

Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety in Young Adults

Teresa Sharon M A^{1*}, Zidan Kachhi², Dr. Deepthi Vijayan³

ABSTRACT

Social media has become an inseparable and important part of our daily lives. The COVID pandemic has forced people to stay indoors in isolation and has increased social media usage. Social media platforms are means for individuals to connect to other users across platforms, borders and continents. While it is said that social media facilitates a sense of belongingness, productivity and creativity, it also leads individuals to engage in social comparison. The present study aimed to assess the relationship between Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety. A web-based survey was administered among a sample of 120 individuals from metropolitan cities of India ranging from 18-25 years. Spearman's Correlation was used to find out whether a significant relationship existed between Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety. The findings revealed that there is a statistically significant and negative correlation between Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Keywords: *Social Media Use, Social Appearance Anxiety, Young Adults*

Technological advancement has spiralled up and amply demonstrates the number of Smartphones used worldwide. Access to social media has never been this easy, and it reflects in the spike in the number of social media users in recent years. This virtual environment provides a platform for individuals to portray and express themselves, share their interests and other information with users globally. Social media platforms enrich an individual's social capital by initiating social interactions and helping them maintain communication with their friends (Doğan & Çolak, 2016). Internet media contrasts from traditional media in terms of its availability and the time users spend on it. Internet-based media that include social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. are available on all Smartphones and facilitate 'fantasy' or unrealistic standards which social media users get conditioned into believing as 'ideal' (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018).

¹Student, Dept. of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bangalore, India

²Student, Dept. of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bangalore, India

³Assistant Professor, Dept. of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bangalore, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: July 03, 2021; Revision Received: August 08, 2021; Accepted: August 23, 2021

The Ideal Body Image

One of the many activities social media users engage in is sharing pictures on photo-based platforms. These shared pictures elicit feedback from followers, which have a detrimental impact on the social media user's body anxiety (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018). With multiple studies conducted on social media and its effects on an individual's mental health, many findings state how individuals develop an unrealistic body image and have a distorted perception of beauty (Perloff, 2014).

Social media models and influencers that fit the "perfect body" image are idealised. These perceptions are internalised by individuals, causing appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and various eating disorders (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018; Perloff, 2014). Sharing pictures on Instagram, Facebook or other social media networking sites is common and sometimes attract negative comments or evaluation from other users that instil negative thoughts and feelings. Individuals who receive such feedback often gauge their self-worth with such responses and may develop appearance anxiety (Doğan & Çolak, 2016). Although such idealised and unrealistic pictures continue to surge on social networking sites, modern-day research sheds light on the benefits of 'body positivity movements' that have been a boom on social media platforms, and the impact of these studies on positive body image and reducing Social Appearance Anxiety is effective. These movements focus on normal body concerns such as cellulite, fat rolls, stretch marks, loose skin, which encourage posts of raw and real pictures on social networking sites. This encourages individuals to relate to others rather than compare themselves with unattainable standards. These movements prioritise wellness more than weight and embrace individuals of all sizes, shapes and colours (Cohen et al., 2020).

Mental Health Conditions

A study done on a large Norwegian sample suggests that the underlying symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety, and depression are associated with addictive (i.e., compulsive and excessive use associated with negative outcomes) social networking (Andreassen et al., 2016), while another research findings suggest that Social Media Usage is related to increased depression in young adults from the U.S. (Lin et al., 2016) and that young adults in the U.S. with higher Social Media Usage experience more social isolation than their counterparts with lower Social Media Usage (Primack et al., 2017). However, the results of a pilot study done on university students demonstrated that social media 'detoxification' can bring about a positive change in mood and anxiety and ameliorate sleep (El-Khoury et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Boursier et al. (2020) found that feelings of loneliness and immoderate use of social media led to increased anxiousness in individuals as a result of enforced lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, which gave rise to a need to be a part of some community virtually, thereby making individuals engage in social media even more, hence creating an endless loop, as this enabled elongated period of Social Media Usage, further increasing anxiousness.

However, another study found that young adults started using the internet to seek health-related information, more so during the pandemic, which may facilitate a healthy lifestyle in these individuals in future (Hunsaker et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Aim

This study intends to assess the relationship between Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety in Young Adults.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety in Young Adults.

Operational Definitions

- **Social Media Usage:** Online behaviours that facilitate “direct exchanges” among users. Such behaviours include liking, commenting, sending messages, and otherwise engaging with other users.
- **Social Appearance Anxiety:** It refers to social anxiety surrounding overall appearance, including body shape, and fear of negative evaluation by others.
- **Young Adults:** Young adulthood is a phase of a human being’s life span between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood which encompasses late adolescence and early adulthood. It is the distinct period between 18-25 years of age

Sample

A sample of 120 individuals (N=120) from metropolitan cities of India were selected for the present study. The study included both males and females aged between 18-25 years who use any social media platform(s). The data were collected using Convenience sampling method.

Tools

Social Networking Time Use Scale: The SONTUS, used to measure time spent on social media is a 29-item instrument. The questionnaire consists of two sections (demographic and Social Networking Site [SNS] use). The demographic information obtained from the respondents includes age, gender etc. While in the second section, the participants are asked to identify SNS use, using a scale of 1 (not applicable to me during the past week) to 11 (I used it more than 3 times during the past week; but spent more than 30 min each time). It addresses where individuals use social network sites and the motive behind it. The SONTUS maintains good internal consistency of 0.92 (Cronbach’s Alpha), (retrieved from: Olufadi, 2016).

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale: The SAAS is a 16 items self-reported measurement scale on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= not at all to 5=extremely). Possible scores range between 16 and 18. Higher scores indicate higher SAA level. The Scale maintains good levels of internal consistency of 0.96 (Cronbach’s Alpha), (retrieved from: Harel et al., 2019).

Data Collection

The data was collected through an online survey platform. Google Forms was used to create and administer the questionnaires. The form had 5 sections. Section 1 contained all information about the study, mentioned the participants’ rights and took the participants’ consent to be a part of the study. Section 2 asked for contact details. Section 3 was a socio-demographic Performa. Section 4 consisted of the first questionnaire, the SONTUS. Section 5 consisted of the second questionnaire, the SAAS.

Procedure

The Google form was circulated through different online platforms like e-mail, WhatsApp and Instagram. After the data was collected, it was coded then analyzed using SPSS 2.0. Spearman’s Correlation was used to assess the relationship between the two variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality

	Statistic	d.f	Sig (p)	Skewness	Kurtosis
SONTUS	.965	120	.003	.221	.438
SAAS	.964	120	.003	.221	.438

Note. a. Lilliefors Significance Correction, * $p < 0.05$

Table 2 Spearman Correlation Test

	N	Sig (p)	Correlation Coefficient (r)
SONTUS	120	.020	-.211
SAAS	120	.020	-.211

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).

Analysing the data collected, it was found that 68% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 18 to 21 years. 52% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 22 to 25 years with the mean age being 21 years. This could be due to the ‘availability of time’. As individuals ranging between age groups 18- 21 usually consist of college going students they tend to have more leisure time. In comparison individuals ranging between the age groups of 22-25 are ones that are mostly caught up at work and do not find ample time to indulge in social media.

The Shapiro-Wilk test for normality administered on the SONTUS scores (M=.337, SD=3.693) and SAAS scores (M=1.207, SD= 13.225) as shown in Table 1 indicates that the data was not normally distributed within each of the categories ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the Spearman’s Correlation test was employed. The results from the Spearman’s Correlation test indicated in Table 2 that there was a significant negative correlation between the two variables namely, Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety ($p=.020$, $r=-.211$).

As the results indicate, null hypothesis is rejected, implying that there is a significant relationship between Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety. However, the correlation was found to be negative, meaning increase in Social Media Usage decreases Social Appearance Anxiety. This could be because of movements such as Body Positivity on social media, as discussed earlier. Numerous influencers and public figures active on various social media platforms address body image issues. Representation of natural body types encompassing cellulite, stretch marks, acne on these platforms encourages body positivity. People feel seen and included now more than ever on social media. Social media can also be used to reach out to positive and healthy content and connecting with other users (Radovic et al., 2017). Body positivity on social networking sites could be one way to boost healthy body confidence on a large scale (Cohen et al., 2020). These networking platforms also have the advantage of bringing users together on a large forum to accomplish unique goals, which results in positive social transformation (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016) and individuals who are dissatisfied with the way they look in the mirror may try to obtain information or encouragement from the Internet (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018). The correlation may have also been caused by factors relating to the sample population of post-graduate participants.

CONCLUSION

There is a statistically significant negative correlation between Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety, implying that, when Social Media Usage increases, Social Appearance Anxiety could slightly decrease.

Limitations and Recommendations

The sample size of this study was small. Other age groups and larger sample sizes can be studied in future research.

REFERENCES

- Andreassen, C. S., Billieux, J., Griffiths, M. D., Kuss, D. J., Demetrovics, Z., Mazzoni, E., & Pallesen, S. (2016). The relationship between addictive use of social media and video games and symptoms of psychiatric disorders: A large-scale cross-sectional study. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 30(2), 252–262. <https://doi.org/10.1037/adb0000160>
- Boursier, V., Gioia, F., Musetti, A., & Schimmenti, A. (2020). Facing Loneliness and Anxiety During the COVID-19 Isolation: The Role of Excessive Social Media Use in a Sample of Italian Adults. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 586222. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.586222>
- Cohen, R., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2020). The case for body positivity on social media: Perspectives on current advances and future directions. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 135910532091245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105320912450>
- Doğan, U., & Çolak, T. S. (2016). Self-concealment, Social Network Sites Usage, Social Appearance Anxiety, Loneliness of High School Students: A Model Testing. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 4(6). <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v4i6.1420>
- El-Khoury, J., Haidar, R., Kanj, R. R., Bou Ali, L., & Majari, G. (2021). Characteristics of social media ‘detoxification’ in university students. *Libyan Journal of Medicine*, 16(1), 1846861. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19932820.2020.1846861>
- Franchina, V., & Lo Coco, G. (2018). The influence of social media use on body image concerns. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis and Education*, 10(1), 5–14. <http://www.psychedu.org/index.php/IJPE/article/view/218>
- Harel, D., Mills, S. D., Kwakkenbos, L., Carrier, M. E., Nielsen, K., Portales, A., Bartlett, S. J., Malcarne, V. L., & Thombs, B. D. (2019). Shortening patient-reported outcome measures through optimal test assembly: Application to the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale in the Scleroderma Patient-centered Intervention Network Cohort. *BMJ Open*, 9(2), e024010. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-024010>
- Hunsaker, A., Hargittai, E., & Micheli, M. (2021). Relationship between Internet Use and Change in Health Status: Panel Study of Young Adults. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 23(1), e22051. <https://doi.org/10.2196/22051>
- Lin, L. Y., Sidani, J. E., Shensa, A., Radovic, A., Miller, E., Colditz, J. B., Hoffman, B. L., Giles, L. M., & Primack, B. A. (2016). ASSOCIATION between SOCIAL MEDIA USE and DEPRESSION among U.S. YOUNG ADULTS. *Depression and Anxiety*, 33(4), 323–331. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22466>
- Olufadi, Y. (2016). Social networking time use scale (SONTUS): A new instrument for measuring the time spent on the social networking sites. *Telematics and Informatics*, 33(2), 452–471. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2015.11.002>
- Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social Media Effects on Young Women’s Body Image Concerns: Theoretical Perspectives and an Agenda for Research. *Sex Roles*, 71(11–12), 363–377. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0384-6>

Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety in Young Adults

- Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. E., Whaite, E. O., Lin, L. yi, Rosen, D., Colditz, J. B., Radovic, A., & Miller, E. (2017). Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation Among Young Adults in the U.S. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 53(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2017.01.010>
- Radovic, A., Gmelin, T., Stein, B. D., & Miller, E. (2017). Depressed adolescents' positive and negative use of social media. *Journal of Adolescence*, 55, 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.002>
- Siddiqui, S., & Singh, T. (2016). Social Media its Impact with Positive and Negative Aspects. *International Journal of Computer Applications Technology and Research*, 5(2), 71–75. <https://doi.org/10.7753/ijcatr0502.1006>

Acknowledgement

The authors appreciate all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Teresa Sharon M A, Kachhi Z & Vijayan D (2021). Social Media Usage and Social Appearance Anxiety in Young Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(3), 1210-1215. DIP:18.01.113.20210903, DOI:10.25215/0903.113