

Internet Addiction and Body Image Concerns Among Youth: A Psychological Analysis

Deena Nath¹, Dr. Janhvi Srivastava²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, VBS Purvanchal University, Jaunpur, India

²Asst. Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, VBS Purvanchal University, Jaunpur, India

ABSTRACT

In this modern era of rapidly expanding digital connectivity, the pervasive influence of internet technology has profoundly altered the psychological landscape of the youth. This study investigates the relationship between internet addiction and concerns regarding body image, focusing specifically on symptoms associated with Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) among young adults. Utilizing a convenience sampling technique, a sample comprising 500 participants aged 16 to 22 was selected. To ensure the collection of reliable data standardized assessment instruments such as the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and Body Dysmorphic Disorder Questionnaire (BDDQ) were employed. Statistical analyses conducted using SPSS revealed a significant positive correlation between internet addiction and BDD symptoms ($r = .364, p < .01$). Furthermore, regression analysis indicated that internet addiction serves as a significant predictor of body image concerns, accounting for 13.2% of the total variance.

These findings shed light on the subtle yet potent psychological ramifications of excessive internet usage specifically highlighting the role of the digitally mediated environment in shaping self-perception and exacerbating body image dissatisfaction. Constant exposure to idealized and curated images online fosters maladaptive comparative behaviors, thereby intensifying psychological distress among young people regarding their physical appearance.

This study underscores the urgent need for integrated psychological interventions alongside digital literacy and awareness programs to mitigate the adverse effects of excessive internet usage. In an increasingly digitized world, addressing these concerns is paramount to fostering a healthy self-image and promoting psychological well-being.

Keywords: Internet Addiction, Body Image Concerns, Youth, Body Dysmorphic Disorder

Introduction

The internet has become an indispensable part of modern life, particularly for youth who rely heavily on digital platforms for communication, education, and entertainment. However, excessive use has led to a behavioral condition known as internet addiction, first conceptualized by Kimberly Young. This condition is characterized by compulsive internet use, loss of control, and negative consequences on daily functioning. Simultaneously, body image concerns have emerged as a significant psychological issue among young individuals. Body image refers to an individual's perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about their physical appearance. Persistent dissatisfaction may lead to severe conditions such as Body Dysmorphic Disorder.

The intersection of these two phenomena is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where youth are frequently exposed to curated and idealized representations of beauty. This exposure may distort self-perception and increase body dissatisfaction. Research indicates that excessive internet use is associated with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Internet addiction also reinforces maladaptive cognitive patterns, contributing to psychological distress. The relationship between Internet addiction and body image concerns has emerged as a significant area of study in contemporary psychology. With the rapid expansion of digital technologies and social media platforms, young people are increasingly exposed to virtual environments that shape their perceptions, behaviors, and self-concept. This section reviews relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that explore the association between Internet use and body image concerns specifically, symptoms related to Body Dysmorphic Disorder. Subsequent research has identified Internet addiction as a behavioral addiction characterized by salience, tolerance, withdrawal, and relapse.

Empirical studies have consistently linked Internet addiction to various psychological issues, including depression, anxiety, loneliness, and low self-esteem. According to Mark D. Griffiths, spending excessive time on online platforms can lead to the development of compulsive behaviors, which are reinforced by reward mechanisms such as "likes," comments, and social validation. Body image is a multidimensional concept encompassing an individual's perceptions, attitudes, and feelings regarding their physical appearance. During adolescence and young adulthood, body image becomes particularly salient due to identity formation and increased social comparison. Body dissatisfaction is prevalent among adolescents and young adults due to sociocultural pressures and media influence. It has been linked to eating disorders, anxiety, and compulsive behaviors.

Research indicates that negative body image is associated with a range of psychological issues, including eating disorders, anxiety, and depression. Severe body dissatisfaction can manifest as Body Dysmorphic Disorder, characterized by a persistent preoccupation with perceived physical flaws. Social media platforms have transformed the way individuals present themselves and interact with others. These platforms often promote beauty ideals and curated portrayals, which can distort users' perceptions of reality. Studies by researchers such as Rachel M. Perloff indicate that repeated exposure to appearance-focused content increases body dissatisfaction, particularly among young users. Similarly, visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok encourage constant comparison, which can have a negative impact on self-esteem and body satisfaction. Studies show a strong association between social media usage and body dissatisfaction. Exposure to edited images leads to unrealistic comparisons and negative self-evaluation.

Methodology

The present study employed a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationship between internet addiction and body image concerns among youth. The study was conducted among high school and college students aged between 16 and 22 years in the Purvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh, India. A total of 500 participants were included in the final analysis. The sample consisted of both male and female participants, representing diverse educational backgrounds ranging from high school to postgraduate level.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the level of internet addiction among youth

- To examine body image concerns among youth
- To analyze the relationship between internet addiction and body image concerns
- To explore the psychological implications of this relationship

Hypotheses

- There is a significant positive relationship between internet addiction and body image concerns.
- Internet addiction significantly predicts body image concerns among youth.

Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling method was employed to select participants. Students who were readily available and willing to participate were included in the study.

Tools and Measures

1. Internet Addiction Test (IAT)

The Internet Addiction Test, developed by Kimberly Young, was used to assess the level of internet addiction among participants. The scale consists of items measuring compulsive use, withdrawal, tolerance, and related problems. Higher scores indicate greater levels of internet addiction.

2. Body Dysmorphic Disorder Questionnaire (BDDQ)

The Body Dysmorphic Disorder Questionnaire (BDDQ), originally developed by Katharine A. Phillips, was used in the present study to assess symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder among participants. The BDDQ is a brief, self-report screening instrument designed to identify individuals who may be experiencing clinically significant concerns related to perceived defects or flaws in physical appearance. To assess body image concerns, particularly symptoms associated with Body Dysmorphic Disorder, the Body Dysmorphic Disorder Questionnaire (BDDQ) was administered. The tool evaluates preoccupation with perceived physical flaws and associated distress or impairment.

Procedure

Data collection was carried out in educational institutions across the Purvanchal region, Uttar Pradesh. Participants were approached in classroom settings, where the purpose of the study was explained clearly. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous, and they were encouraged to respond honestly. Standardized questionnaires were then administered in a structured manner.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The following statistical techniques were employed: Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) to describe sample characteristics Correlation to examine the relationship between internet addiction and body image concerns Simple linear regression analysis to determine whether internet addiction predicts body image concerns

Results

The sample consisted predominantly of participants aged 16–18 years, with a higher proportion of females (66.4%). Most participants belonged to middle socio-economic status and school-level

Education.

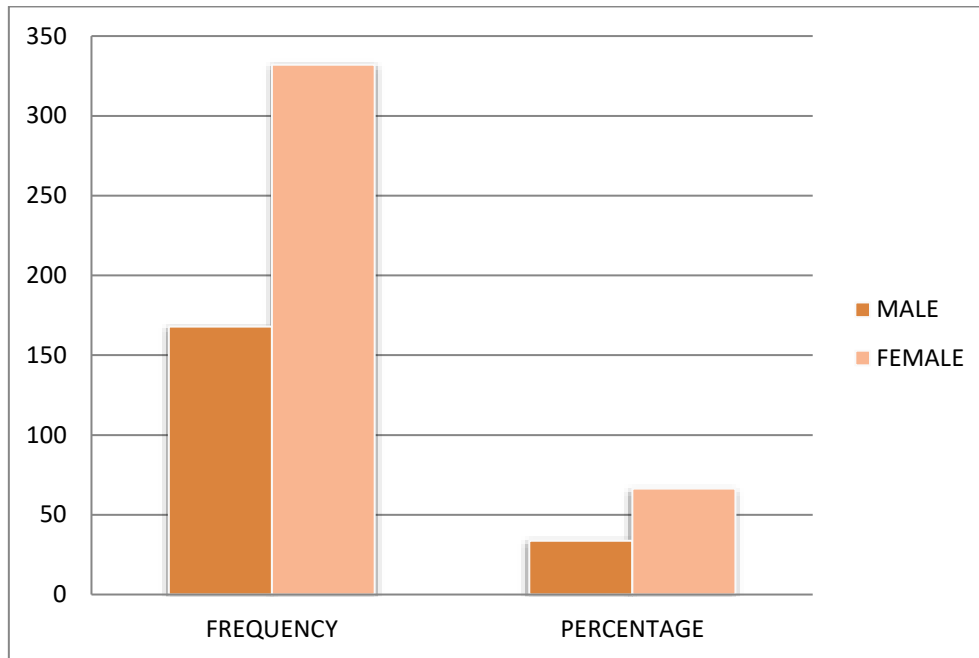


Figure (1). Gender wise frequency & percentage

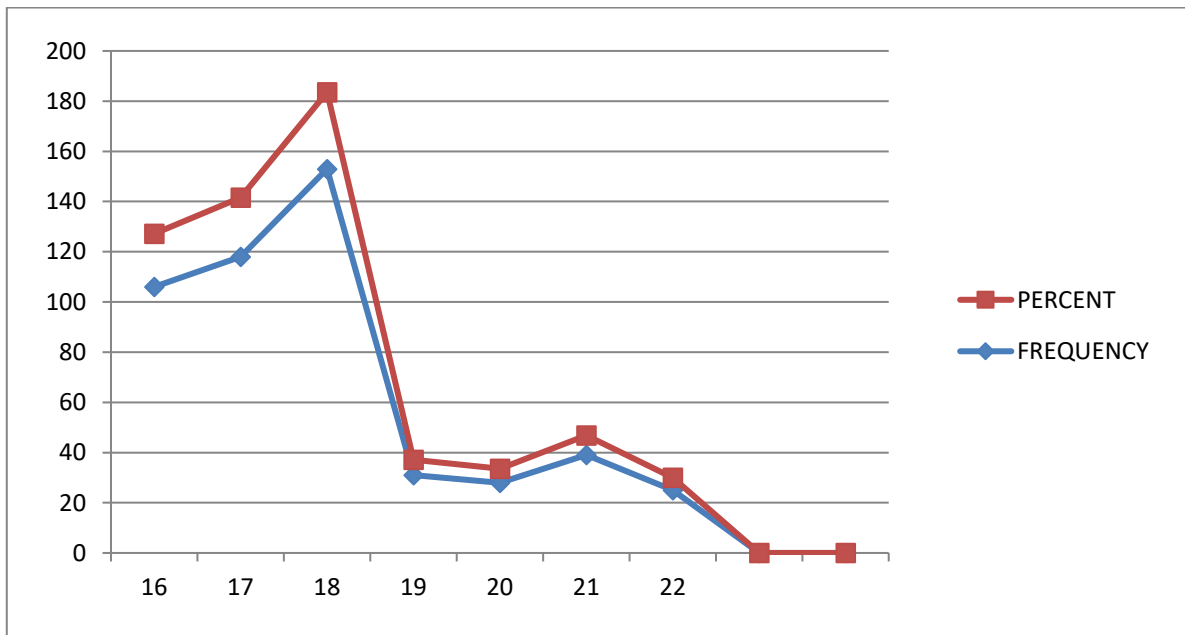


Figure (2). Age wise sample distribution

Internet Addiction and Body-Image Concern

Participants (N = 500) were categorized based on their internet addiction status and body-image concern. For internet addiction, 20.8% (n = 104) were non-addicted and 79.2% (n = 396) were addicted. For body-image concern, 25.8% (n = 129) reported no symptoms, while 74.2% (n = 371) endorsed body-image symptoms.

Table No.1 The Prevalence and level of **Internet Addiction** and **Body-Image Concern**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Non-Internet Addicted	104	20.8%
Internet Addicted	396	79.2%
Non Body-Image Symptoms	129	25.8%
Body-Image Symptoms	371	74.2%
Total	500	100.0%

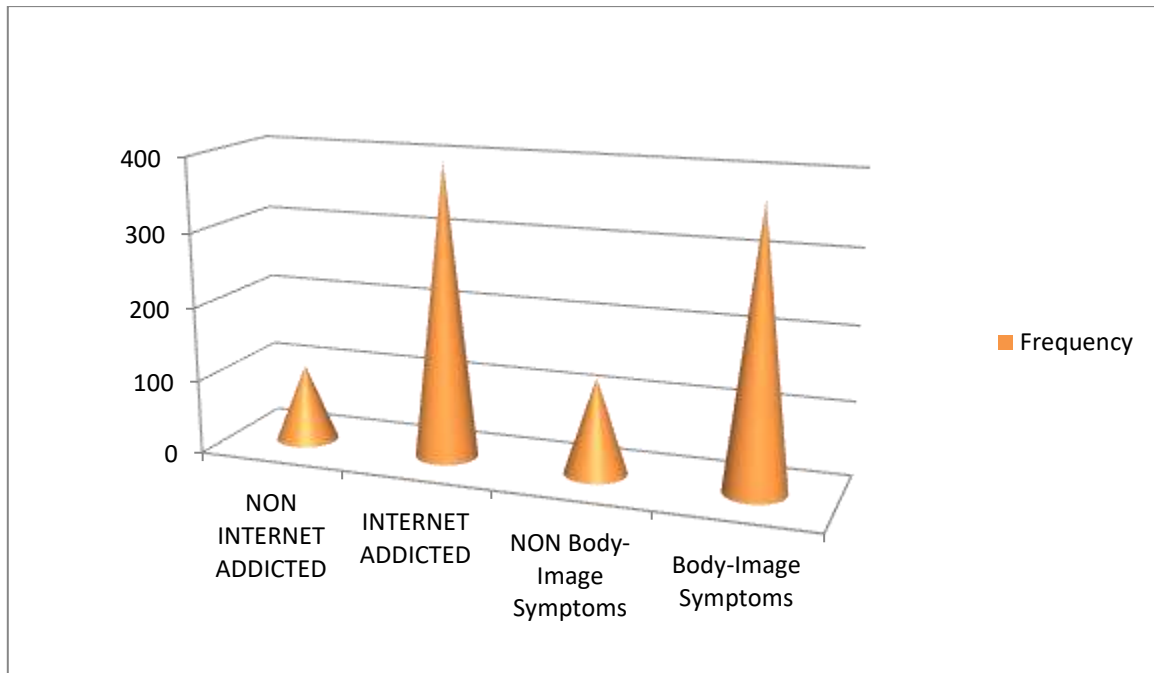


Figure (3). The Prevalence and level of **Internet Addiction** and **Body-Image Concern**

Correlation Analysis

A significant moderate positive correlation was found between internet addiction and body image concerns ($r = .364, p < .01$). Internet addiction emerged as a significant predictor of body image concerns ($p < .01$), explaining a substantial proportion of variance.

Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether Internet Addiction Test scores significantly predict BDDQ scores. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(1, 498) = 75.964, p < .001$. Internet addiction scores accounted for 13.2% of the variance in BDD scores ($R^2 = .132, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .131$). The results indicated a significant positive relationship between internet addiction and body dysmorphic disorder symptoms ($\beta = .364, p < .001$). In other words, higher levels of internet addiction were associated with greater severity of body-image-related concerns as measured by the BDDQ scale. The strength of this relationship can be considered medium.

Discussion

This study investigated the association between internet addiction and symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder among 500 participants. The findings revealed that internet addiction was highly prevalent

within this group; 79.2% (n = 396) of the individuals were identified as being addicted to the internet. Similarly, concerns regarding body image were also very common, affecting 74.2% (n = 371) of the participants. The majority of the individuals in this group were women (66.4%).

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant association between internet addiction scores and symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder ($r = .364$, $p < .001$). This association was further confirmed by a simple linear regression analysis, which demonstrated that internet addiction is a significant predictor of higher levels of body dysmorphic symptoms, accounting for 13.2% of the total variance ($R^2 = .132$, $\beta = .364$, $F(1, 498) = 75.96$, $p < .001$). These results indicate that as engagement in problematic internet use increases, the severity of body image concerns and dysmorphic symptoms also intensifies. These findings align with existing literature, which suggests that excessive internet use—particularly viewing idealized images on social media platforms and engaging in social comparison—can exacerbate body dissatisfaction and dysmorphic tendencies.

However, the moderate effect size suggests that internet addiction is merely one among several factors contributing to these symptoms. Other psychological, social, and cultural factors also play significant roles in the development and maintenance of body dysmorphic symptoms.

Implications

This study underscores the need for greater awareness regarding the potential negative impact of problematic internet use on body image, particularly among young adults. Mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers should consider incorporating screening for internet addiction—along with measures to address body image concerns—into prevention and treatment programs. Promoting mindful and healthy internet habits can serve as a protective factor against body dysmorphic concerns.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design (a study conducted at a single point in time) precludes us from drawing definitive conclusions regarding cause and effect. Furthermore, the sample consisted predominantly of women, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to men. Future research should employ longitudinal designs (long-term studies) to understand changes and relationships over time, and should include more diverse and balanced participant groups. Further studies could also explore mediating or moderating variables, such as social media usage patterns, self-esteem, and appearance-based social comparisons.

Conclusion

The current findings provide empirical support for a significant association between internet addiction and symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder. Addressing problematic internet use may serve as a crucial strategy for mitigating body image distress in the digital age. The psychological impact of excessive internet use is profound and warrants attention from researchers, clinicians, and policymakers.

REFERENCES

1. Carter, A., Forrest, J. I., & Kaida, A. (2017). Association between internet use and body dissatisfaction among young females in Canada. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 19(2), e39. <https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.6584>

2. Demaria, F., et al. (2024). Body, image, and digital technology in adolescence: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, Article 1445098. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1445098>
3. Gupta, M., et al. (2023). The association between social media use and body dysmorphic symptoms in adolescents. *PMC*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10471190/>
4. Mesce, M., et al. (2022). Body image concerns: The impact of digital technologies and psychopathological risks in adolescents. *Behavioral Sciences*, 12(8), 255. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12080255>
5. American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.).
6. Rodgers, R. F., Melioli, T., Laconi, S., Bui, E., & Chabrol, H. (2013). Internet addiction symptoms, disordered eating, and body image avoidance. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 16(1), 56–60. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0242>
7. Rodgers, R. F., et al. (2016). The relationship between body image concerns, eating disorders and internet use, part II: An integrated theoretical model. *Adolescent Research Review*, 1, 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-015-0016-6>
8. Sheehy, M. R., & Vora, T. (2025). Examining the relationship between social media use and addiction and body dysmorphic disorder symptoms: A meta-analytic review. *Media Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2025.2564698>
9. Cash, T. F., & Pruzinsky, T. (2002). *Body image handbook*. Guilford Press.
10. Davis, R. A. (2001). Cognitive-behavioral model of pathological internet use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 17, 187–195.
11. Festinger, L. (1954). Social comparison theory. *Human Relations*, 7, 117–140.
12. Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsy.2015.09.005>
13. Holland, G., & Tiggemann, M. (2016). Social networking and body image. *Body Image*, 17, 100–110.
14. Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2011). Internet addiction review. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 9, 278–296.