policymakers may use the findings to encourage balanced social media use while fostering resilience, self-acceptance, and healthy self-esteem. Public awareness programmes promoting body positivity and responsible digital citizenship may further reduce the adverse psychological effects associated with appearance-focused social media content.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following recommendations are offered for future investigations:

1. Conduct studies using larger and more diverse samples drawn from different educational institutions and geographical regions.
2. Employ longitudinal research designs to examine changes in body self-image and self-esteem over time.
3. Investigate the influence of individual social media platforms separately, as different platforms may produce different psychological outcomes.
4. Examine qualitative aspects of social media engagement, including appearance-related social comparison, content preferences, online feedback, and active versus passive usage.
5. Include additional psychological variables such as body appreciation, self-compassion, resilience, anxiety, depression, fear of missing out (FoMO), and life satisfaction.
6. Compare different age groups, cultural populations, and gender groups to determine whether the observed relationships vary across developmental stages and sociocultural contexts.
7. Employ mixed-methods research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of young adults' experiences with social media.
8. Explore mediating and moderating variables that may explain the relationship between social media usage and psychological well-being, including personality traits, coping strategies, social support, and emotional regulation.

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