

Research Paper

Impact of Social Media Addiction on Body Self Image Perception of Young Adult

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ABSTRACT

The growing influence of social media is subtly reshaping young adults' perceptions of their body self, often leading to an altered sense of self-worth. The purpose of this study was to explore how social media addiction affect the body self image of young adult. The data was randomly collected from various institution of Nainital district of Uttarakhand. The data comprise of 240 young adults from diverse academic disciplines assessing various dimensions of body self-image perceptions, consisted of 120 individual of social media addiction (high social media addiction and low social media addiction). Subsequently divided into further two categories based on gender (male and female), each with 60 participants. The Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), developed by Ünal and Deniz (2015) and Body Self Image Questionnaire developed by Rowe (1999) was administered. For statistical analysis a two-way ANOVA was used by SPSS. The results of the study revealed significant differences at 0.05 level between high and low social media-addicted individuals across several dimensions of body image perception, including Overall Appearance Evaluation, Health Fitness Influence, Health Fitness Evaluation, Attention to Grooming, Height Dissatisfaction, Fitness Evaluation, Negative Affect, and Social Dependence. However, no significant difference was observed at the 0.05 level in the Investment in Ideals dimension. Additionally, gender-based analysis indicated significant differences at the 0.05 level in Overall Appearance Evaluation, Investment in Ideals, Health Fitness Evaluation, Negative Affect, and Social Dependence. Lastly, no significant differences at 0.05 were found in other of body image perception with respect to gender.

Keywords: *Body Image Perception, Social Media Addiction, Young Adults*

In today's digital age, social media is central to interaction, shaping how people connect, express themselves, and influence opinions. It has become part of daily life, enabling instant exchange of ideas, identity formation, and social change, while also supporting knowledge sharing and professional networking. Social media refers to "websites and online tools that facilitate interactions between users by providing opportunities to share information, opinions, and interests" (Swar & Hameed, 2017, p. 141). Social media has grown rapidly, with active users rising from 5.47 billion in 2023 to 5.24 billion in 2025. India represents Instagram's largest market, with nearly 363 million users—most between

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18 and 34 years—showing its strong hold on young adults (DataReportal, 2024; Backlinko, 2024). National surveys also highlight high levels of use among adolescents, with 57.6% of boys and 26.6% of girls in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh actively engaged (Singh et al., 2021). Globally, about 84% of adults under 30 report using at least one platform (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Among college students, platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are integral to daily life, with over 60% spending more than two hours online. This connectivity supports self-expression and empowerment but also poses risks such as misinformation, privacy issues, and mental health challenges like “Facebook depression,” fear of missing out (FOMO), and social comparison (SCO) (Blease, 2015). Social media fosters dependency through algorithms that deliver personalized content, where each interaction, notifications, videos, or feedback—triggers dopamine release. Repeated exposure strengthens craving, reduces self-regulation, and, as the brain adapts it demands more engagement for the same satisfaction, creating a cycle of endless scrolling and potential addiction (Haidt & Allen, 2020). Among young adults, this dependency is particularly concerning, as it often disrupts daily routines, academic performance, sleep patterns, and face-to-face social interactions, leaving them more vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and feelings of disconnection.

Young adulthood is crucial for identity formation, career preparation, and relationships. Social media supports communication and growth, but excessive use can harm psychological and physical well-being. Dependence on online validation ties self-esteem to likes and comments, reinforcing self-concept through positive feedback while avoiding negative judgments (Andreassen, 2015). High self-esteem individuals may also engage heavily to maintain an idealized image (Marshall et al., 2015). Unmet expectations often lead to insecurity, low self-worth, anxiety, or depression, with addiction linked to emotional disorders (Andreassen et al., 2016). Physically, it can cause sleep disruption (26.1%), irritability and aggression (25.5%), eye strain (38.4%), and other behavioral issues (Masthi et al., 2018). Erikson described young adulthood as the stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation, where forming meaningful relationships is central to development. Social media complicates this by encouraging reliance on external validation as a measure of self-worth. When identity is defined through digital approval, self-concept remains fragile, leaving young adults vulnerable to insecurity, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Liṭan, 2025; Marino et al., 2018). Curated online personas hinder authentic intimacy, increasing loneliness and reducing well-being (Primack et al., 2017). Excessive use disrupts sleep, promotes isolation, and can lead to addiction, while exposure to idealized images fuels unrealistic comparisons, body dissatisfaction, and further vulnerability to disconnection (Papapanou et al., 2023).

Body image is how individuals perceive, think, and feel about their bodies, influenced by culture, society, and personal experiences. Mason et al. (2020) define it as “a multidimensional construct including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects,” beyond just physical appearance. Social media strongly shapes body image by promoting unrealistic beauty standards through curated content, edited photos, and idealized lifestyles, with platforms like Instagram and Facebook presenting polished portrayals where selective sharing and digital manipulation create “perfect pictures” that rarely reflect reality (Kleemans et al., 2016). These portrayals encourage ongoing comparison, distort self-perception, and contribute to dissatisfaction with one’s appearance (Xiong, 2023; Trajković, 2022). Young adults, in particular, are highly susceptible to these influences, internalizing unattainable ideals that may manifest in negative body evaluations, disordered eating patterns, and increased vulnerability to anxiety and depression (Jiotsa et al., 2021; Vuong et

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al., 2021). Research shows that frequent online appearance-based comparisons are linked to greater body concerns, lower self-satisfaction, and identity distress, especially in adolescence and early adulthood when self-concept is still forming (Fisher et al., 2022; Avci et al., 2025). For young adults, social media enables communication but also shapes digital identities, where self-worth often depends on online feedback. While it can serve as a coping tool, excessive use leads to distraction, emotional dysregulation, and maladaptive coping (Bellini et al., 2017). Constant exposure to beauty ideals pressures women toward thinness and men toward muscularity (Baltaci et al., 2021; Koronczai et al., 2013), fueling low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and depressive symptoms (Eckler et al., 2017; Fardouly et al., 2015). Influencer culture intensifies self-comparison (Boyle & Lipson, 2017), and compulsive monitoring and validation-seeking increase dependency, heightening risks of anxiety, depression, and chronic stress (Fardouly et al., 2016).

Examining the impact of social media addiction on body self-image is vital, as young adults are constantly exposed to idealized online portrayals. Such comparisons can significantly shape self-perception during a stage of identity formation and heightened social sensitivity. Understanding this relationship provides insight into how digital dependence affects confidence, self-acceptance, and overall body image.

Based on the literature review, the research objectives were:

To assess the level of all dimensions of body self image among young adult with regards to social media. Additionally, to compare young adult in all the dimensions of body self image and gender with regards to social media. Furthermore, to find out interaction effect of all the dimensions of body self image with regards to social media and gender

Hypotheses:

- There would be significance difference in young adult on all the dimensions of body self image on the basis of social media.
- There would be significance difference in male and female on all the dimensions of body self image.
- Social media and Gender would interact significantly on all the level of body self Image.

METHOD

Sample:

A random sampling process was employed to select participants from diverse academic discipline from Nainital district of Uttarakhand. The data was randomly collected from various institution of Nainital district of Uttarakhand. The data comprise of 240 young adults from diverse academic disciplines assessing various dimensions of body self-image perceptions, consisted of 120 individuals of social media addiction (high social media addiction and low social media addiction). Subsequently divided into further two categories based on gender (male and female), each with 60 participants. Data were collected using a personal data schedule and Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS). For statistical analysis Anova was employed to analyse significant differences between the groups.

Tools for Data Collection:

- **Personal Data Schedule (PDS):** It was a self-developed tool for gathering preliminary information about the subjects including name, age, gender etc.
- **Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS):** The Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), developed by Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz (2015). It contains 41 items with 4

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factors including: occupation, mood modification, relapse, and conflict, Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) is 0.967, and test-retest reliability is 0.84. Factor analysis reveals the four factors explain 59% of the variance. Concurrent validity is strong, with correlations of 0.75 with the Facebook Addiction Scale and 0.66 with the Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale.

- **Body Self Image Questionnaire- Short Form (BSIQ-SF):** Body Self Image Questionnaire developed by David Rowe (1999). It contains 51-item questionnaire that included 9- factors, which were Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE); Health Fitness Influence (HFI); Investment in Ideals (II); Health-Fitness Evaluation (HFE); Attention to Grooming (AG); Height Dissatisfaction (HD); Fatness Evaluation (FE); Negative Affect (NA); Social Dependence. (SD). The internal consistency reliabilities for the subscales were calculated that ranged from.68 to.92.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

		High Social Media Addiction		Low Social Media Addiction	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Overall Appearance Evaluation	Female	11.3	3.44	12.4	2.25
	Male	11.3	2.96	12.23	2.25
Health Fitness influence	Female	10.17	3.05	11.57	2.04
	Male	10.77	2.23	11.37	3.44
Investment in ideals	Female	8.93	2.97	9.32	3.62
	Male	9.97	3.45	8.47	3.51
Health fitness evaluation	Female	8.8	2.90	10.63	2.73
	Male	10.47	2.54	11.17	3.48
Attention to grooming	Female	9.5	2.68	8.03	2.48
	Male	9.93	2.77	8.13	3.24
Height dissatisfaction	Female	7.7	3.30	5.53	2.48
	Male	7.77	3.35	6.4	3.29
Fatness Evaluation	Female	5.97	2.94	4.23	2.95
	Male	6.5	3.48	4.2	1.75
Negative Affect	Female	7.53	3.27	5.03	2.12
	Male	9.07	2.13	7.13	2.75
Social Dependence	Female	8.6	2.90	10.64	2.73
	Male	10.46	2.54	11.16	3.38

Table 2: Analysis of Variance of Overall appearance evaluation

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of Social media	1	31.008	31.008	4.158	Sig.
Gender	1	.208	.208	.208	NS
Level of Social media*Gender	1	.208	.208	.208	NS
Error	116	865.16	7.458		

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Table 3: Analysis of Variance of Health Fitness Influence

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of social media	1	30.000	30.000	3.955	Sig
Gender	1	1.200	1.200	.158	NS
Level of social media *Gender	1	4.800	4.800	.633	NS
Error	116	879.8	7.585		

Table 4: Analysis of Variance of Investment in Ideals

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of social media	1	.533	.533	0.46	NS
Gender	1	56.03	56.033	4.871	Sig
Level of social media *Gender	1	3.33	3.333	.290	NS
Error	116	1334.46	11.504		

Table 5: Analysis of Variance of Health Fitness Evaluation

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of social media	1	48.13	48.133	5.57	Sig
Gender	1	36.30	36.30	4.20	Sig
Level of social media *Gender	1	9.63	9.633	1.11	NS
Error	116	1001.4			

Table 6 : Analysis of Variance of Attention to Grooming

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of social media	1	80.03	80.03	9.53	Sig
Gender	1	2.13	2.13	.254	NS
Level of social media *Gender	1	.833	.833	.099	NS
Error	116		8.39		

Table 7: Analysis of Variance of Height Dissatisfaction

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of social media	1	93.6	93.6	9.55	Sig
Gender	1	6.53	6.53	.667	NS
Level of social media *Gender	1	4.80	4.80	.490	NS
Error	116	1136.3	9.79		

Table 8: Analysis of Variance of Fatness Evaluation

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of social media	1	122.0	122.0	14.98	Sig
Gender	1	1.87	1.875	.230	NS
Level of social media *Gender	116	2.40	2.40	.296	NS
Error		9.44.6	8.143		

Table 9: Analysis of Variance of Negative Affect

Source	Df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of social media	1	147.4	147.4	21.54	Sig
Gender	1	99.0	99.00	14.46	Sig
Level of social media *Gender	116	2.40	2.40	.352	NS
Error		793.76	6.84		

Table 10: Analysis of Variance of Social Dependence

Source	Df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Level of social media	1	47.12	47.13	5.476	Sig
Gender	1	35.30	36.20	4.10	Sig
Level of social media *Gender	1	9.53	9.53	1.01	Sig
Error	116	1001.3			

RESULT

The results of the study revealed significant differences at the 0.05 level between high and low social media-addicted individuals across several dimensions of body image perception, including Overall Appearance Evaluation, Health Fitness Influence, Health Fitness Evaluation, Attention to Grooming, Height Dissatisfaction, Fatness Evaluation, Negative Affect, and Social Dependence, leading to partial acceptance of Hypothesis 1. No significant difference was observed in the Investment in Ideals dimension. Gender-based analysis indicated significant differences at the 0.05 level in Overall Appearance Evaluation, Investment in Ideals, Health Fitness Evaluation, Negative Affect, and Social Dependence, resulting in partial rejection of Hypothesis 2. Interaction effects were non-significant in most dimensions except Social Dependence, where a significant interaction led to partial rejection of Hypothesis 3.

DISCUSSION

For overall body evaluation, a significant difference was observed between young adults with high and low social media use: high users were influenced by idealized images, linking self-worth to feedback and experiencing dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, anxiety, or depression, while low users evaluated their appearance more independently. In their study, Silva (2023) found excessive use promotes upward comparisons and body dissatisfaction. No significant gender difference was found, as both women and men experience harmful comparison. In their meta-analysis, McComb et al. (2023) found exposure to idealized images reduces body satisfaction in both genders, with the interaction between gender and social media non-significant, indicating equal influence.

For the level of health fitness influence a significant difference was observed between young adults with high and low social media use. High users are exposed to fitness routines, diets, and supplement promotions, which can motivate healthy habits but also pose risks, while low users avoid risks but miss motivation. In their study, Xiao, Huang, and Li (2025) found such use boosts exercise intention, whereas Fardouly et al. (2018) linked exposure to idealized bodies with dissatisfaction and unhealthy dieting. No significant gender difference was found, and interaction between gender. Holland and Tiggemann (2016) similarly found that appearance-based comparisons on social media influence men and women equally. Finally, the interaction between gender and social media use was non-significant at the 0.05 level.

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For the level of investment in ideals, no significant difference was observed between young adults with high and low social media use, as striving for beauty standards like the “perfect body,” Korean “glass skin,” or cosmetic surgery is widespread. Yao et al. (2024) found repeated exposure to idealized images increased thin-ideal internalization, appearance anxiety, and consideration of cosmetic procedures in both groups. A significant gender difference emerged, with females facing stronger social expectations and investing more in beauty practices. Lang et al. (2024) found societal and media pressures strongly motivated young females, while the interaction between gender and social media was non-significant, indicating both factors equally influence investment in ideals.

For health fitness evaluation, a significant difference was observed between young adults with high and low social media use. Excessive use promotes sedentary behavior, poor sleep, lower physical activity, and distorted fitness perceptions. Moitra et al. (2021) found higher screen time and poor sleep linked to increased obesity and central adiposity. Gender differences were significant: males receive more encouragement for exercise, while females face barriers like limited safe spaces and societal focus on appearance (Contractor et al., 2023). Interaction between gender and social media was non-significant, indicating both factors equally influence fitness evaluation.

At the level of attention to grooming, a significant difference was observed between young adults with high and low social media use. Being “camera-ready” is routine in today’s digital culture, with filters, trends, and viral hacks creating pressure to maintain appearance. High-engagement users compare themselves to curated images, increasing time on grooming, while low users face less pressure. In their study, Alfonso et al. (2023) found greater Instagram use was linked to more appearance comparisons, lower body-image satisfaction, and higher focus on self-grooming. No significant gender difference or interaction with social media was found, indicating both factors equally influence grooming attention.

For the level of height dissatisfaction, a significant difference was found between high and low social media users. Online promotion of “tall is ideal” heightens self-consciousness in shorter individuals, while low users face less exposure and dissatisfaction. Alfonso-Fuertes et al. (2023) found greater Instagram use linked to appearance concerns, showing repeated exposure heightens dissatisfaction with traits like height. No significant gender difference was found, as height concerns affect both genders—men wishing to appear taller, women dissatisfied if too tall or short. Mo and Bai (2022) also found no gender differences in height dissatisfaction. The interaction between gender and social media was non-significant at the 0.05 level, indicating both factors equally influence height dissatisfaction.

For the level of fatness evaluation, a significant difference was observed between young adults with high and low social media use. High users, exposed to thin-ideal images, often view small amounts of fat negatively, perceive themselves as “too fat.”, Delgado-Rodríguez et al. (2022) that higher social media addiction was linked with greater internalization of the thin ideal, often driving extreme dieting or cosmetic procedures. Low users evaluate fatness more realistically. No significant gender difference was found, while men may worry about being too soft and women about being slightly overweight, Akçakese et al. (2024) also found no gender differences in social appearance anxiety. Interaction between gender and social media was non-significant, indicating both factors equally influence fatness evaluation.

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For the level of negative affect, a significant difference was observed between young adults with high and low social media use. High users face social comparisons, curated images, cyberbullying, and FOMO, increasing anxiety, depression, stress, irritability, low self-esteem, and loneliness, while low users maintain more stable moods. A significant gender difference was found, with women reporting higher negative affect due to greater sensitivity to social pressures, while men cope through action-oriented strategies. Keles et al. (2020) also linked higher social media use to depression, anxiety, and stress, with stronger effects in women. The interaction between gender and social media was non-significant, indicating both genders are similarly influenced.

For the level of social dependence, a significant difference was observed between young adults with high and low social media use. High users rely on social media for connection, validation, and staying “in the loop,” often replacing real-life interactions, while low users maintain more face-to-face contact and balance. Andreassen et al. (2017) found higher social media use is linked to compulsive behavior and greater social dependence. A significant gender difference was observed, with females relying more on social media for validation, while males use it mainly for entertainment or information; high use increases dependence across both genders. The interaction between gender and social media was significant, indicating both factors together influence social dependence.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight that excessive social media use shapes how young adults evaluate their appearance, health, and grooming, often linking self-worth with online validation. Since significant gender differences were found in dimensions such as appearance evaluation, ideals, and social dependence, interventions should be gender-sensitive, addressing the unique pressures faced by males and females. The study also shows that while not every aspect of body image is equally affected, the consistent influence of social media underscores the need for awareness programs, digital literacy campaigns, and counseling support in schools, colleges, and workplaces. Encouraging mindful use of social media, fostering critical thinking about online content, and promoting healthier coping strategies can reduce negative self-comparisons and dependency, ultimately protecting young adults' self-esteem and mental well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

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