

Exploring the Impact of Social Media Addiction on Body Image Dissatisfaction and Depression among Adults

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social media plays a significant role in adult life, influencing communication, self-presentation, and psychological well-being. Excessive use may lead to social media addiction, this has been linked to an unhappy self-image and mental health issues. However, existing research shows inconsistent findings, particularly among adults, indicating the need for a focused review of the literature. **Objective:** The objective of the study was to review existing research on the relationship between social media addiction, body image dissatisfaction, and depression among adults and to examine gender-related patterns. **Methodology:** A secondary research design using a narrative literature review was adopted. Peer-reviewed articles and scholarly sources were collected from databases such as Google Scholar and PubMed. Relevant studies were analyzed thematically. **Conclusion:** Adults' body image dissatisfaction and sadness are not strongly predicted by social media addiction on their own, according to the analysis. Psychological outcomes are influenced by multiple factors such as social comparison, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. Promoting balanced social media use and media literacy may support better mental health.

Keywords: *Social Media Addiction, Body Image Dissatisfaction, Depression, Adults, Secondary Research*

In the contemporary digital era, social media has become an indispensable part of daily life, fundamentally transforming the ways in which individuals communicate, interact, and perceive themselves and others. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat are no more just social media platforms; they are multipurpose areas where people can express themselves, network professionally, have fun, and share knowledge. Adults across diverse age groups increasingly rely on these platforms to maintain relationships, access information, and engage with communities across the globe. Constant engagement has reshaped social behaviors, created new norms for self-presentation, and introduced novel psychological challenges that were largely absent before the advent of social media.

Even while social media offers numerous benefits, like increased connectivity, immediate information availability, and opportunities for creative self-expression, excessive usage may

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have negative consequences, particularly for mental health. Social media addiction has emerged as a significant psychological concern in recent years, characterized by excessive, compulsive, and uncontrollable engagement with online platforms. Individuals exhibiting addictive patterns often prioritize virtual interactions over real-life responsibilities and experience distress when unable to access social media. This phenomenon is driven by multiple psychological mechanisms, including the activation of reward pathways in the brain, reinforcement through likes and comments, and FOMO, which encourages people to stay connected all the time. Over time, these patterns can evolve into habitual behaviors that interfere with emotional well-being, social functioning, and productivity. Extensive research highlights that the addictive nature of social media is strongly tied to the brain's reward circuitry. Each notification, like, or comment generates a dopamine response, creating a cycle of anticipation and gratification similar to other behavioral addictions (Amirthalingam et al., 2024; Vasan & Johansen, 2023). This reinforcement loop encourages users to repeatedly check their devices and fosters dependency over time. Individuals struggling with such compulsive engagement often find it difficult to regulate their screen time, prioritize online interactions over real-life responsibilities, and experience discomfort or distress when unable to access social platforms (McLean Hospital, 2025). The fear of losing out (FoMO), which manifests as apprehension about being left out of pleasurable experiences, is a crucial psychological process behind this obsession. FoMO has been consistently linked with greater vulnerability to problematic social media use, heightened psychological distress, and reduced life satisfaction (Gupta et al., 2021; Soraci et al., 2025). Studies further indicate that FoMO contributes to distractibility, poor productivity, and unhealthy comparisons, thereby amplifying negative emotional states (Topino et al., 2023; Rozgonjuk et al., 2020). Taken together, these findings suggest that while social media provides avenues for connection and expression, its addictive patterns can significantly disrupt emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being.

A major area of concern related to social media addiction is shaping how people see their own bodies. A person's body image is their own assessment of how they look, encompassing thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward one's own body. Adults are increasingly exposed to idealized, digitally enhanced representations of beauty and fitness on social media platforms. The constant comparison to these curated images can foster dissatisfaction with one's own body, even among individuals who might otherwise maintain a healthy self-concept. In the context of social media, adults may be particularly vulnerable because these platforms present a continuous stream of images and content that highlight perceived social and physical inadequacies. A significant issue associated with excessive social media use is its influence on how individuals perceive their bodies. A person's body image may be defined as their subjective assessment of their own physical attractiveness, shaped by internal feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. With the rise of platforms like Instagram and TikTok, adults are regularly confronted with filtered and idealized portrayals of beauty and fitness that often promote unattainable standards. Exposure to such content encourages users to compare themselves with others, which research has shown to be strongly linked to greater dissatisfaction with one's body (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). People have a tendency to judge themselves negatively when compared to someone they see as more beautiful or successful, which is supported by social comparison theory. While looking at negative comparisons (Perloff, 2014). Studies further suggest that prolonged exposure to these pictures might impair self-esteem, perpetuate anxieties, and increase the risk of developing disordered eating behaviors (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Tiggemann & Slater,

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2013). This suggests that adults may be particularly at risk in today's digital environment, where an endless stream of curated content continually highlights perceived shortcomings. Alongside body image concerns, excessive social media use has also been associated with depressive symptoms. For example, frequent exposure to idealized internet information might induce emotions of inadequacy and poor self-esteem, which in turn contribute to depressive affect. Additionally, social media can foster social isolation, cyberbullying, and pressure to maintain an idealized online persona, all of which exacerbate emotional distress. Adults, balancing work, family, and social responsibilities, may find themselves particularly susceptible to these stressors, as social media use can intrude into multiple aspects of daily life.

The interplay of depression, body image dissatisfaction, and social media addiction exposes a complex network of cognitive and emotional processes. Cognitive characteristics, such as upward social comparison and internalization of cultural beauty norms, combine with emotional regulation abilities to determine the amount to which social media usage affects mental health. Continuous exposure to curated content may lead adults to adopt maladaptive coping strategies, experience heightened self-criticism, and develop persistent negative affect. These dynamics suggest that social media addiction does not simply represent a behavioral concern but has broader implications for adult psychological well-being.

Research indicates that women may be more vulnerable to body image concerns due to societal and cultural pressures emphasizing physical appearance, while men may experience similar effects related to muscularity, fitness, and social status. These differences in susceptibility can influence the way social media addiction manifests across genders, affecting both the intensity of engagement and the nature of the psychological consequences. Additionally, sociocultural factors such as cultural norms, media messaging, and community expectations contribute to the degree of body dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms experienced by adults, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the issue.

One of the biggest issues connected with prolonged social media usage is the development of social media addiction. This disease is characterized by obsessive and excessive participation with social networking sites, often to the detriment of real-life responsibilities and interpersonal relationships. Individuals exhibiting addictive patterns often check notifications, post content, and interact online, sometimes at the expense of work, study, or social obligations. This behavior is reinforced through instant feedback mechanisms, such as likes, comments, and shares, which stimulate reward pathways in the brain and strengthen habitual engagement. Over time, these patterns may evolve into dependency, where the absence of social media causes anxiety, distress, or discomfort. A recent research by Andreassen et al. (2017) emphasized that people who display greater degrees of social media addiction report more frequent negative emotional reactions while unable to access social platforms, revealing the ubiquitous effect of digital involvement on psychological well-being. Social media platforms are swamped with photos of idealized beauty, fitness, and lifestyle standards, many of which are digitally altered or curated to offer a flawless image. Adults frequently compare themselves to these representations, leading to negative self-evaluations and dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Social comparison theory explains this phenomenon by suggesting that individuals evaluate themselves relative to others, and when comparisons involve idealized or unrealistic images, they often result in negative feelings about oneself. A study conducted during (2018) revealed that exposure to social media content emphasizing appearance-related comparisons significantly increased body

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dissatisfaction among adult women and men, highlighting the role of online content in shaping self-perception. While adolescents are often the focus of research on body image, adults are equally susceptible, particularly due to continuous exposure to social media content highlighting professional, social, and lifestyle ideals.

Beyond body image concerns, social media addiction is closely connected with depression symptoms. Depression, typified by continuing emotions of melancholy, lack of interest in things formerly thought pleasurable, and a sense of despair, represents a major global mental health concern. Excessive social media engagement can exacerbate depressive symptoms through multiple pathways. The constant exposure to idealized images and lifestyles may foster social comparison and feelings of inadequacy. Additionally, online interactions may sometimes result in social isolation, cyberbullying, or pressure to maintain an idealized self-presentation, all of which contribute to emotional distress. Adults, juggling work, family, and social responsibilities, may experience these effects more intensely, as social media use can intrude into multiple facets of daily life and amplify stress.

Several theoretical perspectives provide insight into the psychological mechanics underlying social media addiction and its ramifications. Social Comparison Theory illustrates how individuals assess themselves relative to others, typically ending in negative self-assessments when comparisons involve romanticized images. Social Comparison Theory, first established by Leon Festinger in 1954, explains how individuals appraise their own abilities, beliefs, and self-worth by comparing themselves with others. According to the idea, people have a natural urge to quantify their status, and in the absence of objective standards, they rely on social comparisons. These comparisons can take two primary forms: upward and downward. Downward comparisons, on the other hand, occur when individuals compare themselves with those considered less fortunate, often boosting self-perception and confidence. In the digital era, this process has intensified through social media sites, where individuals are continually presented with carefully curated and idealized portrayals of other people. Such comparisons frequently contribute to body dissatisfaction, reduced life satisfaction, and negative emotional outcomes, making Social Comparison Theory a key framework for understanding the psychological effects of social media.

Additionally, theories of reward and habit formation describe how repeated positive reinforcement from social media interactions strengthens engagement patterns, influencing emotional regulation and psychological outcomes.

The study of social media addiction and its psychological impacts in adults is particularly important given the increasing integration of digital platforms into daily life. While adolescents and young adults have been the focus of much research, adults comprise a significant proportion of social media users and face unique challenges in balancing professional responsibilities, family obligations, and social expectations. Understanding how social media addiction impacts body image dissatisfaction and depression in adults is critical for identifying risk factors, implementing preventative treatments, and improving mental health in the digital era.

Furthermore, excessive social media participation has significant societal repercussions. Adults who internalize unrealistic standards may adopt unhealthy behaviors, experience strained social relationships, and encounter reduced overall well-being. By exploring these

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relationships, research can inform strategies for mitigating negative outcomes, enhancing public awareness, and promoting healthier social media usage among adults.

It's also important for mental health therapies to look at the link between depression, body image difficulties, and social media addiction. Insights into the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying these associations can guide the development of targeted strategies to reduce compulsive social media use, improve self-perception, and enhance coping skills.

Public health initiatives, workplace wellness programs, and digital literacy campaigns can all benefit from evidence-based recommendations informed by such research. Cognitive and emotional factors, such as upward social comparisons, perfectionism, and emotional regulation deficits, interact to shape how adults respond to social media stimuli. Continuous exposure to curated and idealized content can trigger maladaptive comparisons, self-criticism, and negative emotional states, which in turn may reinforce depressive feelings and discontent with one's physique. These dynamics show that social media addiction is not only a behavioral problem but a crucial element impacting mental health and general wellness in people.

While social media provides numerous advantages, including enhanced connectivity, convenience, and access to information, it also poses substantial psychological risks. Chief among these is social media addiction, characterized by compulsive and excessive engagement with digital platforms. Social media addiction is marked by behaviors such as frequent checking of notifications, obsessive posting, and prioritizing online interactions over real-world responsibilities. Neuropsychological research indicates that these behaviors are reinforced through activation of the brain's reward circuitry, particularly the dopaminergic system, creating habitual patterns that are challenging to interrupt.

Several theoretical frameworks give insight into the processes underpinning social media addiction and its psychological impacts. When these needs become overly dependent on social media, individuals may develop addictive patterns that interfere with mental health. Furthermore, psychological theories of reward and habit formation explain how repeated exposure to reinforcing stimuli, such as likes and comments, strengthens compulsive engagement and contributes to emotional dysregulation. Unlike earlier perspectives that viewed audiences as passive recipients of media influence, this theory emphasizes the agency of users in selecting media content that aligns with their motives. People turn to media for a variety of purposes, such as seeking entertainment, gaining information, forming social connections, and reinforcing personal identity. In the context of social media, this framework helps clarify why individuals spend significant time on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok. Users are often motivated by the desire for interaction, validation, or self-expression, and these gratifications reinforce their continued engagement. By focusing on user motivations and outcomes, the theory provides an important foundation for understanding how social media both satisfies personal needs and, at times, contributes to problematic usage patterns (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

The significance of studying social media addiction in adults lies in the increasing integration of digital platforms into everyday life. While much research has focused on adolescents and young adults, adult populations represent a substantial portion of social media users and face unique challenges, such as balancing professional responsibilities,

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family obligations, and social expectations. Therefore, critical for identifying risk factors, developing preventive interventions, and promoting mental health in a digital society.

In addition to individual-level effects, social media addiction has broader societal implications. It can influence public perceptions of beauty and success, shape cultural norms, and contribute to collective stress and anxiety. Adults who are highly engaged on these platforms often internalize unrealistic standards and may adopt behaviors to conform to perceived social expectations, potentially leading to unhealthy lifestyle practices, strained relationships, and reduced overall well-being. By examining these phenomena, researchers and policymakers may devise methods to reduce the harmful impacts of social media, raise awareness about healthy usage, and foster resilience among adult users.

Given the pervasive influence of social media, it is essential to consider both psychological and social dimensions when exploring its impact. Adults' engagement with digital platforms is not limited to social interaction but extends to professional networking, personal branding, and community participation. This multifaceted usage amplifies both the benefits and risks, making it important to examine how compulsive use contributes to dissatisfaction with body image and depressive symptoms. Research in this area can provide insights into the mechanisms through which social media shapes perceptions, emotional health, and behavioral patterns in adult populations.

Furthermore, examining the link between social media addiction, body image dissatisfaction, and depression has practical relevance for mental health interventions. By identifying key predictors and mediators, professionals can design targeted strategies to reduce compulsive usage, enhance coping skills, and promote healthier self-perceptions. Public health initiatives, workplace wellness programs, and digital literacy campaigns can benefit from such research by incorporating evidence-based recommendations to minimize the negative psychological impact of social media. While much research has focused on adolescents and young adults, the adult population has received comparatively less attention despite being a significant demographic of social media users. Adults face unique pressures, such as balancing career responsibilities, family life, and personal aspirations, which can be complicated by social media's pervasive presence. For many, social media becomes a platform not only for social engagement but also for self-promotion, career advancement, and identity validation.

This dual function of social media as both a social connection and a possible psychological risk factor makes it vital to examine its effect in a thorough way, specifically concentrating on how addiction to digital platforms impacts body image discontent and despair in adults.

Social media offers avenues for communication, personal expression, and sharing information, overuse can lead to harmful effect Research suggests that high engagement with social media is commonly associated to body image dissatisfaction, since regular exposure to idealized pictures and comparisons may diminish self-esteem. Prolonged use is also associated with increased symptoms of depression, particularly in vulnerable individuals. Exploring these connections among young adults aged 18–25 is crucial, as this age group is highly active online and more likely to be influenced by social media trends.

In conclusion, social media has transformed the landscape of adult life, creating opportunities for connection and self-expression while simultaneously introducing risks to

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mental health. Social media addiction represents a growing concern, with potential consequences for body image satisfaction and emotional well-being. By exploring these relationships in adult populations, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological implications of excessive social media engagement. This knowledge will contribute to both academic understanding and practical interventions, ultimately fostering healthier relationships with digital media and supporting adult mental health in the contemporary digital age. Research conducted in (2018) highlights how excessive social media engagement intensifies body dissatisfaction and emotional distress among adults, reinforcing the relevance of investigating these relationships. Examining these associations in adult populations is critical for understanding the broader psychological implications of digital engagement, identifying vulnerable groups, and informing strategies to foster healthier interactions with social media. This study aspires to contribute to a greater knowledge of how excessive social media usage affects adult mental health, giving significant insights for both research and practical therapies in the present digital world. Excessive interaction with social networking sites has been repeatedly associated to poor mental health outcomes among adults. Research highlights that compulsive use of social media can contribute to lower self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and greater vulnerability to depressive symptoms. One key mechanism underlying these associations is appearance-based social comparison, this arises when people judge themselves against highly manicured and idealized photos on sites such as Instagram or Facebook.

More recent systematic investigations suggest that seeing pictures of thinness or fitness goals considerably enhances unhappiness with one's own body, while exposure to diverse body representations appears to mitigate these effects (Fioravanti et al., 2022; Castellanos Silva & Steins, 2023). These findings suggest that social media addiction affects daily functioning and is associated with sadness and body image dissatisfaction, reinforcing its significance as a public mental health concern.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Liñan et al. (2025) examined that higher usage of social media platforms can negatively affect mental health in adults. The study focused specifically on anxiety and depression symptoms, finding that persons who spend a substantial amount of time on social media or demonstrate addictive behaviors are more likely to feel greater levels of anxiety, mood disturbances, and depressive symptoms. This shows that social media addiction is not just a behavioral problem but also a substantial psychological risk factor, impacting emotional wellbeing and overall mental health.

Wang (2025) suggested that social media addiction can increase the risk of depression in adults. This effect occurs because addictive social media use often leads to maladaptive behaviors, such as social appearance anxiety (worrying about how one looks compared to others) and body checking behavior (frequently monitoring one's appearance). These behaviors act as mediators, meaning they assist explain how social media addiction relates to depression symptoms.

Czubaj et al. (2025) studied how viewing fitspiration content—images and posts promoting fitness ideals—affects adults' body esteem. The study found that frequent exposure can lower body satisfaction, with effects influenced by gender and body mass index (BMI). This

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suggests that social media content promoting idealized body standards can contribute to body image dissatisfaction, especially among those more sensitive to appearance-related comparisons.

Bonfanti et al. (2025) discovers people who stay active on social media for excessive period are more likely to compare themselves with others, which can lead to dissatisfaction with their body. They also noted that this effect varies between men and women.

El Hayek et al. (2025) showed that depression may serve as a mediator between problematic social media use and body dysmorphic disorder. This suggests that addressing depressive symptoms could help reduce the harmful influence of social media addiction on body image.

Motlagh et al. (2023) assessed body image concerns, social isolation, and mood dependent on the quantity of social media usage, indicating that lowering social media involvement might ameliorate these concerns. Interventions aimed at reducing the negative impacts of social media on mental health have been explored.

Srisoem et al. (2023) explored how psychological elements such as self-esteem, life satisfaction, and extreme sadness and depression contribute to social media addiction among adolescents in Thailand. Their findings showed that adolescents with lower self-esteem and lower life satisfaction were more likely to develop addictive patterns of social media use. Furthermore, greater levels of social media addiction were connected to increased depressed symptoms, suggesting a cycle where poor self-perception and dissatisfaction drive excessive online engagement, which then negatively affects mental health. The research stresses the relevance of fostering self-esteem and overall life satisfaction as potential strategies to prevent or reduce social media addiction and its associated emotional consequences in young people.

Lone, et.al (2022) examined How social media addiction and views of body image effect self-esteem in university students. Interestingly, the study indicated a favorable link between social media addiction and self-esteem., It varies from many prior research that indicated a detrimental influence. This suggests that, for some students, social media engagement may boost self-confidence, possibly through social validation or positive feedback online. The authors stress that the link between social media usage, body image, and self-esteem is complicated and context-dependent, emphasizing a need for future study to identify the aspects that determine whether social media has favorable or bad effects on self-esteem.

Steinsbekk et al. (2021) evaluated the influence of social media usage on appearance self-esteem from infancy to adolescence. The results suggested that other-oriented social media usage (e.g., comparing oneself to others) significantly damaged appearance self-esteem, but self-oriented use did not have the same influence. This underscores the relevance of the type of social media involvement in shaping body image judgments.

Keles, et.al (2020). A systematic review: The effect of social media on depression, anxiety, and psychological discomfort in adolescents and young adults. This systematic review shows evidence that social media addiction is associated to greater levels of sadness and anxiety, indicating the need to study these linkages in adults as well.

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Pawar, et.al (2019) ran a research to explore how social media addiction relates to various psychological and behavioral factors, including self-esteem, sensation seeking, and boredom, among college students. According to their research, students who were more addicted to social media also tended to have lower self-esteem, suggesting that excessive usage of social media platforms might negatively affect one's confidence and feeling of value. Additionally, these students showed higher tendencies toward sensation seeking and experienced greater feelings of boredom, indicating that problematic social media use may be linked to a need for constant stimulation and a reduced ability to engage meaningfully with offline activities. The research demonstrates the varied effect of excessive social media participation on young adults' psychological well-being, emphasizing not only emotional and cognitive consequences but also behavioral patterns that may reinforce addictive tendencies.

Overall, these findings suggest that social media addiction can contribute to a cycle of low self-esteem, heightened boredom, and increased pursuit of novel experiences, which may exacerbate mental health challenges among college populations.

Meier et al. (2018) examined social comparisons on Instagram and found that not all comparisons are harmful. In some cases, feelings of envy can motivate adults to improve themselves rather than cause dissatisfaction.

Andreassen et al. (2017) explored the relationship between addictive social media use, narcissism, and self-esteem. Their results indicated that excessive social media use is linked to lower self-esteem and higher narcissism, which may contribute to body image concerns in adults.

Barry et al. (2017) studied adolescent social media use and its effects on mental health from both adolescent and parent perspectives. The results revealed that misuse of social media severely influences mental health, particularly by increasing depressive symptoms, underscoring the importance of examining similar effects in adults.

Fardouly et al. (2017) investigated appearance comparisons across social media, traditional media, and face-to-face interactions. They found that social media encourages more harmful appearance comparisons than traditional media, which is strongly related to body dissatisfaction and depression in adults.

Primack et al. (2017) focusing on young people in the U.S. and found a positive link between social media use and feelings of social isolation, a known predictor of depression. These findings likely extend to adult populations as well.

Lindsay et al. (2017) highlighted that many studies overlook the unique pressures adults face online, such as maintaining professional personas or coping with aging. Although previous research (e.g., Woods & Scott, 2016) showed links between social media and poor sleep, anxiety, and depression in teenagers, adults may experience similar effects due to chronic stress, work-life balance issues, and family responsibilities.

Holland et al. (2016) did a thorough review of social media and body image. They found that exposure to social networking sites is consistently related with higher body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, making these findings relevant for adults.

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Shensa et al. (2016) examined social media use among young adults and found that higher usage is associated with greater feelings of social isolation and depression, suggesting potential risks for adult users as well.

Lin et al. (2016) conducted a study showing a significant association between the time adults spend on social media and their reported levels of depression. Their findings suggest that as users invest more time in social platforms, they are more likely to experience depressive symptoms, including feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and withdrawal from meaningful activities. This trend is not limited to young adults but extends into the adult population, who use social media for social connection and professional purposes.

Primack, et.al (2016) also examined this relationship, demonstrating that adults with higher social media usage reported greater perceived social isolation. Instead of fulfilling their social needs, extensive time spent on social media appeared to replace in-person interactions, leading to a sense of disconnection. This paradoxical effect contributes directly to B depression, as individuals feel increasingly isolated while being constantly connected online.

Fardouly et al. (2015) this study focused on young women, its findings extend to adults more broadly, since the mechanisms of social comparison apply across age groups. When individuals are confronted with highly curated, digitally enhanced representations of beauty, they may begin to feel that their own appearance is inadequate, which can contribute to depressive symptoms over time. Research has consistently shown that social media has a crucial impact in molding how individuals perceive themselves, particularly in relation to body image and emotional well-being.

Similarly, Rosenthal et al. (2015) demonstrated that following strangers on Instagram—rather than engaging primarily with friends or known peers—was associated with more negative social comparisons and higher levels of depression. This suggests that exposure to unfamiliar people's seemingly perfect lives and appearances can be particularly harmful, as users may interpret these images as authentic representations of reality. For adults, who often balance professional, social, and personal responsibilities, this continuous comparison may intensify feelings of inadequacy, disconnection, and low self-esteem. Together, these studies highlight the potential for social media to undermine psychological health by reinforcing unrealistic standards and fueling cycles of comparison that diminish both body satisfaction and emotional well-being.

According to the reviewed literature, social media addiction is a major psychological risk factor for adult depression and body image dissatisfaction. Negative self-perceptions, social isolation, and mental pain are all exacerbated by excessive social media use, especially when it comes to appearance-focused and comparison-driven use. The majority of the data points to the fact that addictive use of social media more frequently fosters maladaptive comparison processes and depressive symptoms, even though other research suggest that it may provide short-term increases in self-esteem through social validation. Further elucidating the intricate connections between social media addiction and body image issues are mediating factors like depression, body checking activities, and social appearance anxiety. These results highlight the need for education, preventative measures, and interventions to support adults' psychological resilience and better social media use. Future studies should concentrate on protective factors and longitudinal designs to gain a better

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understanding of how social media can be utilized to promote mental health rather than compromise it.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopted a secondary research design using a narrative literature review approach. This design was chosen to synthesize existing research findings and identify patterns, inconsistencies, and research gaps connected to social media addiction, body image dissatisfaction, also depression among adults.

Sources of Data

Data were collected exclusively from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed research articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, books, and reputable organizational reports. Electronic databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, PsycINFO, and ResearchGate were used to retrieve relevant literature.

Inclusion Criteria

- Studies published in English
- Research focusing on adults or young adults
- Studies examining social media addiction, body image dissatisfaction, and/or depression
- Quantitative, qualitative, and review studies
- Articles published within the last 10 years (with key earlier studies included where relevant)

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-peer-reviewed articles
- Opinion pieces and unpublished theses
- Studies focusing exclusively on adolescents or clinical populations without adult representation

Data Analysis

The selected literature was systematically reviewed and organized thematically. Key findings were compared and synthesized to identify common trends, contradictions, and gaps in existing research. No statistical analysis was conducted, as the study relied solely on previously published data.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research evaluated how social media addiction related to body image dissatisfaction and depression among adults, including a comparison between men and females. According to studies, excessive social media usage may have a harmful influence on mental health. For example, Wang (2025) suggested that social media addiction could lead to depression through mechanisms such as social comparison and appearance-related anxiety. In the same vein, Czubaj et al. (2025) discovered that women's body image can be adversely affected by exposure to idealized images online.

The present secondary research aimed to examine existing literature on the relationship between social media addiction, body image dissatisfaction, and depression among adults. The findings synthesized from previous studies suggest that the association between social

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media addiction and bad psychological effects is multifaceted, multidimensional, and not consistently powerful among populations. While some research reveal a relationship between excessive social media usage and unfavorable mental health consequences, overall evidence points toward weak or inconsistent direct relationships, particularly among adult populations.

A key observation from the reviewed literature is that social media addiction alone does not consistently predict body image dissatisfaction or depressive symptoms. Instead, psychological variables such as social comparison, self-esteem, emotional regulation, fear of missing out (FoMO), and coping strategies appear to mediate these relationships. Adults exposed to idealized and curated online content may engage in upward social comparisons, which can contribute to dissatisfaction with physical appearance and negative self-evaluations. However, these effects vary depending on individual vulnerability, personality traits, and contextual factors.

Gender differences emerged as a nuanced finding in the reviewed literature. Several studies reported that females are more susceptible to body image dissatisfaction linked to social media use, likely due to sociocultural emphasis on appearance and beauty standards.

In contrast, findings related to depression and overall social media addiction levels showed minimal or inconsistent gender differences. This suggests that while gender may influence the nature of psychological outcomes, it does not uniformly determine the severity of social media addiction or depression.

Another important consideration is the nature of social media engagement. Research indicates that passive consumption of content, particularly appearance-focused material, is more strongly associated with negative psychological outcomes than active or purposeful use. This distinction highlights the importance of examining how individuals use social media rather than focusing solely on duration or frequency of use.

Overall, the reviewed literature supports the view that social media addiction should not be understood in isolation. Its psychological impact is shaped by broader psychosocial and cultural contexts, reinforcing the need for holistic models that integrate cognitive, emotional, and social factors when examining mental health outcomes in adults.

Conclusion, the present secondary research indicates that social media addiction does not exert a strong or direct influence on body image dissatisfaction or depression among adults. Although certain associations exist—particularly among females in relation to body image concerns—the overall evidence suggests that these relationships are weak and mediated by additional psychological and contextual variables. Factors such as self-esteem, social comparison, emotional regulation, and cultural expectations play a more central role in determining psychological well-being than social media addiction alone.

The findings emphasize that interventions aimed at improving adult mental health should move beyond simply reducing social media usage. Instead, efforts should focus on enhancing media literacy, promoting balanced and mindful engagement with digital platforms, and strengthening emotional coping skills. Encouraging critical evaluation of online content and fostering healthy offline social connections may be more effective in mitigating the harmful psychological impacts connected with social media.

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From a research perspective, the study highlights the importance of adopting comprehensive and multidimensional approaches when examining the psychological impact of social media. Future investigations should continue to explore mediating and moderating variables to better understand individual differences in vulnerability and resilience. Overall, this review adds to the increasing body of data demonstrating that social media addiction is one of several interacting variables impacting body image dissatisfaction and depression, rather than a singular or dominant cause.

Recommendations

To promote better mental health outcomes, adults should be encouraged to engage with social media in a balanced and mindful way. Awareness programs can help individuals critically evaluate online content, reducing the likelihood of unhealthy comparisons or exposure to idealized body images. Mental health professionals can provide guidance on setting healthy limits for screen time, while encouraging offline social interactions and recreational activities to foster well-being. Additionally, promoting access to counseling services, support groups, and educational tools may enable individuals to handle the psychological influence of social media more effectively. These measures can help individuals maintain a healthier relationship with digital platforms while mitigating risks related to body image dissatisfaction and depression.

Limitations

The findings of this secondary research should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the review relied on existing literature, which varies in methodological quality, sample characteristics, and measurement tools. Second, publication bias may have influenced the availability of studies, as research with significant findings is more likely to be published. Third, differences in cultural context, age groups, and definitions of social media addiction across studies limited direct comparability. Additionally, the narrative review approach, while comprehensive, lacks the statistical rigor of a meta-analysis. Finally, the quickly developing nature of social media sites is that conclusions may become obsolete over time.

Future Directions

Future research should employ systematic reviews and meta-analyses to produce greater scientific results about the psychological effects of social media addiction. Longitudinal studies are needed to clarify causal relationships between social media use, body image dissatisfaction, and depression. Researchers should explore mediating and moderating variables, such as self-esteem, emotional regulation, personality traits, social support, and cultural influences. Further attention should be given to platform-specific features and different patterns of social media use. Additionally, future studies should focus on intervention-based research aimed at enhancing media literacy, promoting digital wellbeing, and fostering healthier relationships with social media among adults.

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Conflict of Interest

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