



A study on Social Media Usage, Body Image and Self Compassion among Young Adults

Pearl Makkar, *Master's in Arts, Psychology, Panjab university, Chandigarh*
makkarpearl29@gmail.com

Abstract: The present research investigates the relationship between social media use, body image and self-compassion among young adults. Social media use, body image and self-compassion play significant roles in the health and psychological well-being of young adults. The research population consisted of 30 adults, ranging from 18 to 30 years old. The objectives of the study required the collection of relevant data through standardized tools on the proposed variables, social media use, body image and self-compassion. The standardized tools used for collecting quantitative data included social media use scale (SMUS), Body shape questionnaire (BSQ-16) and self-compassion short form scale (SCS-FS). The results indicate that there is a positive significant correlation between social media use and Body image. Additionally, there is a negative significant correlation between Self-compassion and social media use among young adults. Excessive use of social media can adversely affect body image and diminish self-compassion by fostering ongoing comparison and self-critique.

Keywords: *Social Media Usage, Body Image, Self Compassion, Young Adults.*

1. Introduction

Social media

Social media has become deeply embedded in the lives of young adults, shaping their actions, relationships, and self-identity. Globally, more than 4.7 billion people engage with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Kepios, 2024), which serve both as spaces for

connection and as outlets for self-expression and validation. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974), individuals use media to fulfill specific psychological and social needs, such as seeking entertainment or building relationships. While these platforms provide valuable opportunities, they also present potential psychological risks.

Excessive engagement with social media has been associated with harmful effects, including heightened depression, increased anxiety, and negative perceptions of body image. Research has demonstrated its influence on mental well-being. For example, Liu et al. (2016) identified a significant link between frequent social media use and elevated depression levels in young adults. Similarly, Vannucci et al. (2017) found that spending prolonged periods on these platforms was connected to higher anxiety symptoms. Additionally, Arendt et al. (2019) reported that viewing self-harm content on platforms such as Instagram was correlated with stronger suicidal thoughts and greater emotional distress among vulnerable populations.

Body Image

Body image is described as an individual's "thoughts, perceptions, and feelings regarding their physical appearance" (Schilder, 1935; Slade, 1988). A positive body image is linked to enhanced self-confidence and resilience, whereas a negative body image is associated with issues such as eating disorders, anxiety, and depression. Social media significantly influences body image, often promoting idealized beauty standards that fuel self-comparison and dissatisfaction. Consistent with this, Levenson et al. (2017) found that using social media frequently before bedtime was connected to poor sleep quality and a more negative body image.

Social media's influence on body image is one of the most prominent and widely debated issues in today's world. These platforms are often saturated with idealized depictions, particularly those centered on beauty standards. Myers and Crowther (2009) found that regular engagement with social media, paired with upward social comparisons, plays a significant role in increasing body dissatisfaction. Users frequently compare themselves to digitally enhanced, idealized images, which can distort their self-perception and lead to negative body evaluations. Persistent exposure to such unrealistic beauty ideals often deepens feelings of inadequacy and discontent.

Levenson et al. (2017) notes that social media's influence on body image is not limited to visual comparisons alone. Their research indicates that using social media, especially before bedtime, is linked to poor sleep quality and heightened negative self-perceptions, which in turn amplify its effect on body image. Thus, social media impacts body image both directly, through

idealized imagery—and indirectly, by affecting emotional well-being, ultimately increasing body dissatisfaction and lowering self-esteem.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion means approaching one's own pain, failures, or perceived shortcomings with kindness and understanding, rather than dismissing the experience or engaging in harsh self-judgment. It involves offering oneself care and support during difficult times, whether the challenges arise from personal mistakes, internal struggles, or external situations. In simple terms, it is the act of directing compassion toward oneself in moments of difficulty. According to Neff self-compassion consists of three essential components: self-kindness, recognizing common humanity, and practicing mindfulness.

Self-compassion involves treating oneself with kindness and understanding when experiencing pain or personal shortcomings, rather than ignoring these difficulties or engaging in harsh self-criticism. It also means recognizing that suffering and failure are a normal part of the human experience, rather than something that isolates an individual. Practicing self-compassion requires maintaining a balanced perspective toward negative emotions acknowledging them without either suppressing or exaggerating them. Such emotions are met with openness and held in mindful awareness. Mindfulness is a receptive, non-judgmental state in which one observes thoughts and feelings as they are, without attempting to avoid or deny them. It also involves avoiding “over-identification” with these experiences, which can lead to rumination and heightened distress. Self-compassion differs from self-pity, which reflects a victim mindset and a lack of belief in one's ability to cope with challenges.

Serlachius et al. (2021) discovered that the Whitu app, a digital tool centered on self-compassion for university students, significantly lowered stress and anxiety over a six-week period. Similarly, Andersson et al. (2021) observed substantial stress reduction and marked improvements in self-compassion among Swedish students through digital interventions. Moreover, Schotanus-Dijkstra et al. (2019) emphasized that self-compassion plays a crucial mediating role in decreasing anxiety and depression in Positive Psychology approaches.

2. Review of Literature

Social media

Social media has significantly reshaped the way people share information and communicate online, evolving into an essential aspect of daily life. It allows users to connect with others, express opinions, and access new ideas and content instantly. However, with its fast-paced growth and extensive reach, it is important for individuals to recognize their professional responsibilities and the potential consequences of their online behavior. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube enable the collaborative creation and exchange of user-generated content, influencing not only personal connections but also how businesses and organizations communicate with their audiences.

Stollak (2011) in his research on the impact of social networking on college students' grades, included platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, blogs, Twitter, My Space, and LinkedIn under the category of social networking. With smartphones enabling internet access and offering applications for these platforms, concerns have been raised regarding their potential impact on students' academic performance. The study explored differences in grades among students at a small liberal arts college according to their level of social media use.

Tuck and Thompson (2023), developed and validated the Social Media Use Scale (SMUS) using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to determine its structure. Data collected from college students revealed a four-factor model with 17 items, consisting of belief-based, consumption-based, image-based, and comparison-based social media use, which were broadly categorized as active or passive SMU.

A study involving 300 university students explored patterns of social media use in relation to anxiety and depression and examined self-compassion as a potential moderator. Results revealed that problematic users experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression than other groups. However, among problematic users with high self-compassion, anxiety and depression levels were comparable to those of other profiles, highlighting the protective effect of self-compassion. Phillips and Wisniewski (2021)

Body image

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) highlighted that society often defines individuals particularly women by their physical appearance. Online, this objectification tends to be internalized, prompting individuals to view themselves through the imagined judgments of others. In turn, they engage in constant self-examination, comparison, and assessment of their bodies in light of societal expectations for acceptance.

A study between social media use, body image, and eating disorders in young people aged 10 to 24 years. A systematic search of MEDLINE, PsycINFO, and Web of Science was conducted for studies published from January 2016 to July 2021 that investigated social media's impact on body image concerns and disordered eating. Drawing from 50 studies across 17 countries, the findings were interpreted through an integrated theoretical framework explaining how internet use affects body image and eating pathology. The evidence indicates that social media engagement contributes to body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, eating disorders, and poorer mental health. Key mediators identified include social comparison, the adoption of thin or fit body ideals, and self-objectification. Certain exposures, such as social media trends, pro-eating disorder content, appearance-focused platforms, and high involvement with photos, intensify these effects. Moderating factors like female gender, higher BMI, and pre-existing body image issues increase risk, whereas high social media literacy and positive body image serve as protective influences. These results point to a reinforcing cycle where social media use escalates vulnerability to body image and eating-related problems (Dane & Bhatia, 2023).

Perloff (2014) examined how social media shapes body image in young adult women in the United States, noting that peer interactions and exposure to visual content often promote negative social comparisons. The study proposed a model connecting individual vulnerability, social media use, and psychological mechanisms that influence body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, while also exploring male body image concerns and the impact of ethnicity.

Self-compassion

'Self-compassion involves relating to oneself with care and support when we suffer' Neff (2003). Breines and Chen (2012) describes self-compassion "as treating oneself with kindness and empathy during hardships, while recognizing that errors are an inevitable part of being human'.

A study of 682 young adults from the Nicotine Dependence in Teens (NDIT) project examined factors related to low self-compassion. Sixteen percent of participants reported low self-compassion, which was associated with being female, poor sleep quality, frequent overeating, attempts to lose weight, elevated depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, high daily stress, body-related emotions, greater introjected regulation for physical activity, receiving negative comments about weight, poor self-rated health, and having a diagnosed mood or anxiety disorder (O'Loughlin et al., 2015).

Hwang et al. (2016) investigated how self-compassion, self-esteem, and age jointly affect mental health among individuals of different age groups. Previous research had shown a positive link between self-compassion and well-being, but these findings were mostly based on studies involving young adults, especially college students. In this study, 1,813 adults aged between their twenties and fifties completed questionnaires measuring self-compassion, self-esteem, subjective well-being, and depression. The results indicated that self-compassion was positively related to subjective well-being in older adults and suggested that it might work alongside self-esteem to enhance mental health.

3. Purpose

The purpose is to study social media usage, body image and self-compassion among young adults.

4. Hypothesis

H1: There will be a positive significant relationship between social media use and body image among young adults.

H2: There will be a positive significant relationship between social media use and self-compassion among young adults.

H3: There will be a positive significant relationship between Body image and self-compassion among young adults.

5. Method

5.1 Sample

A total Sample 30 of young adults in the age 18-30 was collected from Punjab, India.

5.2 Measures

The following standardized tools were used to measure social media use, body image, and self-compassion among young adults.

Social Media Use Scale: Social media use was assessed using the social media scale adapted from Preston and Colman (2000). The scale consisted of 17 items measuring 4 Dimensions which were image, comparison, belief, consumption. These dimensions were measured on a 9-point Likert scale which included, (1)Never, (2)1-2 times per week, (3)3-4 times per week, (4)5-6

times per week, (5) once daily, (6)2-5 times daily, (7)6-9 times daily, (8)10-13 times daily, (9)Hourly or more.

Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-16B): Body image concerns were measured using body shape questionnaire-16 (BSQ-16; Evans & Dolan, 1993) a short form of original 34-item BSQ. The scale consists of 16 items assessing concerns about body shape, preoccupation with weight and feeling of self-consciousness about appearance. Participants rated each item on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, (5) very often (6) always.

Self-Compassion: Self-compassion was assessed using the Self-Compassion Scale short form (Raes et al 2011) was used. This 12-item instrument is a condensed version of the original 26-item self-compassion scale developed by Neff (2003). It assesses six subscales: Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over-Identification. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = almost never, 5 = almost always).

5.3 Procedure

The participants were given standardized scales. The data was collected through google form. The participants were assured of confidentiality & finally, the participants were thanked for their cooperation.

6. Analysis Of Data

(A) Result

Table 1: *N, Median, standard deviation*

	Body shape	Social media use scale	Image-based	Comparison-based	Belief-based	Consumption-based	Self-compassion scale
N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Mean	47.1	2.14	0.352	0.752	0.431	0.559	0.254
Standard deviation	18.6	0.812	0.137	0.455	0.179	0.300	0.0375

Table 2: *Correlation between Body shape, Social media usage and Self-compassion.*

	Body shape	Social media use scale	Image-based	Comparison-based	Belief-based	Consumption-based	Self-compassion scale
Body shape	—						

Social media use scale	0.498**	—					
Image-based	0.215	0.585***	—				
Comparison-based	0.459*	0.876***	0.341	—			
Belief-based	0.504**	0.525**	0.395*	0.318	—		
Consumption-based	0.375*	0.895***	0.284	0.789***	0.231	—	
Self-compassion	-0.272	-0.503**	0.003	-0.556**	-0.011	-0.620***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

(B) Discussion of Result

The findings provide insight into the relationship between social media use, Body image and self-compassion among young adults. The correlation analysis reveals a positive significant relationship between social media and body shape ($r=0.49$, $p<.01$). Additionally, image based is strongly correlated with social media ($r=0.58$, $p<.001$). Comparison based is strongly correlated with body shape ($r=0.45$, $p<.05$), and between comparison based and social media ($r=0.87$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, belief based is strongly correlated with body shape ($r=0.50$, $p<.01$), and between belief based and social media ($r=0.52$, $p<.01$), and between belief based and image based ($r=0.39$, $p<.05$). The results also found out consumption based is strongly correlated with body shape ($r=0.37$, $p<.05$), and between consumption based and social media ($r=0.89$, $p<.001$), and between consumption based and comparison-based ($r=0.78$, $p<.001$).

This pattern of results is consistent with the previous literature Mathew Stollak (2011), in his research on the impact of social networking on college students' grades, included platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, blogs, Twitter, My Space, and LinkedIn under the category of social networking. With smartphones enabling internet access and offering applications for these platforms, concerns have been raised regarding their potential impact on students' academic performance. The study explored differences in grades among students at a small liberal arts college according to their level of social media use.

Another correlation analysis reveals negative significant relationship between self-compassion and social media ($r=-0.50$, $p<.01$), and between self-compassion and comparison based ($r=-0.55$, $p<.01$), and between self-compassion and consumption based ($r=-0.62$, $p<.001$).

This pattern of results is consistent with the previous literature: a study of 682 young adults from the Nicotine Dependence in Teens (NDIT) project examined factors related to low self-compassion. Sixteen percent of participants reported low self-compassion, which was associated with being female, poor sleep quality, frequent overeating, attempts to lose weight, elevated depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, high daily stress, body-related emotions, greater introjected regulation for physical activity, receiving negative comments about weight, poor self-rated health, and having a diagnosed mood or anxiety disorder (O' Loughlin et al., 2015).

7. Conclusion

The present research investigates the relationship between social media usage, body image and self-compassion among young adults. The research population consisted of 30 adults, ranging from 18 to 30 years old. The qualitative data was collected from representative members of the total sample. Social media, body image, and self-compassion play significant roles in determining a young adult's well-being, success, and proper functioning. The objectives of the study required the collection of relevant data through standardized tools on the proposed variables of social media, body image and self-compassion. The standardized tools used for collecting quantitative data are the social media usage scale (SMUS), body shape questionnaire (BSQ-16) and self-compassion short form scale. There is a positive correlation between social media and body image, a negative correlation between self-compassion and social media. Therefore, hypotheses one has been proved. It means higher use of social media can influence perception of body shape. This suggested that individuals who spend more time on social media are more likely to experience dissatisfaction with their body shape and increased health concern. Additionally, another finding of the present study indicates a significant negative relationship between social media and self-compassion, meaning that higher social media involvement tends to coincide with lower levels of self-compassion. This pattern indicates that excessive reliance on social media may contribute to stronger self-critical thoughts, frequent social comparisons, and reduced self-kindness. Thus, the study underscores the need to promote mindful social media practices and nurture self-compassion to safeguard the psychological health of young adults.

Suggestion

Overuse of social media may negatively impact body image and weaken self-compassion by reinforcing continual comparison and self-judgment. Encouraging moderated social media use

and nurturing self-compassion could play an important role in protecting young adults' body image and psychological well-being.

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