

A STUDY ON INSTAGRAM USAGE, SOCIAL COMPARISON, AND SELF-OBJECTIFICATION IN YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to find out the relationship between Instagram usage, social comparison, and self-objectification in young adults. The sample comprised 150 young adults. The Social Network Usage Questionnaire (Bashir et al. 2015), the core instrument of the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), and the Self-Objectification Belief and Behavior Scale (Lindner & Tantleff-Dunn, 2017) were used as measurement tools. The results were drawn using descriptive statistics of data and reliability analysis for each scale, Pearson correlation, and independent sample t-test. The correlational analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between Instagram usage, social comparison, and self-objectification in young adults. Moreover, the independent sample t-test indicated gender differences in terms of social comparison and self-objectification in young adults. The findings of this research will help to manage the social comparison and self-objectification faced by young adults so they can learn how to manage self-objectification problems through Instagram usage.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most widely used social media networks nowadays is Instagram, especially among young folks. It has seen widespread use, particularly among young adults, because of its emphasis on visual content and user participation. It has developed into a world of "influencers," politics, advertising, storytelling, online shopping, health information, and more. But with its widespread use also arise worries about how technology may affect mental health, especially in relation to self-objectification and social comparison. The purpose of this study is to present a summary of the body of research on young adults' use of Instagram, social comparison, and self-objectification. Social comparison processes on social media platforms like Instagram can exacerbate emotions of inadequacy. The social comparison theory by Festinger (1954) explains that in cases where no objective measurements can be used to judge the self, individuals are led to compare themselves with other people. People are able to achieve this by making comparisons up and down. Instagram provides users with a myriad of pre-selected and edited photos, videos, and posts, which provides them with multiple opportunities to engage in upward comparisons with other social media users. Herman (2022) posits that self-objectification is a psychological process that women absorb when others objectify their bodies, leading to a continual self-criticism of their own bodies.

Since its 2010 introduction, Instagram has grown in popularity quickly, and as of 2020, there are one billion monthly active users (Statista, 2020). Eventually, it gained popularity and became one of the most widely used social networking sites, expanding beyond only photographs. It has evolved into a global village of influencers, politics, advertisement, narration, online shopping, health knowledge, and others. Females of adolescent age and younger focus more on physical appearance and ideal of beauty in their self-representation. The main reason behind self-presentation is the need to have someone to attentively listen to what they are saying and mostly this is the peers. Instagram is not about posting, however, the most popular activity. Young adults and adolescents, in fact, feel more inclined to browse Instagram profiles and like things than to do anything else. Longitudinal research has shown that gazing through the perfect images of other users ultimately increases your desolation limit. Although some writers claim that social media platforms, or online social networks as some refer to them, initially appeared in the latter part of the 20th century, online social media platforms became popular as online communication tools in the first half of the 2000s. Before delving further into the definition of social media platforms, let us clarify that the notion of social media stems from the idea of conventional social interactions that take place in society; the difference is that, in our case, the internet provides the benefits of convenience and online interaction at any time and from any location. According to Borgatti et al. (2022), traditional social networks are essentially made up of all of your friends, family, coworkers, and business partners with whom you connect personally and/or professionally, as well as those with whom you have institutional and personal interests.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) define self-objectification as the internalization of the objectifying gaze of an observer on the body and is an obsession with the physical appearance. According to the social constructionist explanation of feminist studies, the female body is a socially constructed object to be viewed and evaluated in Western countries. Following the objectification theory proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), women are often perceived as objects in the society and their bodies are more focused than their capabilities on the sexual perspective. Because these objectification encounters are so common, women are socialized to absorb the viewpoint of an observer on their bodies. Women who conceive of and treat themselves as objects to be viewed and judged based only on looks engage in a process known as self-objectification (McKinley, 2011). The cultural practice of sexual objectification, according to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), causes self-objectification, which develops into self-surveillance and has negative psychological effects and hazards for victims' mental health. The majority of correlational research has been cross-sectional, while some longitudinal data are also available and show comparable results (McKinley, 2006). When you are seen as an item instead of a person, this is called objectification. Self-objectification, which follows objectification, is a topic of discussion in sex and gender. Compared to males, women are more likely to be impacted. Calogero et al. (2010) defines the psychological process of self-objectification as the internalized hatred against one's own body that leads to women continuously criticizing their bodies. Sexual objectification and self-objectification are closely connected concepts. A condition known as "sexual objectification" occurs when society perceives a person as a sexual object to be enjoyed.

Theoretical Framework

Using Bandura (1977) idea of public reading to growth, a model was developed that links social media use to perfectionism. The development of sophisticated popular abilities within a social group is referred to as social studies. University students' perfectionism and happiness of life may also be impacted by other people, peers, and events, according to Bandura's social learning theory (Ayin et al., 2016). He claims that the social learning principle essentially describes how inherent and perceptual factors interact to shape a person's behavior and ability to learn. This approach holds that university students do research from every special through declaration, imitation, and modeling, leading to improved learning outcomes. According to Bandura's social learning principle, we think that students who use social media platforms for pertinent educational goals would acquire knowledge and data that will improve their average academic performance (Osei et al., 2019). In Pakistan, the use of Instagram has significantly increased recently, especially among the younger demographic. As Instagram usage rises, young people internalize societal norms that are too high for them, which might result in a variety of psychological issues (Batoool et al., 2023). With more than 40 million internet users in the nation, Instagram has grown in popularity as a social media, entertainment, and self-expression tool. They become interested in and immersed in topics relating to beauty and weight reduction when they compare themselves with others on Instagram. They do this action to make themselves appear famous in photos posted on Instagram (Aafiya et al., 2021). Increased use of Instagram overall was linked to increased self-objectification; internalization and appearance comparisons to celebrities

acted as mediators in this relationship. This is the first study to investigate whether using Instagram may mitigate the established relationship between young adults' social comparison with others and self-objectification. The main goal of this study is to look into the relationship between self-objectification, social comparison, and young adults' use of Instagram. Instagram platforms have been linked to bad self-objectification because of the constant exposure to idealized pictures of beauty. Instagram use, social comparison, and self-objectification results were mediated by appearance-related social media material and social comparison. Furthermore, there has been limited research on how gender variations in Instagram usage, social comparison, and self-objectification occur.

II. METHOD

Participants

A correlational research methodology was employed. Data for this study were gathered from 150 social media user young adults. An approach known as purposive sampling was used to collect data from the young adults.

Measures

Bashir et al. (2015) have created the Social Network Usage Questionnaire. The scale includes 19 items as each statement has to be rated on the 5-point Likert scale (Always=5, Often=4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2, and Never=1). The main tool of the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM), which has been designed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999) consists of 11 items. In these items participants provided with statements regarding their self-comparisons with the others in various social and cultural dimensions that they can respond on a five-point scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Lindner and Tantleff-Dunn (2017) created the Self-Objectification Belief and Behavior Scale that helps to evaluate the self-objectification of adults. It is a 14-item scale, which is also meant to gauge self-objectification by a young adult. It is a five-point scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Procedure

Permission was obtained from the Head of the Department of Psychology in this study before beginning data collection. Purposive sampling methods were used to choose research participants from various areas of Lahore. Participants between the ages of 18 and 26 provided the data. They were asked for both written and oral permission after being informed of the purpose of the study. The research included only individuals who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Additionally, participants were guaranteed the confidentiality of their information and the freedom to withdraw at any moment.

III. RESULTS

The findings revealed that the mean age of social media users was 23.2. Instagram users at the undergraduate level were 46%, graduate 34% and post-graduate level were 19% regarding social media users. Findings also indicate that 56% belonged to urban areas, whereas 43% had a rural background, 40% were single, and 59% were married. 60% participant belongs to a joint family system, whereas 40% have a nuclear family system.

Table 1: Psychometric Properties of Scales

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α
Instagram Usage	47.1	13.71	19-95	.89
Social Comparison	34.3	7.70	0-56	.87
Self-Objectification	45.3	14.03	0-40	.93

The psychometric properties of scales show that all the scales have good alpha reliability, so they are good to use in the current study.

Table 2: Correlation between Instagram Usage, Social Comparison, and Self-Objectification in Young Adults

Variables	1	2	3
1. Instagram Usage	--		
2. Social Comparison	.37**	--	
3. Self-Objectification	.36**	.77**	--

** $p < .01$

The above table shows that there is a significant positive relationship between Instagram usage and self-objectification in young adults. Furthermore, there is a significant positive correlation between social comparison and self-objectification. Social comparison was found to be significantly positively correlated with self-objectification.

Table 3: Gender Differences in Instagram Usage, Social Comparison, and Self-Objectification in Young Adults

Variables	Men		Women		<i>t</i> (148)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Instagram Usage	47.6	16.1	47.1	13.7	-.18	.85	.03
Social Comparison	32.9	10.3	34.3	7.78	3.90	.03	.25
Self-Objectification	44.8	16.2	45.3	14.0	4.20	.00	.33

The results of the independent sample t-test showed that non-significant gender difference exists in terms of social comparison and self-objectification. Women were higher on social comparison and self-objectification as compared to men. The results further revealed that no significant gender difference exists in terms of Instagram usage.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results showed a positive relationship between Instagram usage and self-objectification. Previous research demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between Instagram usage and self-objectification. In other words, a high level of Instagram usage was associated with a high level of self-objectification. A previous study has revealed that Instagram usage influences young adults' self-objectification. Dunbar et al. (2018) investigate how the media objectifies women and increased exposure to the media that objectifies women is linked to increased self-objectification in young adults. To create a self-objectified image, one factor that might lead to this association between media use and self-objectification is the possibility of the young adults aligning their looks with those of other people in the media. It implies that the more an individual uses Instagram, the more self-objectified the person is; the less an individual uses Instagram, the less the self-objectified the person is. According to Garcia et al. (2022), more visual social media platforms like Instagram are becoming the main components of the everyday life of young women, yet their psychological impact has not been investigated by the daily level yet. This paper looks at the impact of Instagram use on a daily basis on state self-objectification.

The results were also positive as social comparison and self-objectification were positively related. The previous research by Vartanian et al. (2018) examined the mediation (i.e. internalization of cultural of beauty standards, application of upward and downward appearance comparison, application of positive and negative appearance commentary), moderation (i.e. feminist beliefs) and mediation moderation of connections between Instagram (an electronic means of sharing visual images) use and self-objectification. Findings showed that Instagram use and self-objectification were mediated by internalization of cultural ideals of beauty and participation in upward appearance comparison, which were found to be unique in mediating self-objectification and the use of Instagram. As Lippman et al. (2017) analysed, despite the fact that Facebook was invented to make people feel connected, the data show that such consistent use has both harmful and beneficial relations with well-being. To investigate these ambivalent outcomes, we examined the importance of the social comparison and self-objectification as the

potential mediators of Instagram use. The findings indicate the correlation of social comparison and self-objectification on young adults that is positive.

Findings revealed that there is likely to be a significant gender difference between social comparison and self-objectification. The results also showed that no significant gender difference exists in terms of Instagram usage in both genders, as they use Instagram at the same level. There are gender differences in social comparison, with women tending to define themselves as higher in relational interdependence and men as higher in independence. Although some past research has found that women tend to report greater social comparison tendencies (Gibbons et al., 1999). Despite self-objectification being extensively discussed among women, according to recent studies, the bodies of men are also being objectified in Western societies (Daniel et al., 2014). The men appear to experience less self-objectification than women (Calogero et al., 2010). However, compared to their older counterparts, young men pay more and more attention to their physical appearance (Rollero, 2013). The study of indicates that males used technologies more than females, but found no gender difference in their use of social media platforms. Liu and Bakici (2019) showed no significant gender difference in the knowledge of social media concepts. Yet males had a higher rate of use of resource-based social media tools, while females used to relationship-build platforms more than males.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the relationship between Instagram usage, social comparison, and self-objectification among young adults. Instagram usage has a strong relationship with self-objectification. When the rate of Instagram usage increases, it affects the self-objectification of young adults. If young adults use high levels of Instagram or social media platforms, then it will affect their self-objectification. The study also concluded that social comparison has positively affected the self-objectification of young adults. If self-objectification increases, then social comparison is relatively increased. On the other hand, females are more objectified than males. Females perform more social comparison than males. The rate of Instagram is equally distributed among both males and females. The present study expands the literature by highlighting the role of Instagram usage and social comparison on self-objectification.

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