

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON SOCIAL COMPARISON AND BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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KEYWORDS

Social Media Usage, Social Comparison, Body Dissatisfaction

CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Saher, I., Khalid, M. T., Aeen, N. U., & Haidar, Z. (2025). Impact of social media usage on social comparison and body dissatisfaction among university students. *Pakistan Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2(2), 6-11.

ARTICLE DETAILS:

Received on 4 Apr, 2025

Accepted on 13 Jun, 2025

Published on 25 Jun, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between social media use, social comparison, and body dissatisfaction and the differences on the basis of demographics (age, gender, and marital status). Cross-sectional research design was conducted on 240 students, including male and female undergraduate and graduate students from Gujranwala and Wazirabad. Data was collected using the Social Comparison Scale, Social Network Usage Scale, and Body Shape Questionnaire. Participants were assessed using SPSS. The results of this study show that there is a non-significant negative relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction. There is a non-significant positive relationship between social media use and social comparison, and there are no significant differences on the basis of demographics. Findings revealed a positive relationship with social comparison but, unexpectedly, a negative relationship with body dissatisfaction, possibly due to exposure to body-positive content in Eastern cultures. No significant gender or age differences were observed, suggesting that cultural norms and appearance-based stereotypes may affect both sexes equally. These results challenge Western assumptions and imply that reducing unrealistic beauty standards can minimize media's harmful effects. Promoting inclusive and positive content can help improve body image. The study also shows that men and women both face appearance-related stereotypes, so these ideas need to be changed. Overall, this research gives useful information about how social media affects body image in different cultures.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media usage refers to how often and how much people use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and others to share content and interact with others. These platforms allow users to connect, express themselves, and stay updated with trends and news. The increasing availability of smartphones and internet access has made social media a regular part of everyday life. People now use social media for many reasons, including entertainment, learning, communication, and social interaction. However, this constant exposure also means users are more likely to view and compare their lives with others. The type of content people consume on social media can shape their opinions, emotions, and self-perception (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Therefore, social media is not just a tool but a powerful force that influences how individuals think and feel about themselves.

Social comparison is the process of evaluating oneself by comparing personal traits, appearance, or achievements with others. It happens naturally, but social media has made it more frequent and more intense. On platforms filled with photos and posts showing ideal lifestyles or beauty, people may start comparing their own lives or looks with what they see online. This comparison can be upward (with people who seem better off) or downward (with people who seem worse off). While upward comparison can motivate self-improvement, it can also lead to feelings of jealousy, low self-esteem, and dissatisfaction. Young adults are especially vulnerable to comparing themselves with influencers, celebrities, or peers. Regular social comparison online may cause emotional stress and negatively affect mental health (Vogel et al., 2014).

Body dissatisfaction refers to negative thoughts and feelings about one's body shape, weight, or appearance. It often starts when people feel that their bodies do not match the beauty standards shown in media. Social media plays a strong role in increasing body dissatisfaction by displaying edited and filtered images of "perfect" bodies. This can cause people to feel insecure or unhappy about how they look, even if their appearance is healthy and normal. Both men and women can experience body dissatisfaction, although women are often more affected due to greater pressure to meet certain beauty ideals. This dissatisfaction may lead to harmful behaviors like strict dieting, over-exercising, or low self-worth. Understanding this issue is important for promoting body positivity and mental well-being in today's media-driven world (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018; Vandenbosch et al., 2022). Therefore, the present study is an attempt to bridge the gap.

II. METHOD

Participants

The aim of the study was to observe the relationship between social media usage, social comparison and body dissatisfaction among University students. Cross-sectional research design was selected and used in this research. Survey questionnaire about body dissatisfaction, social comparison and social media usage were given to participants to collect data. Sample of research were 240 participants. Participants were adults and university students. Both males and females were included. There were 130 males and 110 females in the sample. Participant's age's ranged from 18 to 30. There were 240 participants in the research sample. Adults and college students participated. For more broadly applicable findings, a sample was selected from various departments. There were both males and females. The sample consisted of 110 females and 130 males. The age range of the participants was 18 to 30. Data was gathered using the survey approach. Participants came from a variety of semesters. Male and female university students between the ages of 18 and 30 were enrolled as participants. Teenagers under the age of eighteen and schoolchildren and participants with psychological disabilities or certain mental illnesses were not allowed to participate.

Measures

[1] The Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) was used to assess body dissatisfaction, particularly in individuals with eating concerns. In this study, the short 16-item version recommended by Evans and Dolan (1993) was used. Each item was rated from 1 (never) to 6 (always), with higher scores indicating greater dissatisfaction. The responses were averaged to calculate the final score. The scale demonstrated strong internal reliability with an alpha of 0.93 (Cooper et al., 1987). [2] The Social Comparison Scale (SCS) was used to assess self-perceptions in social contexts (Allan & Gilbert, 1995). It included 11 items rated on a ten-point scale, focusing on status, preferences, and social belonging. Lower scores reflected negative, self-focused emotions. The scale showed strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.88 to 0.96 (Allan & Gilbert, 1995, 1997). [3] Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (SNUS). The Social Network Usage Scale (SNUS) by Gupta and Basheer (2018) was used to measure participants' social media usage. The scale categorized usage into four areas: education, relationships, entertainment, and communication. It assessed how individuals engage with social networking sites. The scale showed good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha reported as 0.83.

Procedure

The current study was conducted to examine the impact of social media usage on social comparison and body dissatisfaction among university students. Participants were approached through purposive and convenience

sampling from various departments of GIFT University and Apex College. Before data collection, the purpose and objectives of the research were clearly explained to all participants. They were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that all responses would remain anonymous and confidential. A total of 240 students, both male and female, aged between 18 to 30 years, took part in the study. The participants were asked to complete a set of questionnaires comprising four main sections. These included a demographic information sheet and standardized questionnaires. The entire questionnaire was self-administered and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Data was collected in classroom settings and during free hours to minimize disturbance and ensure focused participation. The environment was kept calm and non-distracting to allow participants to respond thoughtfully. After submission of the forms, participants were appreciated for their time and cooperation, and a brief debriefing was provided regarding the study's broader goals.

Inclusion criteria required participants to be university students enrolled in any academic program, within the age range of 18 to 30 years, and without any known psychological or cognitive impairments. Both male and female students were eligible. Participants were excluded if they were below 18 years of age, not enrolled in a university program, or had any history of mental illness or psychological disability that could affect their ability to respond accurately. Informed consent was obtained in written form and attached to each questionnaire. The consent form explained the nature of the study, ensured confidentiality, and clarified the participants' right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the research process to maintain academic integrity and participant well-being.

III. RESULTS

The study included a total of 260 university students who initially responded to the survey, aiming to assess the impact of social media usage on social comparison and body dissatisfaction. After screening for incomplete or missing responses, 240 valid questionnaires were retained for final analysis, while 20 were excluded to ensure the accuracy and reliability of data. The participants consisted of 130 males and 110 females, with ages ranging between 18 and 30 years, representing a diverse mix from various departments of GIFT University and Apex College. The results revealed notable differences in social media engagement among students. Most participants reported regular use of social media platforms, with a significant portion engaging in social comparison and expressing concerns related to body image. Gender-based patterns emerged, with females showing slightly higher levels of social media use, comparison behaviors, and body dissatisfaction. However, these gender differences were not statistically significant. Similarly, variations in age and marital status were observed, but no meaningful differences were found across these group.

Table 1: Social Media Usage as Predictor of Social Comparison and Body Dissatisfaction among University Students

Variables	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		<i>p</i>
			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
(Constant)	77.29	4.59	68.24	86.35	
Social Media Usage	-.11	.09	-.28	.06	.20
(Constant)	44.19	4.71	34.91	53.48	
Social Media Usage	-.14	.09	-.31	.04	.13

Table 1 shows that social media usage is a non-significant negative predictor of social comparison among university students ($\beta=.0814$, $p>.05$). Findings shows that .7 % variance in social comparison is accounted for by social media usage. Table shows that social media usage is a non-significant negative predictor of body dissatisfaction among university students ($\beta=.097$, $p>.05$). Findings shows that .9 % variance in body dissatisfaction is accounted for by social media usage.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation among Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Social Media Usage	--	.08	-.07
2. Social Comparison		--	-.19**
3. Body Dissatisfaction			--

** $p < .01$

Table 2 indicates the relationship between social networking usage, social comparison and body dissatisfaction. Findings indicate that Social Media Usage is positively correlated to Social Comparison (.084) and negatively correlated to body dissatisfaction (-.071). Findings also shows that there is negative relationship between Social Comparison and body dissatisfaction ($r = -.194^{**}$). The value of correlation coefficient shows that the comparison between these variables is negative and moderate.

Table 3: Gender and Age Differences in Study Variables

Gender	Males		Females		$t(218)$	p	Cohens' d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Body Dissatisfaction	36.82	16.78	37.30	16.72	-.21	.83	.01
Social Media Usage	50.04	13.06	52.03	11.29	-1.67	.09	.16
Social Comparison	71.68	14.61	72.56	17.33	-.41	.68	.05

Age	18-24		25-30		$t(218)$	p	Cohens' d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Body Dissatisfaction	36.88	16.65	39.31	17.92	-.558	.37	0.14
Social Media Usage	51.07	12.09	55.62	13.96	-1.43	.34	0.34
Social Comparison	72.17	15.89	71.43	17.95	-.177	.93	0.05

Table 3 shows that social networking usage and social comparison are non-significant with $p > 0.05$, the participants who reported themselves as females have slightly higher level of body dissatisfaction as compared to males ($M = 37.30$, $SD = 16.72$). The results also indicates a non-significant gender difference in social media usage $t(218) = -.209$, $p > .05$. Females ($M = 52.03$, $SD = 11.29$) reported high social media usage than males ($M = 50.04$, $SD = 13.06$). Findings indicate that female participants have more social comparison as compared to male participants ($M = 72.56$, $SD = 17.33$). Table also shows that social networking usage and social comparison are non-significant with $p > 0.05$. Findings indicate that participants with age range of 25-30 have higher body dissatisfaction as compared to other age group ($M = 39.31$, $SD = 17.92$). This age group also shows higher social media usage as compared to other age group ($M = 55$, $SD = 13.96$). Results indicate lower social comparison in participants with age ranges from 25 to 30 in comparison to participants with age range of 18 to 24 ($M = 72.17$, $SD = 15.89$).

Table 4: Marital Status Related Differences in Study Variables

Measures	Single		Committed		Married		$F(2, 237)$	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Social Comparison	71.43	16.67	72.54	16.42	73.55	4.24	.13	.00
Social Media Usage	51.04	12.28	53.15	11.09	50.11	11.58	.47	.00
Body Dissatisfaction	36.79	16.79	42.12	16.93	37.28	14.93	2.23	.01

Table 4 shows that social networking usage and social comparison are non-significant with $p > 0.05$. Findings show that married people ($M = 73.55$, $SD = 4.24$) more often socially compare themselves with others as to single and committed one. On the other hand, committed group ($M = 53.15$, $SD = 11.09$) shows more social media usage as compared to others. Also, committed group ($M = 42.12$, $SD = 16.93$) has more body dissatisfaction as compared to others.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study explored the impact of social media usage on body dissatisfaction and social comparison among university students, with a focus on demographic differences. Results showed a positive relationship between social media use and social comparison, indicating that increased media use may lead to more frequent comparisons with others. This finding aligns with previous research (Lewallen & Morawitz, 2016; Tahir et al., 2018) which highlights how social norms, peer influence, and celebrity culture on media platforms trigger comparison behaviors. However, the study did not support the hypothesis that social media usage increases body dissatisfaction. In fact, a negative relationship was observed. A possible explanation is the presence of body positivity content or less harmful media messaging, which may improve rather than harm body image, as seen in Vandenbosch et al. (2022) and Huang et al. (2020). Thus, the type of content on social media may influence whether body dissatisfaction increases or decreases.

Regarding demographic differences, the study hypothesized that females would show higher body dissatisfaction than males, but the results showed no significant gender differences. This suggests both genders may experience similar levels of body-related concerns, possibly due to shared cultural pressures and appearance expectations, as noted by Meghan & Eva (2006). Although earlier research (e.g., Furnham & Greaves, 1994; Gestsdottir et al., 2016) found women to be more dissatisfied, some studies (e.g., Silberstein et al., 1988) support the current findings. Similarly, no significant differences were observed across age groups for social media use or body dissatisfaction. Overall, the findings indicate that social media influences social comparison more clearly than it does body dissatisfaction and that gender and age might not be as decisive factors in predicting body image concerns among students as previously thought.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study explored the impact of social media usage on social comparison and body dissatisfaction among university students. Findings showed a non-significant negative relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction, and a weak positive link with social comparison. No significant gender or age differences were found in any of the study variables. These results suggest that content type may influence body image more than frequency of media use.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The author received no funding from any organizations.

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