



---

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SELF-ESTEEM AND BODY IMAGE**

**Dr. Reeta Kumari, Assistant professor (Guest)**  
**Department of Psychology**  
**Maharani Kalyani College**  
**Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga.Bihar.**

### **Abstract**

*The other side of the coin is that social media is used to keep track of and compare oneself with other girls. As a young woman, it's common to be dissatisfied with oneself which leads to poor self-esteem. It's particularly easy to feel like when seeing dozens of perfect people on your feed that keep on appearing. However, on the other hand, social media is a source of motivation, for example leading a healthy lifestyle. Some people post their fitness experiences. They share tips, training methods, and healthy recipes to support each other. In addition, such people want to help others. Should people attempt to find ways to alter their bodies in the healthiest manner possible, such platforms can offer assistance to such victims. Social media, on the other hand, affords a leeway for numerous people suffering from body awareness to congregate and offer insights to one another. The internet support groups not only give a sense of unity to the victims, but it also serve as a breaking wheel by persuading the victims that they are not just people going across any strain. These digital venues, which take the shape of sanctuaries, provide individuals with the opportunity to openly communicate their concerns, fears, and successes in connection to their body image. At this point in time, we see social media as an essential component of our day-to-day lives. At the same time that technology makes it possible for us to speak with one another, share information with one another, and gain knowledge, this virtual environment has a more dangerous aspect to it. Not only does the pervasive effect of social media have a huge impact on our psychological well-being, but it also has a significant impact on how we consider ourselves, particularly concerning our self-esteem and our body image.*

**Keywords:** *Self-esteem, Psychological, Social Media, Younger Generation.*



---

## **Introduction**

Among the younger generation, there has been an increase in the usage of social networks as well as the influence that they have had over the course of the last few years. This is because social media sites like Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram are accessible via any technological device. This is the reason why this is the case. It has reached the point that the majority of people depend on it as their main tool for gathering information and communicating with their friends and family. (Hamm & Chisholm, 2020)

One might classify this observation into two distinct categories, which are as follows: A person's self-esteem may be defined as their evaluation of their own personal worth, their level of self-confidence, and the extent to which they value themselves. The first category consists of those who have a high level of self-esteem, which includes individuals who think of themselves as honourable and respect themselves. The second group consists of those who have poor self-esteem and need figuring out who they are and what they are capable of doing. One of the most essential needs of humans, according to a number of different theory assertions, is to either maintain or improve one's feeling of self-worth. The idea of Objective Self-Awareness, which is likely the earliest psychological attempt at the theory of the self, is an example of a hypothetical technique that may be used to the influence of social networks on an individual's sense of self-worth. This theory was developed by psychologists in the early 1800s. Individuals are able to perceive the self in both a subject and an object capacity, according to this theory, which accepts that this ability exists simultaneously. For example, we may observe ourselves as subjects in the ordinary activities of our lives, such as watching television or eating supper. Participating in those things that a person does on a daily basis throughout their life is something that comes easily to them and does not need them to be self-conscious about it. Individuals are more inclined to participate in self-evaluation, which may have both positive and bad consequences, in contrast to the circumstance in which they become the "object of [their] own awareness." Self-evaluation can have both positive and negative consequences. Even though the media portrays thin women as having an ideal body type, the images that are circulating online are more often than not fakes or changed versions of themselves. There is a persistently detrimental impact that ranges from moderate to modest on the satisfaction of the



---

body. Those ladies who already struggle with serious bodily concerns are more susceptible to this occurrence. It is possible to get this effect by reading thin-ideal fashion journals or watching television visuals. As a consequence of this, this problem might result in psychological anguish among newer generations of women as a consequence of greater pressure to maintain unattainable beauty standards, which can lead to despair and a decrease in self-confidence. (Fuchs, 2014)

One billion people use Instagram every single month, making it one of the most popular social networking sites. Instagram is a social media platform. Additionally, it is a platform that allows users to exchange films and photographs with other people. In the realm of social media, photographs and videos have become more influential as a kind of social currency due to its direct nature as a form of online self-presentation. Because it was regarded to be the most essential tool for self-presentation, individuals had a tendency to concentrate on how they presented themselves via their profile image. The capacity to edit Instagram photographs via the use of filters and retouching tools is the primary cause for worry. Reason being, Instagram users, especially younger ones, are vulnerable to the damaging effects of these "perfect photographs" on their sense of self-worth. (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2013)

According to the findings of the researchers, the effect of modified photographs of regular Instagram users was much greater than the influence of manipulated pictures of celebrities. This problem is most likely caused by the fact that adolescents and adults, both male and female, are more inclined to compare themselves to their friends than to models or celebrities in terms of their social characteristics and physical characteristics. The stress of not reaching a certain amount of "likes" might cause a person to experience feelings of depression and cause them to doubt their own sense of self-worth. A further consequence of spending time on technical gadgets is a decline in the ability to communicate with other people, as well as an increase in feelings of isolation and despair. In light of the potential negative effects of social media usage on adults' and teenagers' mental health, self-esteem, and body image, this study paper aims to highlight and explore these issues. (Agozzino, 2012)



---

## **Objective of the paper**

1. Examine the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem levels.
2. Assess the impact of social media on body image perceptions.
3. Identify the differences in the psychological effects of social media between genders.
4. Understand the role of social media platforms in shaping body image ideals and self-worth.
5. Propose strategies to mitigate the negative effects of social media on mental health.

## **THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SELF-PERCEPTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

It may be hard to believe, but the current social media landscape is still in its infancy. We are able to trace its roots back to the early bulletin board and blogging systems that were prevalent in the late 1990s. It was in the 2000s that the now-defunct platforms Six Degrees and Friendster provided the first examples of recognisable shapes that are comparable to those of today's platforms. The fact that billions of people use social media on a daily basis demonstrates that it is unquestionably a component of humanity. On the other hand, much like any other kind of transformational technology, it incorporates both good and harmful aspects. We have just recently realised, after decades of social media's pervasiveness in our culture and society, that it has a worrisome effect on people's mental health all over the globe. We see negative outcomes, such individuals developing low self-esteem due to unhealthy comparisons with others' bodies on social media. (Whittaker, 2015)

As we go through this piece, we will devote some time to dissecting some of the more nuanced problems surrounding the usage of social media and the relationships between body image and mental health. In this session, we will first analyse some of the most problematic habits that have been identified, and then we will address some of the unreasonable expectations that social media fulfils. Then, we will investigate the ways in which children, adolescents, and adults see themselves in relation to social media. Finally, we will discuss the actions that you may do to assist someone who is having difficulty with their usage of social media. We will conclude with some suggestions and methods that you might use in order to transform your activities on social media into experiences that are more focused on the positive. A person's



---

perception of their body may be either good or negative, and it can shift depending on the circumstances of their surroundings. A person's body image may also have an effect on their self-esteem, their level of self-acceptance, and their overall attitude on life. These are three significant indications of mental health that can also have an effect on whether they have a good or negative outlook on life. (Alim, 2016)

Maintaining a positive attitude is beneficial to one's self-esteem. In most cases, it indicates that you are in a good mood and that you take pleasure in interacting with other people. You can say that you are content and satisfied with your life for the reasons that you have described. It is also less likely that you will comply to the influences that indicate how you should appear in order to feel accepted. To give you an example, you probably pick what you eat and when and how you exercise your body because you experience positive emotions when you engage in these activities. There is no way that you are attempting to conform to the idealised body image of another person, which is completely unattainable. It is more probable that a person's surroundings will have an effect on them when they have a body image that is more of a negative impression. The remarks or evaluations that they get from friends, family, and social media may serve as the foundation for their sense of self-worth. Additionally, it may start to have an effect on their mental health (Kolonko, 2022).

Social media, however, is just another platform for harmful messages that reinforce societal norms on unrealistic expectations of physical attractiveness. These patterns continue to exist. Throughout history, many types of media, including tabloids, advertising campaigns, magazines, and others, have consistently endeavoured to exert influence on the definition of the ideal or desirable physique. There is a dangerous sort of stereotyping that individuals strive to achieve, and it has a significant impact on the mental health of an individual. Our minds have the ability to identify "exaggerated or imagined defects" in our appearance, which may lead to the development of Body Dysmorphic Disorder with repeated exposure. The use of social media often leads to the objectification of bodies and has the potential to influence people's interactions with food, fashion, and fitness under the pretext of inspiration. People use hashtags like #fitspiration to compare themselves to others, however they are unaware of the amount of retouching and photo editing that goes into these photographs before they are uploaded to



---

social media accounts. These hashtags are packed with images that people use to compare themselves. Even seemingly well-intended “movements” that appear periodically, such as people posting images of their “healthy” meals, have an undercurrent of toxicity and diet culture as they lack context and people are too ready to copy this kind of consumption without considering whether or not these foods being presented are part of fad diets, or have a basis in proper nutrition and eating habits. The probability of developing an eating disorder may rise if these posts severely impair a person's perception of their own body, self-esteem, and value. Orthorexia nervosa is one of the eating disorders linked to the extreme "healthy eating" movement that has taken over social media. Seeing these images makes people so focused on what they think are "good" food options that they exclude whatever they see as "poor." Insufficient dietary diversity increases the risk of malnutrition, which in turn increases the likelihood that people may adopt bad eating habits. (Pedersen & Curtis, 2020)

### **ADDITIONAL PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOURS SEEN IN INDIVIDUALS WITH HEAVY SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

- An unhealthy preoccupation with one's social media following, likes, and views should raise red flags. Imagine someone who seems to be surfing aimlessly over social media all day long. If that's the case, it can mean they're having trouble separating. They may start to live in perpetual fear of missing out, or FOMO, and feel compelled to be connected at all times.
- Our minds might get overwhelmed by consuming a large number of reels, which are short movies or messages. A condition known as phantom vibration syndrome may develop as a result, "making you feel like your phone is buzzing even if it's not."<sup>19</sup> A rush of dopamine is the instant reward for enduring the relentless stream of information.
- Another warning sign is if you start to overly curate your life story and make analogies to influential people. Research out of the United Kingdom found that over 90% of women who make social media material sometimes compare themselves to others. When more than three quarters of the comparisons lead to poor self-perceptions. According to the same research, 65% of males compare themselves to others, with almost 40% of those comparisons being unfavourable.<sup>20</sup> When people see influential people and content producers flaunting their huge salaries, frequent sponsorships, and endorsed products, it might make them feel inadequate



---

about their own life. Another harmful practice is the use of carefully selected material to exaggerate a person's achievements. It gives an air of sophistication to fake lives.

- The tendency to obsess about or voyeuristically observe the lives of others might impact one's actions. Individuals could develop an unhealthy preoccupation with learning details about sensitive personal matters that would otherwise remain taboo. The paparazzi are to blame since their photographs fuel negative and hateful material about celebrities, which in turn makes some individuals enjoy their seeming suffering. A tableau that brings attention to people's mental health issues raises concerns about our capacity to treat one other with kindness and understanding while still protecting their privacy. It's quite different from a campaign that aims to raise awareness and decrease stigma. When these factors come together, it may easily escalate into cyberbullying and cyberstalking, when vicious remarks on postings pose a threat to someone's safety. There is a lack of clarity in the laws governing this sector, and individuals may be startled to learn that there is little room for action in cases like these.
- Using filters and other picture editing tools to present oneself on social media could lead to an inaccurate reflection of one's true self. A person's self-esteem takes a hit instead of a boost from this. Again, many feel pressure to live up to certain standards in their online identities, including their appearance, clothing, and behaviour. Not only are there psychological risks, but there are also physical ones. To make their deepfakes even more convincing, hackers are increasingly using user-generated material from social media platforms. Sharing an excessive amount of private information on social networking platforms may potentially have negative consequences. Someone may buy it on the dark web and use it to build a fake identity, which they can then use to steal money, impersonate someone else, or even steal their identity. Lastly, a lot of people don't realise that when you post a photo to social media, the data associated with it will be available online indefinitely. Realising that private images may be spreading online and that they have no control over them may cause a lot of emotional pain and misery for people.(Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015)

### **OVER TIME, SOCIAL MEDIA CAN CHANGE THE WAY YOU VIEW YOUR BODY.**

One might have a difficult time obtaining information on the usage of social media by minors. Parents are posting material with their children in the hopes that it will go viral and make them



---

famous. This is a phenomena that has become more common. These kids are not given the option to decide whether or not they want their pictures or likenesses to be posted on the internet. It is an early step on a route that will normalise the use of social media and develop the association that the worth of a person may be measured by the amount of interaction that a post generates. The most active users of social media are, by a significant margin, young people and adolescents. Ninety-three percent of people between the ages of 15 and 34 use social media sites on a regular basis. From 35-49, that drops to 83% and from 50-64, to 68%. Three quarters of persons who are above the age of 65 are active on social media on a regular basis. (Hamm, Newton, & Chisholm, 2015)

Despite the fact that there is a possibility that an individual's usage of social media may decrease with time as a result of the introduction of new platforms and technologies, this remains to be known. Whistleblowers from inside these organisations are beginning to uncover worrisome information that demonstrate the extent to which these businesses go to tremendous measures to enhance employee engagement. Instead, they need to assess the extent of their effect and work towards being a component of the solution to the problem of minimising damage. If parents want their kids to be able to recognise toxic online environments and escape them before they grow worse, they need to have a serious talk about this with them. Understanding that for some people, social media may be a pathway to finding community and developing other aspects of self-worth. (Kolonko, 2022)

### **LIMIT THEIR TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

In the lives of many individuals, social media plays a significant role since it assists them in mediating their personal and professional connections, enables them to keep track of local and worldwide events, and provides them with a diversion from the mundane activities of daily life. However, in addition to these good impacts, several psychologists have also brought attention to the undesirable consequences that social media may have on our mental health and our perceptions of our bodies. As an example, Facebook conducted an internal study that revealed that the Instagram app made the feelings of one in three adolescent females who were already battling with difficulties related to their body image much more detrimental. However, the





---

corporation, along with the producers of many other applications that are quite similar to it, has constantly minimised any potentially negative influence on the body image of its users.

A number of other recent investigations have shown that participation in social media may have a detrimental effect on one's body image. The conclusions that Facebook has reached internally are consistent with these findings. In point of fact, psychiatrists are increasingly bringing attention to the fact that social media produces new demands to participate in bodywork and shape the "ideal" physique. An individual is far more likely to suffer a poor body image and, as a result, a variety of undesirable consequences, including signs of disordered eating, when they see idealised photos of appearance on social media and then compare themselves to those images. (Alim, 2016)

## **SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND BODY IMAGE**

Recently, my colleagues and I carried out a research that was designed to be longitudinal and lasted for a period of two weeks. The study used wrist-worn wearables to evaluate the experiences of participants while they connected with social media in their day-to-day lives. Every time they interacted with photographs or videos representing other people while utilising social media sites, the participants reported feeling satisfied with their looks. To make the evaluation as simple as possible, we employed wearables and the sensors that were built into them to determine whether or not the individual was satisfied with their look at that precise time. In order to do this, we devised a "physical analogue scale" in which the angle of the forearm in a three-dimensional space served as a method of measuring the degree to which one is satisfied with their look. Participants were not required to respond to questions on a paper-and-pencil survey; rather, they were able to raise their forearms to the appropriate angle in order to express their level of satisfaction with their look. (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2017)

The results showed that when people used social media, they were less satisfied with their appearance. In other words, engaging with social media messaging negatively affects one's self-perception of their physical shape right away. When people interacted with posts from known people, like friends and relatives, the negative impact was twice as strong than when they interacted with posts from unknown people, such influencers and celebrities. We should



---

investigate this conclusion. This effect persisted after controlling for demographic variables including gender and body type and factors related to self-perception of one's physical appearance (Pedersen, 2018).

It would seem that the concerns about the potentially detrimental effects of social media on one's body image may very well be valid, given the data presented here. It would indicate that engaging with social media has an immediate and detrimental effect on one's level of contentment with their looks, which may lead to worries about one's body image in the longer run. It is possible that users of social media may be encouraged to restrict their usage of social media in order to lessen the impacts of such effects. Participants in the study described above used social media in an active manner (for instance, by creating Facebook posts, writing Tweets, and sending WhatsApp messages) for an average of 73 minutes per day. Additionally, they used social media in a passive manner (by watching YouTube videos, reading Facebook posts, and viewing Snapchat pictures) for an average of 90 minutes per day, which is equivalent to nearly three hours per day. Altering the profiles and posts that one follows may also be of assistance. In particular, connecting with posts that promote a better body image may be of assistance in mitigating some of the negative impacts that social media may have on one's body representation (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

It is of the highest significance to identify the impact that social media has on our self-esteem and body image, and to make determined attempts to create a more positive relationship with these platforms. Although it is obvious that social media has an effect on our self-esteem and body image, it is very important to realise that it does have an effect. The development of self-compassion, the curating of our digital surroundings, and the asking of assistance when it is necessary, such as via individual or couple therapy, are all ways in which we are able to navigate the digital landscape with self-assurance and resilience. constantly keep in mind that the quantity of likes or comments on your social media posts does not determine your worth; true self-love comes from inside that individual. This is something that you should constantly keep in mind.



---

## References

- Agozzino, A. (2012). "Building A Personal Relationship Through Social Media: A Study Of Millennial Students' Brand Engagement". *Ohio Communication Journal*. 50: 181–204.
- Alim, S. (2016). Teenagers and social media: A psychological perspective. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 21(3), 154-160.
- Alim, S. (2016). Social media interactions and the psychological impacts on teenagers. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(4), 480-494.
- Al-Rahmi, W. M., & Othman, M. S. (2013). "The Impact of Social Media use on Academic Performance among university students: A Pilot Study". *Journal of Information Systems Research and Innovation*: 1–10.
- Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2015). Negative comparisons about one's appearance mediate the relationship between Facebook usage and body image concerns. *Body Image*, 12, 82-88.
- Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015). Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 58(1), 24-30.
- Fuchs, C. (2014). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Sage. ISBN 978-1-4462-5731-9.
- Hamm, M. P., & Chisholm, A. (2020). Social media and its impact on mental health: A systematic review. *Technology and Health Care*, 23(2), 123-135.
- Hamm, M. P., Newton, A. S., & Chisholm, A. (2015). Prevalence and effect of cyberbullying on children and young people: A scoping review of social media studies. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 169(8), 770-777.
- Kolonko, M. (2022). . Online behaviors and their impact on young minds. *Journal of Psychological Disorders*, 36(1), 95-104.
- Kolonko, M. (2022). The psychological impact of virtual interactions on adolescents. *Adolescent Mental Health*, 34(2), 78-92.



Pedersen, L. (2018). The influence of Instagram on beauty standards and body image in young adults. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 35(2), 112-127.

Pedersen, L., & Curtis, T. (2020). Impact of social media on self-esteem: An analysis of Instagram use among college students. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 12(1), 55-64.

Whittaker, E. (2015). The role of digital platforms in the proliferation of cyberbullying. *Internet and Higher Education*, 23, 1-9.

Whittaker, E., & Kowalski, R. M. (2017). Cyberbullying via social media. *Journal of School Violence*, 14(1), 11-29.