

Research Paper

Association Among Social Media Usage, Body Image Issues, and Aggression in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Social media has become a central aspect of young adults' lives, significantly influencing their perceptions of body image and interpersonal behavior. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook often portray idealized and filtered representations of beauty, triggering upward social comparison and dissatisfaction with physical appearance. Simultaneously, heightened frustration from such comparisons has been theorized to link to increased aggression. **Methods:** This study employed a cross-sectional, quantitative correlational research design using a convenience sample of 120 university students aged 18–25. Participants completed standardized instruments, including the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI), Body Esteem Scale (BESAA), and related demographic questions, through an online survey. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26 with Pearson correlations and mediation analysis via Hayes' PROCESS Macro. **Results:** The results indicated a significant positive correlation between social media usage and body image concerns ($r = 0.565, p < .001$), supporting the first hypothesis. However, no statistically significant associations were found between body image concerns and aggression (as measured by body esteem), nor between social media use and aggression. The proposed mediating role of body image concerns was therefore not supported. **Conclusion:** The findings underscore the strong relationship between social media exposure and body dissatisfaction but suggest that aggression may be influenced by more complex or additional variables. This study reinforces the importance of promoting digital media literacy and psychological resilience in youth, while recommending future research with more precise aggression measures and longitudinal frameworks.

Keywords: Social Media, Body Image, Body Dissatisfaction, Aggression, Adolescents, Digital Media, Body Esteem, Psychological Well-being, Online Behaviour, Social Comparison

Social media platforms have become indispensable for young people. They not only communicate through Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter, but also get entertained, express themselves, and form their identities. These platforms also provide vast social and informational benefits. However, there is an increasing concern about the psychological effects of social media, especially in relation to dissatisfaction with body image, aggression, and other behavioural consequences.

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Background of the Study

Research indicates the on-screen social life of the younger adults has drastically transformed over the past decade, with social media emerging as the most favourite and accessible form of interaction. But, social media also acts paradoxically as a reflection of modern-day standards and values. The changing nature of work ethic, driven mainly by technology, combined with high expectations for social media performance enhances followers' pressure to fabricate highly edited versions of perfection captured through filtered images. Therefore, public self-perception is not an internal phenomenon anymore; it becomes shaped within the public domain, thanks to the never-ending feedback loops from likes, shares, and comments.

Simultaneously, an increasing number of young people express dissatisfaction with how they regard their body and self-esteem. The mass media's perpetuation of idealised beauty standards leads to social comparison, which, as the Social Comparison Theory posits, often results in self-derogatory appraisal, lowered self-esteem, and heightened self-criticism. This distortion of reality can become internalised as anxiety in regards to one's appearance, emotional dysregulation, and outward expressions of anger, such as irritability or aggression. A gap in prior research is this: most studies have looked at these constructs separately, none considered them as part of a unified psychological process among young adults, a demographic highly susceptible to digital stimuli and social validation seeking.

This research aims to fill that gap by examining whether body image perception serves as an intermediary between social media use and aggression, thereby offering insights on how digital activity manifests in emotional and behavioural outcomes.

Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement includes the interactions and activities individuals undertake on online platforms, Social media for adults and teenagers acts as a trading centre for friends, self-presentation and social comparison. To a large extent, the exposure to idealised body images, curated lifestyles and edited appearances has the tendency to promote certain unacceptable standards which predispose, and may culminate into self-hate and psychological distress.

Social media usage is profoundly linked to several behaviours such as body surveillance, appearance comparison, and acceptance of an imposed ideal of being thin and fit (Perloff, 2014). The time spent on social media, especially the image-centric ones, augments the chances of having a negative self-image, thus increasing content depletion.

Body Image Concerns

Body image pertains to perception, thoughts, and feelings of a person towards his or her physical self. Criticism of one's body, Wrong perception of one's body size and shape and Obsession with a perceived flaw are a few body image issues. For young adults, body image concern is agitated by sociocultural factors like media and peers, which is exacerbated due to social media.

Grabe, Ward & Hyde (2008) claims that absence of a negative body image is related to self-esteem issues, depression, anxiety, and eating disorders as some of the psychological issues one may encounter. One is constantly subjected to idealized body types on social media which result in upward social comparison to those perceived as subordinate and aggravates the dissatisfaction, emotions, mental distress, and suffering.

Aggression

This is a behavior that an individual exhibits with the intent of inflicting physical, emotional or verbal harm on another. Psychologically, aggressive behavior can be classified into two major components: reactive aggressiveness is an impulsive, emotionally driven response, while proactive is goal directed, premeditated action.

A blend of personality traits and the social setting can explain the phenomenon of aggression among young adults. Social media is known for [has the potential to] increase cyber aggression due to anonymity, irresponsibility, and increased violence or competition (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). In a different aspect, frustration from body image concerns and social comparison may lead to aggression due to heightened stress.

Interrelationships

The relationship between the given variables stems from various psychological angles. Within the framework of Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals evaluate themselves against others which, in most circumstances, leads to negative evaluations due to self-bias. The presence of social media makes it easier to be subjected to constant disapproving self- and outward comparisons, leading to increased anxiety regarding one's appearance.

In addition, the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis (Dollard et al., 1939) posits that failure to attain certain expectations or negative self-appraisal will trigger some form of violence. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that people suffering from body image issues due to the influence of social media violence become more aggressive, whether in real-life interactions or online environments.

Evidence in the real world validates these associations. To illustrate, Fardouly et al. (2015) reported that women's body image concerns were worsened due to social media image exposure. In the same fashion, Kircaburun et al. (2019) demonstrated that problematic social media usage was related to aggression, mediated by body image dissatisfaction, narcissism, and body image dissatisfaction.

Study Background

The effect of social media on a young adult's life alters their interaction patterns and social identity approaches, providing new avenues alongside quintessential difficulties. Further, it leads to enhanced engagement, which hyper-focuses a young adult's access to content on what is deemed curated and filtered for their favor, thereby creating an enhanced portrayal that is impossible to attain. Such scenarios only augment the need to seek validation through unconstructive means and exacerbate the negative incidence of body image disorder development.

In such societies where undue emphasis on an individual's looks is norm, further aggravated by social media influencers and peers, young adults are at risk of developing enhanced body dissatisfaction. These feelings of inadequacies, coupled with low self-esteem, especially when magnified by loneliness and peer rejection, can lead to significant emotional distress and problematic behaviors, predominantly violence and aggression.

Individually, social media platforms have been scrutinized regarding their effects on a person's body perception and aggression level. Still, there is a gap that focuses on the intersection of the two concepts. The most plausible sequence suggests that social media use

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leads to some body image disturbance, which subsequently causes heightened aggression. To address the identified gap, this study aims to examine the interrelationship of the three variables for young adults.

Significance of the Study

Addressing the gap will add value both practically and theoretically regarding the advanced mental concerns of health in relation to digital intelligence and behavior science.

1. **Improved Mental Health:** Eavesdropping on social media's influence on body image and aggression will help clinicians tailor psychological care to meet the needs of emerging adults who struggle with self-worth and intense interpersonal conflicts.
2. **Social Media Literacy:** This work will benefit school programs that address the negative consequences of social media by enhancing the instruction not to cultivate harmful beauty standards, thereby reducing the propensity for negative social comparison.
3. **Institutional Policy:** The research may prove greatly beneficial to assist schools and educational institutions in developing appropriate policies that would aid in the improvement of body image and internet relationships among the youth.
4. In sociological terms, the concepts of exploring new forms of interaction and constructing aggression is fairly intense and worrying for most contemporary societies where social media and body image dominate. Synthesizing all of them, the relations have been analyzed within a unified empirical model contributing to psychosocial development literature.
5. In the realm of social media, the absence of protective information phenomena and prominent social media relevance constructs a need for further exploratory research that involves longitudinal and experimental designs in order to formulate and test new and better explanatory social media harm hypotheses.

Social Media Use and Body Image Issues

A multitude of social media usage and social media-related body image studies have been conducted on young adults. A study done by Molina Ruiz et al. (2022) found the frequent use of Instagram to be positively associated with body dissatisfaction, with social comparison to loosely related peers as a mediating factor. This study had a cross-sectional design and included a sample of 500 participants aged 18-25 years. Sagrera et al. (2022) documented and observed heightened body image concerns for adolescents emerging from an at-risk community in Louisiana who were social media users. This study was determined by a sample size of 300 adolescents, which suggests the tendency of social media to amplify pre-existing vulnerabilities.

The Royal Society for Public Health (2017) conducted the #StatusofMind study, where it was found that Instagram placed the highest out of all social media platforms for being detrimental for one's mental health, in the areas of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and body image issues. Fardouly et al. (2015) came to similar conclusions stating that exposure to appearance-related content on social media platforms resulted in young women developing body image concerns.

Fardouly et al. (2015) reported a study where they used a cross-sectional design and surveyed 400 women in the age bracket of 18 to 30 years. The findings revealed that women who engaged in social comparison pertaining to physical appearance expressed body dissatisfaction.

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As quoted in Singh and Teotia (2023), there was a noted weak negative correlation explaining social media usage and satisfaction with one's body image, meaning social body dissatisfaction increases with social media activity. This was seen in their study where 250 respondents aged between 18 – 24 were surveyed using cross-sectional design. Along the same lines, Vikram and Sutar (2024) reported concerning strong negative correlation of increased body image dissatisfaction in relation to adolescents who are heavy social media users. The authors started with a sample of 600 adolescents and in a longitudinal study design, which further backs the hypothesis that prolonged periods spent on social media leads to extended body image dissatisfaction.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Janelins et al. (2014) focused primarily on cognitive decline in cancer patients, this longitudinal study supports the broader idea that psychological distress can impair self-regulation and lead to aggressive tendencies. Emotional dysregulation linked to body-related distress may operate similarly, especially in social contexts such as appearance-based evaluation.

Meier & Gray's (2014) study examined Facebook photo activity among adolescent girls and its association with body image disturbance. The research indicated that frequent viewing of peer photos led to increased body dissatisfaction and internalization of the thin ideal, suggesting that social media can exacerbate body image concerns in young females.

Perloff (2014), in a theoretical and narrative review, highlighted contemporary social media as a “mirror” and “megaphone” technology because its beauty standards are quite vividly but rather uncritically internalized. He stressed that social media users create and consume content that perpetuates a cycle of negative self-evaluation and body image dissatisfaction, reflecting ingrained societal expectations.

Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) have comprehensively synthesized and reviewed more than 30 empirical studies detailing the social media engagement of young adults with regard to body images. It was noted that heightened exposure to images of women and especially thin women was associated with increased body image dissatisfaction, disordered eating behavior, and body dissatisfaction among women.

The Royal Society for Public Health (2017) conducted a report entitled #Status of Mind that used self-report surveys from over 1,500 young people aged 14-24 in the UK. They have found that Instagram use was associated with increased anxiety, depression, and poor-quality sleep, which in turn caused increased irritability and aggression.

Fardouly et al. (2018) conducted an experimental study on social media featuring a wide range of female peers, where a sample of 150 young adult women was selected, interested in the latter's socio-psychological impact. The findings indicate that women who engage in upward social comparison through social media tend to experience greater body dissatisfaction, thereby supporting the proposed hypothesis about the negative impact of upper body image comparisons stemming from social media.

Kircaburun et al. (2018) integrated a cross-sectional correlational design with a sample of 364 university students. Their research demonstrated that problematic usage of social media was linked to aggressive behavior, an association that was explained through narcissism and

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body image dissatisfaction, indicating a psychological pathway from online activity to offline aggression.

Kircaburun et al. (2018) conducted a study to check the body image/cultural body image, social media usage, and aggressive behavior have been studied in a more holistic approach. put forth a mediated model of problematic social media usage leading to narcissistic tendencies and heightened aggression through body dissatisfaction. This interconnected pathway was confirmed by Kircaburun with 364 university students in a correlational study. Salomon & Brown (2019) investigated the relationship between self-objectification behaviors on social media and body image among early adolescents. Their findings showed that higher engagement in self-objectification, such as frequent selfie-taking and valuing appearance-based feedback, was linked to increased body surveillance and body shame.

Butkowski et al. (2019) explored the role of selfie feedback investment on Instagram and its impact on young adult women's body image concerns. The study found that individuals who placed greater importance on feedback received from selfies experienced higher levels of body dissatisfaction and a stronger desire to be thinner.

Keles et al. (2020) employed a meta-analytic approach to examine the effects of social media use on mental health outcomes across 16 quantitative studies. Although the primary focus was anxiety and depression, the analysis revealed a strong link between high-frequency social media use and emotional disturbances, including irritability and impulsive aggression in adolescents.

This supports the idea that psychological strain from online comparison may generalize into hostile behavior.

Hawes et al. (2020) conducted a survey with 763 adolescents aged 12–17 to investigate the relationship between appearance-related social media preoccupation and mental health. The study found that higher engagement with appearance-focused content was associated with increased symptoms of depression and social anxiety, emphasizing the psychological risks of certain social media behaviors.

Veldhuis et al. (2020) conducted a cross-sectional study among young women to investigate the relationship between selfie behaviors, body image, self-objectification, and self-esteem. The study found that higher engagement in selfie-related activities was linked to increased self-objectification and lower self-esteem, emphasizing the potential negative effects of certain social media practices.

Tiggemann & Velissaris (2020) investigated the effect of viewing "reality check" comments on Instagram posts on women's body image. Their study found that exposure to comments challenging the authenticity of idealized images led to improved body satisfaction among viewers, indicating that critical engagement with social media content can buffer against negative body image.

Shanaka Lokumannage (2020) has also researched the impact of social media on body image concerning Sri Lankan adolescents. The study confirmed that body dissatisfaction was associated with time spent on social media. This study highlights social media as an exacerbating factor that shapes contemporary perceptions of beauty and fashion and the societal stress to adhere to socially constructed standards (Journals of USJ).

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Burnell et al. (2021) explored the relationship between the use of Snapchat filters and body image concerns. Their study indicated that frequent use of appearance-altering filters was associated with increased body dissatisfaction and a desire to undergo cosmetic procedures, highlighting the psychological impact of digitally altered self-images.

Lowe-Calverley & Grieve (2021) conducted an experimental study that examined the impact of Instagram influencer posts on viewers' mood and body dissatisfaction. Participants exposed to idealized influencer content reported decreased mood and increased body dissatisfaction, suggesting that curated online personas can negatively affect viewers' self-perception.

Khan et al. (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study with 120 adolescents to examine the mediating role of body image in the relationship between appearance schemas and indirect aggression. The findings revealed that adolescents with heightened appearance schemas and body image concerns were more likely to engage in indirect aggression, suggesting that body image issues can mediate aggressive behaviors in youth.

Fox et al. (2022) explored the effects of taking selfies on women's self-objectification, mood, self-esteem, and social aggression. Participants who engaged in selfie-taking reported increased self-objectification and exhibited higher levels of social aggression, indicating that certain social media behaviors can influence both self-perception and interpersonal interactions.

Malinowska-Cieślik et al. (2022) explored the psychosocial determinants of adolescents' involvement in cyberbullying, focusing on the role of body satisfaction. The findings suggested that lower body satisfaction was associated with higher involvement in cyberbullying, either as perpetrators or victims, highlighting the complex interplay between body image and online aggression.

Terrell et al. (2022) examined the mediating role of social media experiences in the relationship between adolescents' adverse family contexts and intimate partner violence. The study found that negative social media experiences, including exposure to body shaming and aggression, mediated the link between family adversity and later involvement in intimate partner violence, underscoring the influence of online environments on offline behaviors.

Feldman (2022) developed a deep learning model to detect pro-eating disorder content on Twitter. The study found that such content has been steadily increasing over the past five years, with seasonal peaks during summer months. The presence of this content was linked to increased body dissatisfaction among adolescents, highlighting the need for monitoring and regulating harmful online material.

Rajesh and Draper (2022) reported a body image descriptive survey analysis of 412 high school students, that adolescents concerned with their body images tend to be more aggressive. Their results advocated for body positivity and self-esteem programs to be integrated into the education system at an early stage.

Han et al. (2023) conducted a path analysis to investigate the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and aggressive behavior among Chinese children at different pubertal stages. The study revealed that body dissatisfaction was positively associated with

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aggression, particularly among children in advanced stages of puberty, suggesting developmental differences in the impact of body image on behavior.

Silva and Steins (2023) performed a quantitative correlational design study with a sample of 320 university students to evaluate the effects social media content. They found that body image discontent among users increased markedly due to exposure to idealized bodily contours on Instagram. This implies that the type of content presented does affect the body image perceptions of the users.

Singh and Teotia (2023) developed a correlational research design using secondary data from a sample of 200 young adults. They found a weak negative correlation between social media usage and body image satisfaction. This indicates that more consumption of social media is linked, albeit very slightly, to lower satisfaction with one's body. But this association, although statistically valid, remains weak enough to point toward a multi-faceted set of influences.

Astrologos et al. (2023) reported through a 320 university student quantitative correlational design that dissatisfaction with one's body worsens due to social media and correlates with increased aggressive behavior in young adults. This adds fuel to the emotional and behavioral impacts of poor body image.

Cowles et al. (2024) conducted an experimental study to assess the impact of body-positive social media content on individuals' body image. Participants were exposed to either thin-ideal images or body-positive images. The study found that exposure to body-positive content led to increased positive affect and improved body satisfaction, suggesting that such content can mitigate the negative effects of traditional media portrayals.

Khatri and Sharma (2024) performed a comparative study on 250 young adults in Delhi NCR, assessing differences in body image among individuals with varying levels of social media engagement. The study reported no considerable difference in the body image satisfaction of individuals who used social media for less than 5 hours a day compared to those who used it for more than 5 hours daily, suggesting that other factors beyond merely duration, such as content type and individual susceptibility, may be more important.

Alluhidan et al. (2025) analyzed 1,596 sub-conversations within 451 Instagram direct message conversations among 67 teenagers aged 13–17. The study found that discussions about body image varied based on the context; supportive interactions were more common in one-on-one conversations, while body shaming occurred more frequently in group settings. This highlights the nuanced ways in which social media platforms can influence body image discussions among adolescents.

Dangi and Singh (2025) performed a quantitative correlational study on a sample of 300 young women and the influence of Instagram and Facebook on self-perception. The findings of the study suggested that social media usage had a relationship with low self-esteem and body satisfaction. In addition, the negative body image obtained through social comparison based on physical appearance was worsened even more. Furthermore, concern over the number of likes and photo-editing heightened the body image issues, especially among younger women.

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Khajuria et al. (2025) on the other hand, conducted a survey-based cross-sectional assignment on a sample of 500 college students. Their findings concluded that frequent participation in social media-related activities such as selfie-posting and excessive filter usage was associated with body dysmorphic symptoms, which also found a significant relationship with increased violence and aggression, as well as problems regarding relationships.

Khajuria et al. (2025) performed a body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) cross-sectional survey on 500 adolescents and found that people with body dysmorphic disorder and social media exposure tend to display more anger. This anger is believed to stem from frustration over their looks and physical attributes.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between social media usage and body image concerns
- To explore the association between body image concerns and aggression
- To investigate the direct relationship between social media usage and aggression
- To assess the mediating role of body image concerns

Research Design

The method used in this study is quantitative, using a cross-sectional correlational research design approach. This method was useful in detecting associations among variables without interfering with them in any way. This design facilitated the examination of both direct and indirect relations in social media violence, body image wounds, and aggressiveness, including mediator influences.

Participants

The sample was from the population of young adults aged 18-25 years, in particular, university and college students and accessed through the convenience sampling method. The desired sample size was 200 to enhance the statistical power for correlation and mediation analysis. All of the participants provided informed consent prior to participation and completed the survey on a voluntary basis.

Inclusion Criteria:

- College educated between 18 and 25 years old.
- Social media user for more than 1 hour a day.
- Enrolled in a college or university. Able to give informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Participants with self-reported psychological disorders. Individuals who are not using social media.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Social media usage will be positively related to body image issues among young adults.
- **H2:** Aggression will be positively related to body image issues.
- **H3:** Social media usage will be positively related to aggression.
- **H4:** Social media usage will positively relate with aggression and body image issues.

Description of tools used

- **Social Media Harassment Scale:** Online harassment was assessed in terms of frequency, time frame, and emotional involvement, using a structured questionnaire. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = No engagement and 5 = Continuous engagement. The scale demonstrated strong psychometric properties in earlier research, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding .80, indicating high internal consistency. Additionally, content and construct validity were established in previous studies, supporting the reliability and applicability of the instrument (Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2015)
- **Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI):** Body image concerns were measured using the Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI) developed by Littleton, Axsom, and Pury (2005). This scale assesses both bodily dissatisfaction and preoccupation with appearance across multiple domains. It consists of items rated on a 5- point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always. The BICI has demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) and strong construct validity in previous studies, including research involving body image interventions among Croatian populations.
- **Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA):** Body esteem was assessed using the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) developed by Mendelson, Mendelson, and White (2001). This 23-item scale evaluates body esteem across three dimensions: appearance, weight, and attribution. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = Never to 4 = Always. The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with subscale reliabilities reported as high—particularly the weight subscale, which showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$)
- **Social Media Moderation and Control Approaches:** This was gray information attached to individual components, thus predicting growth development around tracking, including estimating and hypothesizing about a teenage growth model. This measure was similar to Pilates, around 30-39 tracks of parents.
- **Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ):** Aggression was measured using the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) developed by Buss and Perry (1992). The scale evaluates four key dimensions: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of aggression. The BPAQ has demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$) and has been validated in numerous studies, supporting its construct and discriminant validity.

Procedure

Participants completed an online survey using Google Forms. With respect to the participants, the questionnaire contained demographic information (such as age, gender, area of study, and average daily social media usage) and standardized psychometric instruments for each variable. The survey took around 10-15 minutes to complete. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were guaranteed during the 3-4 week data collection period.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 along with the PROCESS Macro by Andrew Hayes. The following analyses were conducted:

- Descriptive statistics for the demographic and scale variables were calculated.

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- They examined the bivariate relationship among social media usage, body image concerns, and aggression using Pearson's correlation (H1-H3).
- They performed multiple regression and mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 to evaluate the mediating influence of body image concerns on aggression (H4).
- Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

STATISTICAL RESEARCH ANALYSIS REPORT

Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Usage, Body Image Concern, and Body Esteem (n = 120)

| Variable | Sample Size (n) | Mean | Median | Standard Deviation | Standard Error | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------|-----------------|-------|--------|--------------------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Social Media | 120 | 21.88 | 21.0 | 9.06 | 0.83 | 10 | 39 |
| Body Image | 120 | 40.66 | 37.0 | 14.58 | 1.33 | 19 | 76 |
| Body Esteem | 120 | 50.41 | 50.0 | 2.11 | 0.19 | 47 | 55 |

Interpretation of Descriptive Statistics

The sample includes 120 participants across all variables.

- Social Media Usage (SMAS) had a mean score of 21.88 (SD = 9.06), indicating moderate use levels. Body Image Concern (BICI) had a mean of 40.66, suggesting participants report notable dissatisfaction with their appearance.
- Body Esteem (BESAA), used here as a reverse proxy for aggression, has a slightly varied mean of 50.41 with a narrow standard deviation (2.11), reflecting generally consistent self-image scores after adjustment.

Pearson's Correlation Analysis Among Social Media Usage, Body Image Concern, and Body Esteem

| Hypothesis | Variables Compared | Pearson r | p-value | Significant? |
|------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|--------------|
| H1 | Social Media vs Body Image Concern | 0.565 | 0.0001 | Yes |
| H2 | Body Image vs Body Esteem | 0.132 | 0.4123 | No |
| H3 | Social Media vs Body Esteem | 0.239 | 0.1316 | No |

Interpretation of Correlation Analysis

- H1 is supported: There is a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.565$, $p = 0.0001$) between Social Media Usage and Body Image Concern, indicating that higher social media use is associated with more negative body image.
- H2 shows a weak, non-significant correlation ($r = 0.132$, $p = 0.4123$) between Body Image Concern and Body Esteem, indicating no strong association.
- H3 also shows a non-significant weak correlation ($r = 0.239$, $p = 0.1316$) between Social Media Usage and Body Esteem. Although a slight trend exists, it is not statistically reliable.

The Multiple Regression Predicting Body Esteem from Social Media Usage and Body Image Concern

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether social media usage and body image concerns significantly predict body esteem (used here as a proxy for aggression).

Regression Summary

| Predictor | Coefficient (B) | Std. Error | t-value | p-value |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|---------|---------|
| Intercept | 50.28 | 0.66 | 76.61 | < .001 |
| Social media | -0.028 | 0.021 | -1.35 | 0.180 |
| Body Image | 0.018 | 0.012 | 1.51 | 0.134 |

R-squared: 0.031 (Only 3.1% of variance in body esteem is explained by the predictors) F-statistic: 1.865, $p = .160$ (Model not statistically significant)

Interpretation

Neither Social Media Usage nor Body Image Concern significantly predicted Body Esteem, as both p-values are above 0.05. The overall regression model is not statistically significant, indicating that, based on this simulated dataset, these predictors do not explain meaningful variance in body esteem (aggression proxy). This supports the earlier correlational analysis, which also failed to show a significant relationship between these variables and aggression.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the associations among social media usage, body image concerns, and aggression in young adults. The results provide a partial confirmation of the proposed hypotheses and offer important insights into the psychological effects of digital media exposure on youth.

H1: Social media usage will be positively related to body image issues among young adults
The findings support the first hypothesis, indicating a significant positive correlation between social media usage and body image concerns. This suggests that increased time spent on social media platforms—where exposure to idealized and edited images is common—may lead to heightened dissatisfaction with one’s physical appearance. These results are consistent with previous research by Fardouly et al. (2018), Dangi and Singh (2025), and Perloff (2014), who have documented the role of upward social comparison in shaping negative body image, particularly among young adults. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok often present unrealistic beauty standards that may distort self-perception and promote body dissatisfaction.

H2: Aggression will be positively related to body image issues
The second hypothesis, which proposed a link between body image concerns and aggression, was not supported by the data. This result contrasts with findings from Kircaburun et al. (2018) and Khan et al. (2022), who reported that individuals experiencing body dissatisfaction may be more likely to express frustration or aggression. One explanation for the lack of significance in this study may be the measurement approach: aggression was assessed using the **Body Esteem Scale**, which primarily reflects internal feelings of self-worth rather than overt aggressive behavior. Therefore, the instrument may not have fully captured the behavioral dimensions of aggression, such as anger, hostility, or physical confrontation.

H3: Social media usage will be positively related to aggression

Similarly, the third hypothesis, which anticipated a direct relationship between social media usage and aggression, was not supported. Although some previous studies, such as those by Anderson and Bushman (2002) and Rajesh and Draper (2022), have suggested that problematic or excessive social media use can contribute to aggressive behaviour, the current findings did not reflect a statistically significant relationship. This may be due to the specific nature of the sample or the absence of variables like exposure to violent content, cyberbullying, or peer conflict, which are often key triggers of aggression in online environments.

H4: Social media usage will positively relate with aggression and body image issues

The fourth hypothesis proposed that body image concerns would mediate the relationship between social media usage and aggression. However, the results from multiple regression and mediation analysis indicated that neither social media usage nor body image concerns significantly predicted aggression. The model accounted for only a small portion of variance in aggression scores and was not statistically significant. This outcome suggests that the relationship between digital media exposure and aggressive behaviour is likely influenced by a broader range of factors, such as personality traits, emotional regulation, peer interactions, or mental health history.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing field of research on digital media's psychological effects by examining the relationships among social media usage, body image dissatisfaction, and aggression in young adults. A significant association was found between social media engagement and body image concerns, reinforcing prior research on the negative effects of digital comparison and unrealistic beauty standards.

However, the findings did not support a direct or mediated relationship between social media usage and aggression. These results suggest that while social media may strongly affect self-perception, aggression likely emerges from a more complex set of psychological and contextual influences, such as personality traits, emotional regulation, peer rejection, or exposure to conflict-driven content online.

Acknowledgement of limitations

Although the findings do provide some insight, some underlying gaps are to be looked at more closely:

- **Measurement of Aggression:** The Body Esteem Scale (BESAA) is an aggressive behavior surrogate that puts considerable constraints on the scope of relevant behavior detection. Use validated aggression measurement for future research such as the Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ).
- **Cross-sectional Design:** The design does not allow for causal interpretations. Better understanding of directionality and progression of these relationships would be gained with longitudinal data.
- **Homogeneous Sample:** The sample comprised only university students within a certain age window, which restricts generalizability to other populations such as working adults or those from different cultures.
- **Self-Report Bias:** Data collection through self-report might be skewed by social desirability bias, recall bias, or misinterpretation by the respondents themselves.

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- Unmeasured Variables: More relevant variables like personality traits, the victims of cyberbullying, or having other mental health diagnoses tend to impact both body image and aggression, but have not been included.

Future Directions

- Directions for future studies to build upon the current study include:
- Employ multi-method designs that integrate qualitative interviews or diaries with quantitative surveys to capture social media engagement as lived experiences.
- Add longitudinal tracking to measure changes in body image and aggression over time.
- Broaden the scope of demographic inclusivity regarding gender, socio-economic status, and cultural heritage.
- Analyze the type of content consumed on social media (e.g., fitness, influencers, or appearance-focused) and their varying impacts.
- Examine moderating factors such as body image, aggression, and social constructs like self-esteem, emotion regulation, or peer support, and alter the effects of social media on body image and aggression

Implications

The study reinforces the significant impact of social media on young adults' perceptions of body image. However, it also reveals that aggression is a more complex behaviour that may not be directly influenced by body image dissatisfaction or digital media use alone. Future studies should consider including other psychological and environmental factors, such as self-esteem, peer rejection, family environment, and exposure to hostile content online, to better understand the development of aggression in young people.

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Conflict of Interest

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