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A Study on Impact of Social Media on Body Image among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The growing popularity of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat has significantly influenced young adults' perceptions of physical appearance, self-worth, and beauty standards. This study examines the impact of social media on body image, focusing on social comparison, influencer culture, beauty filters, and digitally manipulated content. A quantitative research approach was adopted, using structured questionnaires administered to 150 undergraduate and postgraduate students. The findings reveal that frequent social media use is associated with increased body dissatisfaction and negative self-perception, with female participants reporting comparatively higher appearance-related concerns. Beauty filters, photo-editing applications, and influencer culture promote unrealistic beauty ideals, potentially affecting confidence and self-esteem. Although body positivity and self-acceptance campaigns offer alternative perspectives, their influence remains limited. The study highlights the importance of digital literacy, responsible social media consumption, and awareness initiatives in promoting authentic representations, inclusive beauty standards, and healthier body image perceptions among young adults.

Keywords: Social Media, Body Image, Young Adults, Self-Esteem, Social Comparison, Beauty Standards.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat has significantly influenced how young adults perceive their physical appearance and self-worth. These platforms expose users to carefully curated, filtered, and digitally enhanced images that often promote unrealistic beauty standards. Continuous exposure to such content encourages individuals to compare their appearance with influencers, celebrities, and other social media users.Body image refers to an individual's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions regarding their physical appearance. Frequent social comparison and the desire for online validation through likes, comments, and followers may contribute to body dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and negative self-perception. Beauty filters, photo-editing applications, and influencer culture further reinforce unrealistic expectations of physical attractiveness.

However, social media also provides opportunities to promote body positivity, self-acceptance, and diverse beauty standards. Recognizing both its positive and negative influences, the present study examines the impact of social media on body image among young adults through a quantitative survey of 150 undergraduate and postgraduate students. It focuses on social comparison, self-esteem, body

dissatisfaction, and exposure to idealized beauty standards, while highlighting the importance of digital awareness and responsible social media usage.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the relationship between social media usage and body image perception among young adults.
2. To identify the role of social comparison in shaping body dissatisfaction and self-esteem.
3. To analyse the influence of influencers, celebrities, and digital beauty trends on young adults' self-perception.
4. To assess the effects of photo editing, filters, and AI-generated beauty standards on body image concerns

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

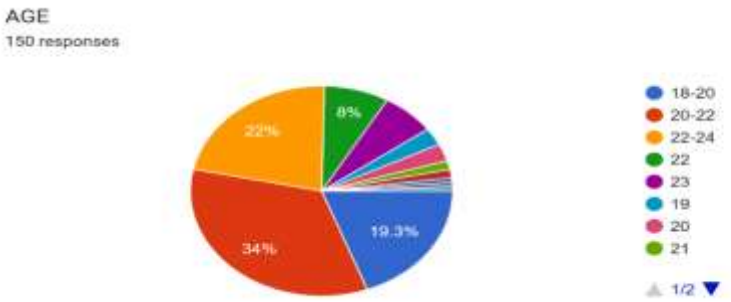
Previous studies have highlighted the influence of media and social media on body image, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Cash et al. (2004) described body image as an individual's attitudes and beliefs about physical appearance, while Festinger (1954) explained through Social Comparison Theory how individuals evaluate themselves by comparing with others. Grabe et al. (2008) found that exposure to idealized media images negatively affects women's body image and mood. Similarly, Jwana (2017) highlighted the impact of ideal male body images on muscle dissatisfaction.

Dar and Nagrath (2022) emphasized responsible digital technology usage among Indian youth. Arya and Rai (2017) discussed how thinspiration and fitspiration promote unrealistic body ideals. Puglia (2017) linked social media engagement, low self-esteem, and appearance-based comparisons to negative body perceptions. Choudhry and Reddy (2021) examined how online self-presentation influences body image. Dane and Bhatia (2023) highlighted the effects of filters and online validation. Tamplin et al. (2018) and Marengo et al. (2018) associated appearance comparisons and excessive social media use with psychological concerns. Thomas and Kotian (2021) and Cataldo et al. (2021) further discussed unrealistic beauty standards and fitspiration-related behaviours.

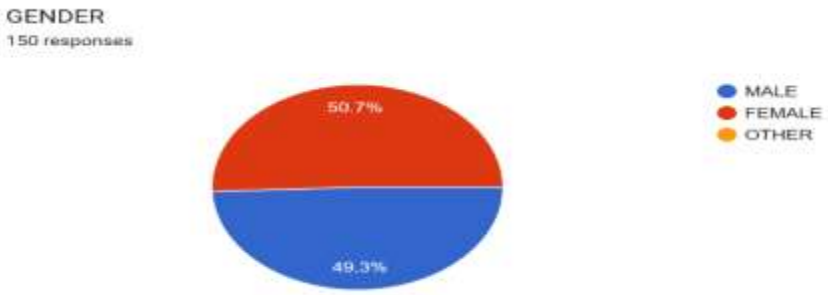
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of social media on body image among young adults. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions, administered to 150 undergraduate and postgraduate students using convenience sampling. The survey was conducted through Google Forms, ensuring anonymity and encouraging honest responses. The questionnaire covered demographic details, social media usage patterns, self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, exposure to influencers and beauty standards, the influence of filters and photo-editing applications, and engagement with body-positive content. Instagram and Snapchat were given particular attention due to their visual nature and popularity among young adults. Secondary data were collected through previously published research papers, academic journals, reports, and relevant literature to support the study's theoretical foundation. The collected primary data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency and percentage analysis, to identify patterns and understand the relationship between social media usage and body image perceptions among young adults.

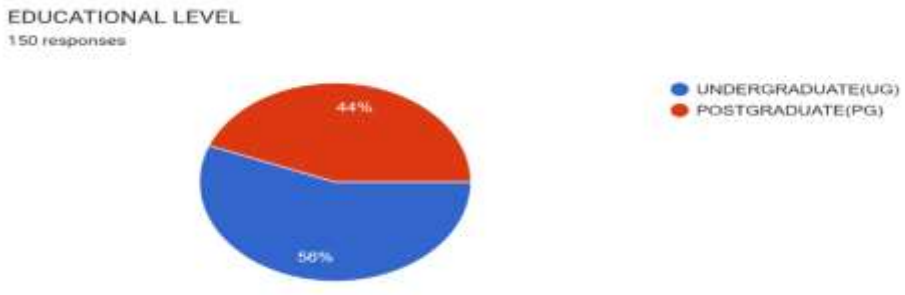
DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS



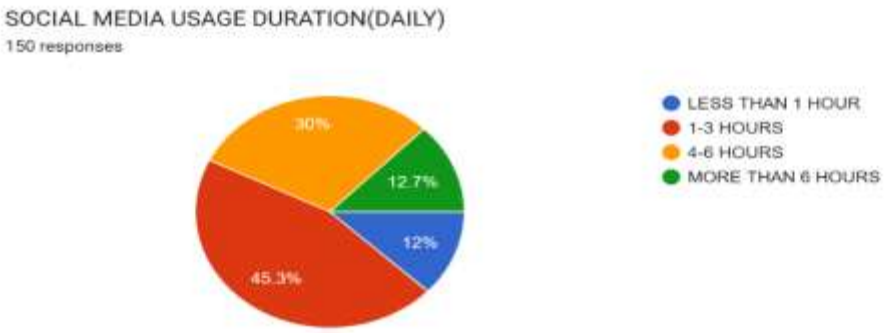
Out of 150 respondents, the majority (34%) belong to the 20–22 age group, followed by 22–24 (22%) and 18–20 (19.3%). This indicates that most participants are young adults, making the sample relevant to studying social media's influence on body image.

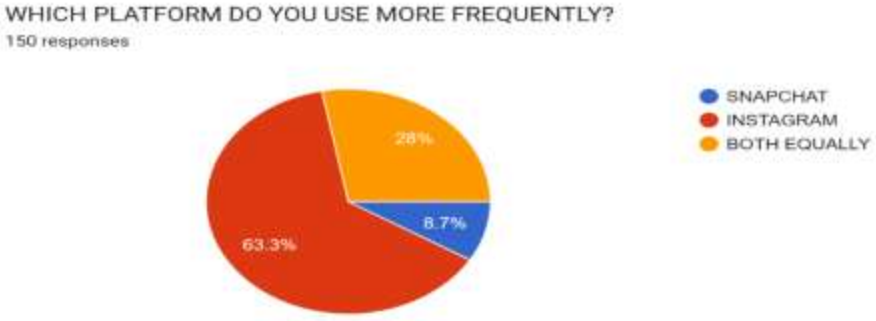


50.7% females and 49.3% males, indicating nearly equal gender representation. This balanced distribution supports a comparative analysis of social media's impact on body image across genders.

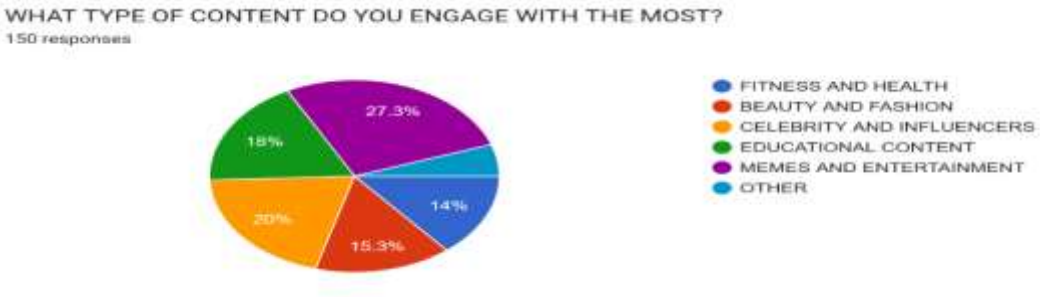


56% undergraduate and 44% postgraduate students. This representation enables comparison of body image perceptions across educational levels and provides insights into how education may influence awareness of social media and beauty standards.

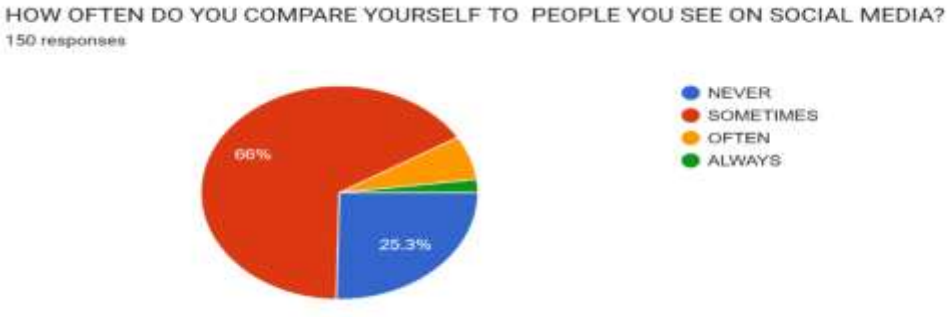




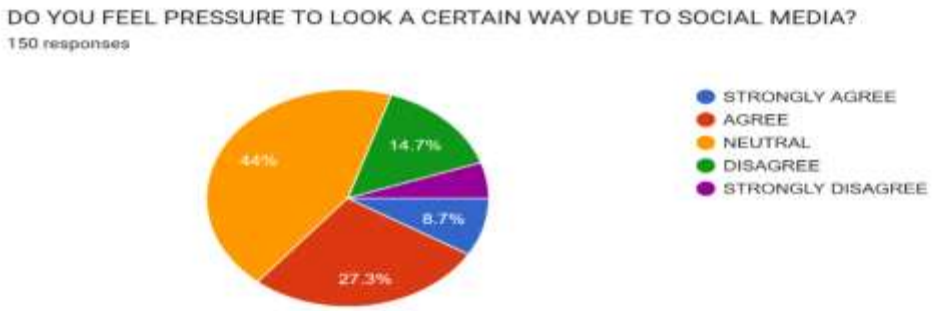
The majority of respondents (45.3%) spend 1–3 hours daily on social media, followed by 30% spending 4–6 hours. Meanwhile, 12.7% spend over 6 hours and 12% less than an hour. This indicates considerable social media exposure, which may influence body image and self-perception.



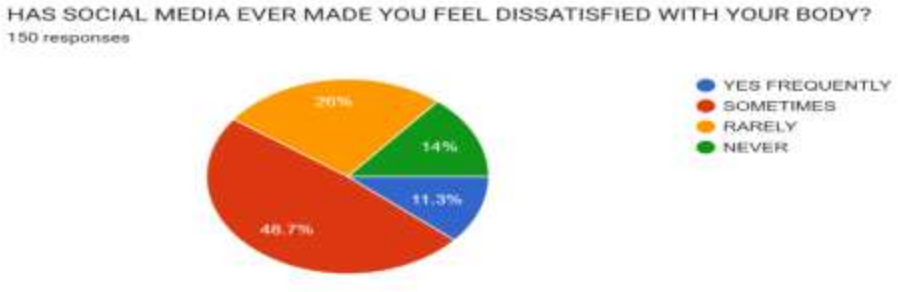
63.3% prefer Instagram, while 28% use Instagram and Snapchat equally, and 8.7% prefer Snapchat. This highlights Instagram's dominance and its potential influence on young adults' body image through visual and curated content.



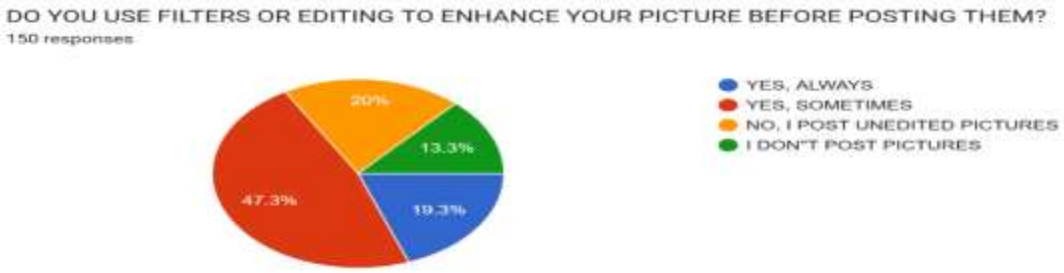
27.3% engage with memes and entertainment, followed by celebrity/influencer content (20%) and educational content (18%). Beauty and fashion (15.3%) and fitness and health (14%) also attract attention, indicating potential exposure to content influencing body image and self-perception.



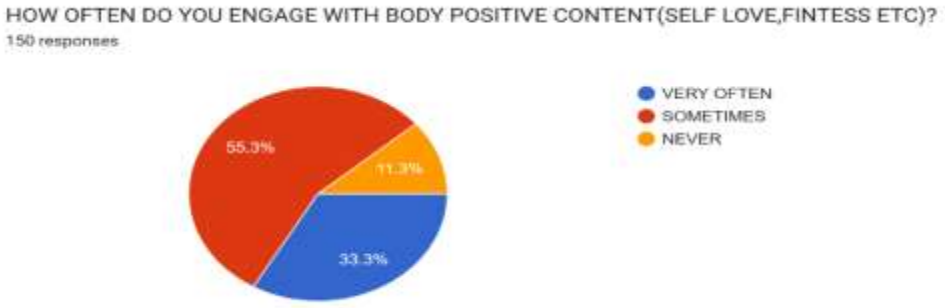
66% sometimes compare themselves with others on social media, while 25.3% never do so. This indicates that social comparison is common and may influence individuals' body image and self-perception.



Around 44% of respondents feel neutral about appearance-related pressure, while 27.3% agree and 8.7% strongly agree. This indicates that over one-third experience pressure to meet social media beauty standards, potentially affecting their body image and self-perception.

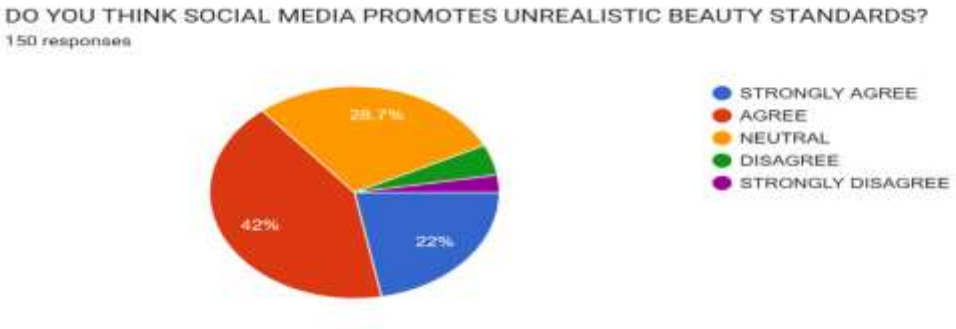


The majority of respondents (48.7%) sometimes feel dissatisfied with their bodies due to social media, while 11.3% experience it frequently. Meanwhile, 26% rarely and 14% never feel dissatisfied, indicating that social media influences body image to varying degrees.

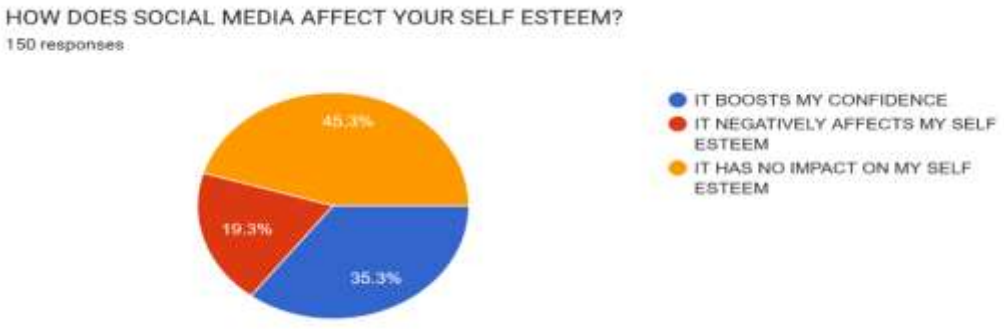


47.3% sometimes use filters or editing before posting pictures, while 19.3% always do. Meanwhile, 20% prefer unedited pictures and 13.3% do not post photos, indicating widespread use of photo enhancement on social media.

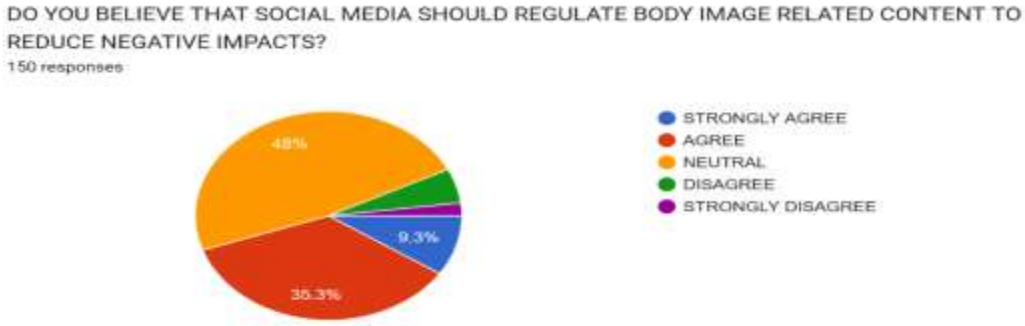
55.3% sometimes engage with body-positive content, while 33.3% engage very often and 11.3% never do. This indicates growing awareness of self-acceptance and body diversity, highlighting the need to promote such content to reach a wider audience.



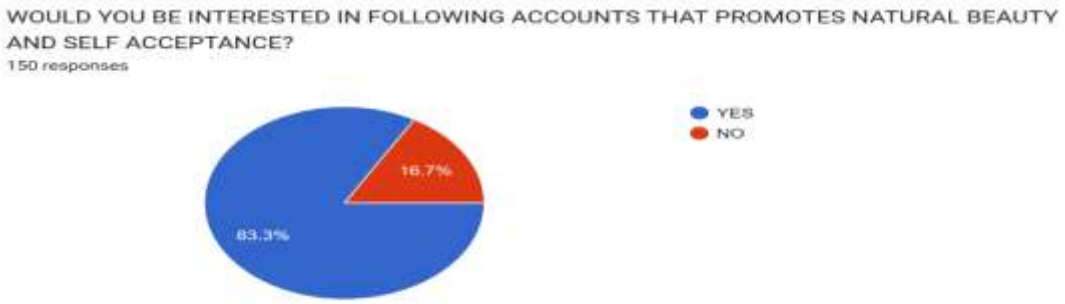
42% agree and 22% strongly agree that social media promotes unrealistic beauty standards. Meanwhile, 28.7% remain neutral, indicating widespread concern about idealized online content and its potential impact on body image and self-esteem.



45.3% reports no impact of social media on self-esteem, while 35.3% experience increased confidence and 19.3% report negative effects. This highlights the varying influence of social media on individuals' confidence and self-perception.



35.3% agree and 9.3% strongly agree that social media platforms should regulate body image-related content. Meanwhile, 48% remain neutral, indicating mixed opinions and a need for greater awareness of responsible content regulation.



83.3% are interested in following accounts promoting natural beauty and self-acceptance, while 16.7% are not. This indicates a strong preference for authentic, inclusive, and body-positive content over unrealistic beauty standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey findings from 150 respondents indicate that social media significantly influences body image perceptions among young adults. Around 48.7% sometimes experience body dissatisfaction due to social media, while 11.3% experience it frequently. The widespread use of filters and photo-editing applications further reflects the influence of idealized online appearances. Regarding body-positive content, 55.3% engage with it sometimes and 33.3% very often. However, 42% agree and 22% strongly agree that social media promotes unrealistic beauty standards. Concerning self-esteem, 35.3% report increased confidence, 19.3% experience negative effects, and 45.3% report no significant impact. Additionally, 63.3% have considered changing their physical appearance due to social media influence.

Furthermore, 83.3% express interest in following accounts promoting natural beauty and self-acceptance, indicating a preference for authentic and inclusive content. However, unrealistic beauty standards and social comparison continue to influence users.

Overall, the findings highlight the dual impact of social media on body image. While it encourages self-expression and body positivity, it can also promote dissatisfaction and unrealistic expectations. Therefore, digital literacy, authentic content, inclusive beauty representations, and responsible social media usage are essential for healthier body image perceptions among young adults.

SUGGESTIONS

Future research should explore the long-term psychological effects of social media exposure on body image through longitudinal studies. Further investigations could examine the differences between active and passive social media users, gender-based variations, and cultural influences on beauty perceptions. Researchers should also assess the effectiveness of body-positive content in improving self-esteem and reducing body dissatisfaction through experimental studies. Additionally, comparing the influence of different social media platforms, particularly image- and video-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, could provide deeper insights into platform-specific effects. Greater attention should also be given to digital and media literacy programmes in schools and colleges to help young adults recognize digitally altered images and develop healthier social media habits. The involvement of parents, educators, and social media platforms in promoting realistic beauty standards, self-acceptance, and responsible online engagement should also be encouraged. These research directions can contribute to a better understanding of digital beauty culture and help create a more inclusive and psychologically healthy online environment.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant influence of social media on body image and self-perception among young adults. The findings reveal that social media has both positive and negative effects, as it promotes body positivity and self-acceptance while also exposing users to unrealistic beauty standards through edited images, filters, and influencer culture. A considerable number of respondents reported experiencing body dissatisfaction and considering changes to their physical appearance due to social media influence. Although body-positive content encourages natural beauty and self-confidence, its effectiveness in reducing appearance-related insecurities remains uncertain. The study also indicates that the impact of social media on self-esteem varies among individuals depending on their usage patterns and personal experiences. Therefore, promoting digital literacy, responsible social media consumption, authentic content, and diverse representations of beauty is essential. Social media platforms, educational institutions, influencers, and users should collectively encourage healthier online environments that prioritize self-acceptance and mental well-being over unrealistic beauty ideals. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of developing a balanced relationship with social media to promote positive body image and self-confidence among young adults.

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