

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

Ms Pavana Sivakumar^{1*}, Prof. Sanju George²

ABSTRACT

Perception Control is the conscious desire of an individual to control how others perceive them. It is similar to self-presentation and other impression management techniques. Our study looked at whether there is a relationship between self-esteem and perception control among young people, and also if there are age and/or gender-related differences in perception control and self-esteem. We conducted this study, using a convenient sampling method, in 305 young people aged 15 to 24 years. The variables of self-esteem and perception control were measured using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale and Perception Control Scale respectively. Data was analysed using Spearman's Rank Correlation, and difference in perception control and self-esteem based on age and gender was analysed using T-Test and Mann-Whitney U Test respectively. We found that self-esteem was negatively correlated with perception control and negatively predicted perception control. There was no significant difference in perception control and self-esteem based on gender, but there was a significant difference in perception control based on age. Our findings can help people create awareness about impression management, self-presentation and perception control techniques. Mental health care professionals can use this study's findings to help their clients in refraining from the use of false self-presentation techniques and can also help people understand their self-worth and gain self-respect.

Keywords: *Perception Control, Self-Esteem*

Centuries have passed since Aristotle said the above: human life has modernized immensely and our day-to-day lives have altogether gathered a new dimension but some basic human characteristics remain the same. Society and social life are very important for most people. An individual's whole life is controlled by actions, values and norms that are set by the society in which he or she lives. Appearance is one such factor which has high desirability in a social world. Attractive individuals are highly prioritized, and studies have found how physically attractive defendants were evaluated with less certainty of guilt than others (Clarke, 2018). Social desirability leads to a salient increase in an individual's preference for

¹ Centre for Behavioural Sciences and Research, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery, Kochi, Kerala, India

² Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology Centre for Behavioural Sciences and Research Rajagiri College of Social Sciences Kalamassery, Kochi, Kerala, India

**Responding Author*

Received: September 23, 2019; Revision Received: October 22, 2019; Accepted: December 25, 2019

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

their façade. From time immemorial, man has craved for recognition from others around him, from both who are superior and inferior to him: He tries to get noticed and spends his time, energy and resources in making himself more presentable and beautiful. Similarly, individuals engage in various self-presentation tactics to present themselves in favorable ways (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). These self-presentation strategies in turn help them to create a better impression of themselves. It is not just impression management, but individuals also show a conscious desire to control how others perceive them, which is termed perception control (Keep & Attrill-Smith, 2017).

People have expectations about others, and they do try to conform to these expectations by means of self-presentation. It has been noted that one of the factors that influences self-presentation is self-esteem (Baumeister, 1982). Self-esteem refers to a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. It is also defined as the feeling of satisfaction that someone has in himself or herself and in his or her own abilities. Self-esteem can vary according to age and gender. Baumeister (1982) found self-esteem to have an impact over self-presentation among young people. Similarly, studies have also reported the influence of age on self-esteem.

World-wide, there are 1.8 billion young people in the 10 to 24 age group, and this constitutes 42% of the world's total population. Furthermore, majority of these young people live in developing countries like India, where they are 65% of the total population. With time and technological advancement, as the world saw an increase in the number of young people, it also witnessed an increase in the number of people who use the internet, and specifically those who use social media. Of the current world population of 6.2 billion people, about 4.021 billion people use the internet and 3.196 billion people use social media.

The internet/social media gave its users new purpose, new beginning and new perspective, and hence impacted public life in a huge and significant way. Perhaps crucially, the affordances and ubiquity of online social networking sites provide users with the opportunity to engage in selective self-presentation (Haferkamp et al, 2012). A person can use his/her positive self-presentation in creating a profile that will help manipulate others' impression/s of him/her. This can lead to a conscious control of others' perception of oneself.

From the above discussion it is evident that there are some important and inter-related issues: perception control as a means of impression management, self-esteem, young people and social networking. These will indeed significantly influence what an individual is like and how he/she deals with changes when it has something to do with his/her self-esteem or impression. Similarly creating an online identity is crucial for an individual because it is a mode of self-expression, self-exploration and self-presentation (Bailey et.al, 2013). Insights into these variables and their relationship with one another can be of huge relevance. Only detailed studies can help to predict the influence of these variables and their impact on the individual as well as on the society. In this study we looked at whether there is a relationship between self-esteem and perception control among young people, and also if there are age and/or gender-related differences in perception control and self-esteem.

MATERIAL METHODS

Objectives

To look at the relationship between self-esteem and perception control among young people, and to look for differences in perception control and self-esteem according to age and gender.

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

Hypotheses

- H1. There is significant relation between self-esteem and perception control among young people.
- H2. There are differences in perception control and self-esteem among young people according to age and gender.

Variables

Self-esteem is the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds about himself. Perception Control is an individual's conscious desire to control how others perceive them.

Sample

Our study sample consisted of 305 young people aged 15 to 24. Employing a convenient sampling method, participants were recruited from various schools, colleges and tuition centres. Participants included both males and females.

Materials

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965): This measures the self-esteem of an individual. It is a 10-item Likert scale with items answered on a four-point scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree: Response options include Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Items 2,5,6,8 and 9 are reverse scored. Scores between 15 and 25 are considered average. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale has a Guttman scale coefficient of reproducibility of .92, indicating excellent internal consistency. Test-retest reliability over a period of 2 weeks revealed correlation of .85 and .88. This scale has demonstrated excellent concurrent, predictive and construct validity. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale correlates significantly with other measures of self-esteem, including the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. In addition, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale correlates in the predicted direction with measures of depression and anxiety.

Perception Control Scale (Keep and Attrill-Smith, 2017) measures the participant's conscious desire to control how others perceive them. The Perception Control Scale is a 12 item Likert scale with items answered on a five-point scale, from 'extremely' to 'not at all'. The response options are Extremely (5), Very (4), Moderately (3), Slightly (2) and Not at all (1). This Scale achieved a Cronbach's α of .90, showing very good reliability. We also carried out an adequacy assessment to determine content validity and high internal consistency was established

Data collection:

The data was collected from schools, colleges and tuition centres. All participants gave informed consent for participation in this study. Both Google forms (online) as well as written (pencil and paper) forms were used to collect data from participants. All those who completed the questionnaires were in the 15 to 24 age group.

Data analyses:

A correlational research design was used for the study and data analyses were carried out using quantitative statistical methods. Data was analysed using Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient analysis. To find the relationship between the variables and demographic

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

variables, Student T-Test was used for parametric variables and Mann Whitney U-Test was used for non-parametric variables.

RESULTS

Key findings of our study are given below in tables and text:

Table 1 Distribution of individual subjects based on age, gender, use of social media and time spent on social media

Group	Sub-group	N	Percentage (%)
Age	15-19	140	45.9
	20-24	165	54.1
Gender	Male	103	33.8
	Female	202	66.2
Use of social media	Daily	271	88.9
	Weekly	24	7.9
	Monthly	9	3.0
	Never	1	0.3
Time	Up to 7 hrs	282	92.5
	8-10 hrs	13	4.3
	10 hrs & above	10	3.3

Table 2 Reliability, mean, standard deviation and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality of self-esteem and perception control

Variables	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD	K	Sig
Self-esteem	.800	28.61	5.17	.081	.000
Perception control	.837	33.82	9.27	.039	.200

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality of perception control showed that the variables were normally distributed in the sample ($p=.200$; $p>0.05$) and the K-S test of normality of self-esteem showed that the variables were not normally distributed in the sample ($p=.000$; $p>0.05$). The mean score of self-esteem was 28.61 which suggests that the population had high average self-esteem and the mean score of perception control was 33.82 which also suggests a high average for the population.

Table 3 Summary of Spearman's Rank correlation of Perception Control with Self-esteem

Variables	Self-esteem (r)
Perception Control	-.151**

**= $p<0.01$, *= $p<0.05$

Table 3 shows the correlation between perception control and self-esteem: self-esteem was negatively correlated with perception control ($r=-.151$, $p<0.01$).

Table 4 Regression analysis predicting perception control by self-esteem.

Variable	R^2	Df	F	B	Sig
Perception control	0.020	304	6.187	-0.141	0.013
Self-esteem					

Table 4 shows the prediction of perception control by self-esteem. $R^2=0.020$, $B=-0.141$ and is significant at 0.01 level. This suggests that the variable self-esteem negatively predicted perception control.

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

Table 5 Student t-test comparing perception control based on gender and age

Group	Mean	F	T	Sig
Male	33.04	0.258	.240	0.612
Female	33.42			
15-19 years	34.56	4.278	1.287	0.039
20-24 years	33.19			

The above results suggest that there was no significant difference in perception control ($t=.240$, $sig=.612$) between males and females. The mean value of perception control in males was 33.04 and in females was 33.42, suggesting that there is significant difference in perception control ($t=1.287$, $sig=.039$) among 15-19 years old and 20-24 year olds. The mean value of perception control in 15 to 19 – year - olds was 34.56 and in 20 to 24 – year - olds was 33.19.

Table 6 Mann Whitney U-test comparing self-esteem based on gender and age.

Group	N	Mean Rank	U Score	Z Score	Sig
Male	103	159.50	9734	-.920	.357
Female	202	149.69			
15-19 years	140	137.23	9342	-2.883	0.004
20-24 years	165	166.38			

The results above show that there was no significant difference in self-esteem based on age and gender.

DISCUSSION

Our study looked at whether a relationship exists between self-esteem and perception control among young people and whether the difference in perception control and self-esteem varies according to age and/or gender. Our study sample consisted of 305 young people between the ages of 15 and 24.

We found that there exists a strong negative correlation between self-esteem and perception control among the young people we studied: this means that, lower the self-esteem of an individual, higher their perception control will be. According to Keep and Atrill-Smith (2017), perception control is an individual's conscious desire to control how others perceive them. Self-esteem indicates a person's self-worth and those with low self-esteem conform to an obvious false majority judgement more than those with high self-esteem (De Charms & Rosenbaum, 1960). It had been noted in earlier studies that confidence increased the willingness to work and people who generally wanted others to like them would be more willing than others to claim favourable attributes (Schneider, 1969). But participants to an extent were weary and often reluctant to take the risk of making self-enchanted statements as they could be disconfirmed by subsequent events (Schlenker, 1975). Individuals with high self-esteem did not find it necessary to conform to their manipulated reputation or public expectation, rather they presented a contradicting self when the reputation was bad and acted as modest when the reputation was good. However, individuals with low self-esteem did little to remove the constraints of manipulated reputation and conformed to the expectation (Baumeister R. F., 1982). In many of the cases, individuals with high self-esteem do not even find the need to create an ideal picture of themselves. They are confident and realize that they are worthy even without an impressive presentation of self in front of others. Whereas people with low self-esteem were eager in maintaining online activity and self-promotional

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

techniques as this might help them in enhancing their self-esteem. These activities might help individuals with lower self-esteem in bringing out and expressing the ideal image of possible self (Krämer & Winter, 2008). It was also noted that stable individuals with clear self-concept portrayed a similar version of themselves during self-presentation and ones with low self-concept, who also possess lower self-esteem (Campbell, et al., 1996) went on presenting an ideal different versions of self. This might be so as they were trying to discover themselves and finding a self that they were comfortable with. Such individuals might be less satisfied with themselves and will be prone to opportunities that might aid them in presenting alternative identities (Fullwood, James, & Chen-Wilson, 2016). It was also found that self-esteem negatively predicted perception control. A variation in self-esteem will produce same amount of variation in a different direction in perception control and thereby acts a good predictor of a youth's inclination to engage in self-presentation tactics (Fullwood, James, & Chen-Wilson, 2016).

Our study found no difference in perception control and self-esteem according to the gender of the participant. Similar findings have been noted by Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz (2014), wherein both males and females involved in techniques of self-presentation and impression management up to an equivalent extent and contained characteristics that would be considered attractive or favourable by potential partners. Studies on various online sites which give prominence to an individual's presentation of self like online dating networks also found no gender difference in the amount of inaccurate information (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). The world is witnessing new trends in women's empowerment movements in work places, public places and in their own homes. The struggle has been there for centuries and although far from extinction, at least among many educated groups, people have started to recognize the importance of women and gender equality. Similar upbringing and development styles might have led boys and girls (males and females) to think alike which might be why no significant gender differences were found in self-esteem (Jackson, et al., 2009) or perception control (Keep & Attrill-Smith, 2017).

Our study found no age-related differences in perception control and self-esteem among the 140 young people between ages of 15 and 19 and the 165 young people between ages of 20 and 24. These findings of ours are in contrast to those of Keep and Attrill-Smith (2017) who found that age negatively correlated with perception control. They also found that young adults were more involved in perception control than older adults.

Further, both the age groups (15 to 19, and 20 to 24) in our study had adequate self-esteem and perception control. It has to be noted that the first group (young people aged 15 to 19) belonged to the category of millennial teens and the second group (young people aged 20 to 24) belonged to the category of early youth. Both these mark the period where young people are in need of constant approval of others. They are also very vulnerable during this period (Gallagher, 2017) and they might try 'experimenting'. It can be argued that both these groups represent young people with similar mind sets and similar characteristics. Hence they might not differ much in what they perceive as their worth and abilities, and can exhibit identical techniques of presentation of self and impression management.

CONCLUSION

Our study found that self-esteem negatively correlated with perception control and also negatively predicted perception control. There were no significant differences in self-esteem based on gender and age. But there was a significant difference in perception control according to age. These findings can help people in creating awareness about impression

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

management, self-presentation and perception control techniques. Mental health professionals and counsellors can utilize the findings of our study to help young people and their clients in refraining from the use of false self-presentation techniques. Our study findings could also help people understand their self –worth and gain self-respect.

REFERENCES

- Babore, A, Carlucci, L, Cataldi, F, Phares, V, & Trumello, C. (2017). Aggressive behaviour in adolescence: Links with self-esteem and parental emotional availability. *Social Development*, 26(4), 740-752.
- Baumeister, R. F, & Hutton, D. G. (1987). Self-presentation theory: self-construction and audience pleasing. . *Theories of group behaviour*, 71-87.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1982). Self-esteem, self-presentation, and future interaction: A dilemma of reputation. *Journal of Personality*, 50(1), 29-45.
- Beard, C, Haas, A., Wickham, R., & Stavropoulos, V. (2017). Age of initiation and Internet gaming disorder: the role of self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social networking*, 20(6), 397-401.
- Boyd, D. M, & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of computer-mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230.
- Campbell, J, Trapnell, P, Heine, S, Katz, I, Lavallee, L, & Lehman, D. (1996). Self-concept clarity: Measurement, personality correlates, and cultural boundaries. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 70(1), 141-143.
- Clarke, L. H. (2018). Women, Aging, and Beauty Culture: Navigating the Social Perils of Looking Old. *Generations*, 41(4), 104-108.
- De Charms, R, & Rosenbaum, M. (1960). Status variables and matching behaviour. *Journal of Personality*, 28, 492-502.
- Doster, L. (2013). Millennial teens design and redesign themselves in online social networks. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12(4), 267-279.
- Efran, M. G. (1974). The effect of physical appearance on the judgment of guilt, interpersonal attraction, and severity of recommended punishment in a simulated jury task. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 8(1), 45-54.
- Ehrenberg, A, Juckes, S, White, K. M, & Walsh, S. P. (2008). Personality and self-esteem as predictors of young people's technology use. *Cyberpsychology and Behaviour*, 11(6), 739-741.
- Ellison, N, Heino, R, & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 11(2), 415-441.
- Ellison, N. B, Steinfield, C, & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends:” Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143-1168.
- Fox, J, & Vendemia, M. A. (2016). Selective self-presentation and social comparison through photographs on social networking sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, 19(10), 593-600.
- Fullwood, C, James, B. M, & Chen-Wilson, C. (2016). Self-concept clarity and online self-presentation in adolescents. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking*, 19(12), 716-720.
- Gallagher, S. M. (2017, September 6). The influence of social media on teen's self-esteem. Theses and Dissertations. Retrieved from <http://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/2438>
- Gil-Or, O, Levi-Belz, Y, & Turel, O. (2015). The “Facebook-self”: characteristics and psychological predictors of false self-presentation on Facebook. *Frontiers in psychology*, 6, 99.

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

- Gonzales, A. L., & Hancock, J. T. (2011). Mirror, mirror on my Facebook wall: Effects of exposure to Facebook on self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, 14(1-2), 79-83.
- Haferkamp, N., Eimler, S. C., Papadakis, A.-M., & Kruck, J. V. (2012). Men are from Mars, women are from Venus? Examining gender differences in self-presentation on social networking sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, 15(2), 91-98.
- Herring, S. C., & Kapidzic, S. (2015). Teens, gender, and self-presentation in social media. *International encyclopedia of social and behavioural sciences*, 2, 1-16.
- Hum, N, Chamberlin, P, Hambright, B, Portwood, A., Schat, A., & Bevan, J. (2011). A picture is worth a thousand words: A content analysis of Facebook profile photographs. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(5), 1828-1833.
- Jackson, L. A, Zhao, Y., Witt, E. A, Fitzgerald, H. E, Eye, A. V, & Harold, R. (2009). Self-Concept, Self-Esteem, Gender, Race, and Information Technology Use. *Cyberpsychology and Behaviour*, 12(4), 437-440.
- Jan, M., Soomro, S. A., & Ahmad, N. (2017). Impact of Social Media on Self-Esteem. *European Scientific Journal*, 13(23), 329-341.
- Johnston, K, Tanner, M, Lalla, N., & Kawalski, D. (2013). Social capital: the benefit of Facebook 'friends'. *Behaviour and Information Technology*, 32(1), 24-36.
- Keep, M, & Attrill-Smith, A. (2017). Controlling you watching me: measuring perception control on social media. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, 20(9), 561-566.
- Krämer, N. C, & Winter, S. (2008). Impression Management 2.0: The relationship of self-esteem, extraversion, self-efficacy, and self-presentation within social networking sites. *Journal of media psychology*, 20(3), 106-116.
- Marder, B, Joinson, A, Shankar, A, & Thirlaway, K. (2016). Strength matters: Self-presentation to the strongest audience rather than lowest common denominator when faced with multiple audiences in social network sites. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 61, 56-62.
- Mbuva, J. (2017). Exploring Teachers' Self-Esteem and Its Effects on Teaching, Students' Learning and Self-Esteem. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 17(3), 123-134.
- Mehdizadeh, S. (2010). Self-presentation 2.0: Narcissism and self-esteem on Facebook. *Cyberpsychology, behaviour and social networking*, 13(4), 357-364.
- Mierzwa, J, & Jurjewicz, H. (2014). Does Facebook, Twitter, Instagram influence well-being and self-esteem among early adolescents? *Psychology*(1), 103.
- Rosenberg, J, & Egbert, N. (2011). Online impression management: Personality traits and concerns for secondary goals as predictors of self-presentation tactics on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(1), 1-18.
- Schlenker, B. (1975). Self-Presentation: Managing the impression of consistency when reality interferes with self-enhancement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32, 1030-1037.
- Schneider, D. (1969). Tactical self-presentation after success and failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 13, 262-268.
- Schwartz, S. (2012). Does Facebook Influence Well-Being and Self-Esteem among Early Adolescents? St. Catherine University, School of Social Work. Minnesota: SOPHIA.
- Shaw, L. H, & Gant, L. M. (2004). In defense of the Internet: The relationship between Internet communication and depression, loneliness, self-esteem, and perceived social support. *Internet Research*, 28(3).
- Steinfeld, C, Ellison, N. B, & Lampe, C. (2008). Social capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), 434-445.

Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?

- Tifferet, S, & Vilnai-Yavetz, I. (2014). Gender differences in Facebook self-presentation: An international randomized study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 35, 388-399.
- Toma, C, Hancock, J, & Ellison, N. (2008). Separating fact from fiction: An examination of deceptive self-presentation in online dating profiles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34(8), 1023-1036.
- Twomey, C, & O'Reilly, G. (2017). Associations of self-presentation on Facebook with mental health and personality variables: A systematic review. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, 20(10), 587-595.
- Valkenburg, P. M, Peter, J, & Schouten, A. P. (2006). Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' well-being and social self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology and Behaviour*, 9(5), 584-590.
- Vogel, E. A, Rose, J. P, Roberts, L. R, & Eckles, K. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(4), 206.
- Watkins, D., & Yu, J. (1993). Gender Difference in the source and level of Self-Esteem of Chinese College Students. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 133(3), 347-352.
- White, C. M., Cutello, C. A., Gummerum, M., & Hanoch, Y. (2018). A cross-cultural study of risky online self-presentation. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, 21(1), 25-31.
- Yang, C. C, & Brown, B. B. (2016). Online self-presentation on Facebook and self development during the college transition. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 45(2), 402-416.
- Zhang, D, Feng, X., & Chen, P. (2018). Examining microbloggers' individual differences in motivation for social media use. *Social Behaviour and Personality: an international journal*, 46(4), 667-681.
- Zhao, S, Grasmuck, S, & Martin, J. (2008). Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers in human behaviour*, 24(5), 1816-1836.

Acknowledgements

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

How to cite this article: P Sivakumar & S George (2019). Self-esteem and perception control among young people: Is there a link?. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(4), 23-31. DIP:18.01.003/20190704, DOI:10.25215/0704.003