

Social Media Use and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Body Image Dissatisfaction among Young Adults in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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Abstract

Constant interaction with peers and exposure to online and offline media can influence one's apparent discontent with one's body parts. Such body discontentment has currently generated a lot of research interest demanding further exploration. Using a cross-sectional design, this study investigated the predictive role of social media use and self-esteem on body image dissatisfaction. The sample comprised of 542 (25.6% male and 74.4% female) young adults in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, whose ages ranged from 18-29 years ($M = 21.84$, $SD = 2.77$). They were recruited using convenience sampling technique. Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (SNUQ), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and a combination of the Appearance Evaluation (AE) and the Body areas Satisfaction Scale (BASS), subscales of the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire–Appearance Scales were used to measure social media, self-esteem, and body image dissatisfaction, respectively. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that social media use was a significant positive predictor of body image dissatisfaction ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$) while self-esteem was not. These results suggest that unchecked use of social media might lead to adverse consequences and a harmful approach to body care.

Keywords: Body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem, social media, young adult, gender.

Introduction

Young people frequently experience body dissatisfaction and distorted body images (Pradeilles et al., 2022). Young people's social circles change when they graduate from high school and enroll in universities. There is an increased social interaction with people from various walks of life. At this developmental stage, young people are exploring their social identity and are more conscious of various parts of their bodies. They are constantly comparing themselves with significant individuals around them, and are impacted by any perceived shortcoming in their body. These insights could occasionally result in body dissatisfaction.

The term "body image" refers to an individual's perception, feelings, and ideas

about their physical appearance. It is a person's perceptual, attitudinal and behavioral disposition towards one's physical self (Cash, 2000). Body ideals, which are mostly propagated by the media, family, and peers, are what create the perspective of one's own body (Jiotsa et al., 2021). It is believed that a perceived difference between one's desired ideal state of the body and one's actual physical appearance—that is, one's real body image—is the root cause of body image dissatisfaction (BID). Pradeilles et al. (2022) defined BID as a negative attitude towards one's physical appearance. Body image dissatisfaction also includes body part discontentment, which is defined as being unhappy with one's size or form of one's

body parts, including sex and sexual organs (Mohamed & Idrees, 2023).

Research on body image perception revealed varying prevalence rates of body image dissatisfaction among young people: 51% in Iran (Alipour et al., 2015), 48.1% in Malaysia (Kamaria et al., 2016), and 73.6% in Saudi Arabia (Assaedi et al., 2016). These findings were based on studies conducted in Asia. According to a study conducted in Nigeria, 82.9% of students in public and private secondary schools in Benin, Edo State, expressed unhappiness with their bodies (Otakpor&Ehimigbai, 2016). In addition, a recent study conducted in Lagos among undergraduate students discovered a 63.5% rate of body image dissatisfaction (Olatona et al., 2023).

Various research investigated the association between negative body image and other psychological variables, such as depression (Soares-Filho et al., 2020; Jiménez-Limas et al., 2022), suicidality (Aquil et al., 2021), sleep quality (Balshill& Wilhelm, 2014), and unhealthy weight control behaviours (Flores-Cornejo et al., 2017). Crow et al. (2008) suggest a direct connection between eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction. The majority of this research focused on the relationship between health-related factors and BID. But as social media has grown over the past 20 years, a new potential risk factor for BID has surfaced.

Undergraduate students use social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok as media to express themselves to the outside world. Consequently, these platforms have become more crucial in shaping young people's self-perceptions regarding their physical appearance. Due to the proliferation of social media influencers and celebrities, many beauty influencers are endorsing their views on "positive body image," which establishes unattainable standards of beauty for society (Aw & Raheem, 2023).

Students who connect with social media through comments likes, and shares might become fixated on how they are viewed on the platform in an attempt to gain more recognition and validate conventional beauty standards. Regular interaction in social media may increase the degree of body image dissatisfaction since it exposes users to the ideal appearance regularly. They may become influenced by this to use filters and photo processors to make themselves appear and feel perfect. To meet society's ideals for beauty, a person may also have plastic surgery, engage in risky weight-loss behaviours, use weight-management products like steroids or slimming tablets inappropriately, and endure several other risky operations (Vuong et al., 2021). According to Brazier (2020), these norms may lead to the development of potentially lethal societal problems like physical and cyberbullying, mental health problems like anxiety, despair, and low self-esteem, and eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia nervosa. Such resultant social problems make it important to recognize young adult body dissatisfaction because of the primary, potentially fatal, consequence of this problem.

The link between social media and BID exists in the literature. Studies suggest that social media usage, particularly when it involves appearance comparisons, is associated with body image dissatisfaction across various demographics, with factors like thin-ideal internalization, social physique anxiety, and sociocultural influences contributing to this dissatisfaction (Bilal et al., 2021; Nagl et al., 2021; Hashim et al., 2022). These studies were all conducted in the Western and Asian countries, thus creating a significant gap in the literature regarding African context. It is also important to investigate undergraduates' attitudes to self as this may also play a role in BID. A possible

construct that stands out in relation to this is the self-esteem. Self-esteem can be classified as high and low, based on an individual's assessment of their own value, self-worth, and level of confidence in themselves. Individuals with high self-esteem value and regard themselves as noble, comprise the first category whereas individuals with low self-esteem are still figuring out who they are and what they can do make up the second group (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2022). Several ideas contend that preserving or enhancing one's sense of self-worth is an essential human need (Bergagna et al., 2018).

Self-worth and self-esteem are closely linked to traits like determination, self-assurance, inventiveness and decision-making ability, creativity, sanity, and mental well-being (Noronha et al., 2018). It also describes a person's perception of their own value or worth, or how much they esteem, approve of, prize, or like themselves. Numerous research have demonstrated that people who are overweight or obese have worse self-esteem (Danielsen et al., 2018; Zametkin et al., 2004). According to Coopersmith (1981), there are four main elements that are significant in the development of self-esteem: (i) the way one is treated and accepted by important people in their lives; (ii) a person's past achievements; (iii) the values and aspirations that shape and interpret one's experiences; and (iv) how one reacts to devaluation.

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between self-esteem and BID (Sung & Yan, 2020; Uchôa et al., 2020; Eshak et al., 2020; Cai et al., 2021; Qasim et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022). These studies suggest that low self-esteem is consistently associated with higher levels of body image dissatisfaction across various demographics, including Generation Y men, Brazilian adolescents, university female students, and working women.

In the context of dissatisfied body image, self-discrepancies are significant. They may negatively affect a person's body satisfaction and have an effect on behaviours connected to appearance (such as limiting one's food intake or getting cosmetic surgery) (Vartanian, 2012). For instance, someone who feels that their nose is not as pointed as it should be can be unhappy and think that cosmetic surgery will help to bridge the gap between their perceived ideal and actual/ought selves. Pentina et al. (2009) looked into the connection between young women who wanted cosmetic surgery and self-discrepancy, ages 17 to 29. Through self-report, it was found that people's decisions to have cosmetic surgical treatments done in order to cope with and lessen discomfort related to their appearance can be influenced by how they view the difference between their ideal and actual selves.

According to Balogun et al. (1992), university students in Nigeria were content with their bodily parts thirty years ago. Research has indicated that a significant number of students (87.4%) have an inaccurate perception of their true body size, leading to a high incidence of body dissatisfaction and likely psychiatric illness (Otakpor&Ehimigbai, 2016; Oyewole et al., 2018). According to studies done on undergraduates in Abia and the Edo States, a significant percentage of students—26.7%—did not feel that their body weight was what they thought it was, and body shape dissatisfaction was common (Otakpor&Ehimigbai, 2016; Ejike, 2015).

Although there are many different factors that contribute to body image dissatisfaction, such as biological, evolutionary, psychological, and sociocultural aspects (Ferguson et al., 2011; Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011), it has been expected that self-esteem and social media use can predict a variety of higher levels of body image dissatisfaction in

teenagers. Concerns over body image are often sparked by the media's excessive exposure to "idealized" body types and skin tones, which is a severe example of how this affects one's self-esteem. Additionally, eating disorders and depression in youth are linked to this body image (Soares-Filho et al., 2020; Flores-Cornejo et al., 2017). According to some research (Scully et al., 2020; Fardouly et al., 2017) social media use is linked to a positive body image (Cohen et al., 2019), while other studies (Ferguson et al., 2014; Cohen et al., 2017) find no direct relationships between social media use and body image dissatisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of social comparison accounts for the variables under study. This theory was first put forth by social psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954. According to this theory, people evaluate their own social and personal worth by comparing themselves to those they believe to be doing better or worse. Sometimes people use self-esteem, self-motivation, and self-image enhancement techniques by comparing themselves to others. Because of this, people are continuously evaluating both themselves and other people in a variety of areas, such as success, IQ, wealth, and attractiveness. Additionally, these evaluations may promote prejudiced, judgmental, and unduly competitive or superior attitudes (Festinger, 1954). Many studies (Hogue & Mills, 2019; Gattario et al., 2020; Jach & Krystoń, 2021) concentrated on the psychological reasons behind negative body image, such as the media, stigmatization and bullying, social and cultural conformity, and so on. A person may feel content or dissatisfied with one or more body parts when they compare their look to that of others. The current study aims to investigate the perceived role of social media (without considering a particular

platform) and self-esteem on body image dissatisfaction in a sample of Nigerian undergraduates.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature reviewed above, the study hypothesised that:

H1: social media would significantly predict body image dissatisfaction among young adult undergraduates of the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN).

H2: self-esteem would significantly predict body image dissatisfaction among young adult undergraduates of UNN.

Methodology

Study Design: The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design.

Study Population: A total of 542 undergraduates {139 (25.6%) males and 403 (74.4%) females}, drawn from the population of the University of Nigeria Nsukka participated in the study. The participants were sampled using a convenience sampling technique because only the disposed and accessible students available at the moment of collection participated in the study. The average age of the participants ranged from 18 to 29 years with a mean age of 21.84 (SD = 2.77). Participation was voluntary. 482 (88.9%) of the participants were Christians while 60 (11.1%) were Muslims. 493 (91.0%) were Igbos, 24 (4.4%) were Yoruba, 18 (3.3%) were Hausa and 7 (1.3%) were Efik. What were the Inclusion and exclusion criteria?

Instrument for Data Collection: Three instruments were used in this study, namely the social networking usage questionnaire (SNUQ), the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES), and the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire-Appearance Scales (MBSRQ-AS). A demographic questionnaire was used to obtain data containing the participants' gender, age, religious group, and ethnicity.

Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (SNUQ; Gupta & Bashir, 2018)

This 19-item survey employs a 5-point Likert scale, with 5 representing "always" and 1 representing "never," to gauge respondents' usage of social media. 'Social media' was used in place of 'social networking sites' in this study to better reflect its purpose. 'I use social media to become more sociable' and 'I use social media to communicate fresh ideas' are two examples of questions from this scale. Al-Dwaikat et al. (2020) reported good internal consistency reliability for the scale (Cronbach's α for the total scale was 0.88). The alternate form reliability of the SMUIS was also tested by administering the Social Media Use Integration Scale and the Social Networking Usage Scale (Gupta & Bashir, 2015) to the same sample and the correlation coefficient had a high positive value ($r = .95$, $p < .001$). For the current study the items yielded a high internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .90.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965)

One of the most used tools for self-esteem study is the 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale, which consists of five positively and five negatively worded questions. Responses to the items are given on a 4-point Likert scale, with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (4) being the possible outcomes. The scores range from 10 to 40. Higher scores indicate high self-esteem, while lower scores indicate poor self-esteem. This scale has questions like "I am able to do things as well as most other people," "I certainly feel useless at times," "I am satisfied with myself overall," and so on. To achieve uniformity in scoring, the negatively phrased items (2, 5, 6, 8, and 9) were scored in reverse. Rosenberg (1979) reported that RSE demonstrates a Guttman scale coefficient of reproducibility of .92 and a test-retest reliability over a period of 2 weeks reveals correlations of .85 and .88. The scale

yielded a high internal consistency reliability for the current study with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .84.

Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire-Appearance Scales (MBSRQ-AS; Cash, 2000)

A self-report questionnaire with 9 items was used to evaluate several elements of body image connected to appearance. This is measure, scored on a 5-point scale with anchors 1: strongly disagree and 5: strongly agree, addressing issues of valuing and attending to one's appearance as well as engaging in appearance-management (or grooming) behaviors. Sample items are: "I try to be as physically attractive as I can be" and "I have never paid much attention to what I look like." The scale has a lowest total score of 20 and a highest total score of 100. Reverse scoring was used for the final two (bolded) items on the Appearance Evaluation scale. The developers reported good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$) (Cash, 2003). Argyrides & Kkeli, (2013) reported that the internal consistencies of the subscales ranged from .76 to .86. Test-retest reliabilities ranged from .75 to .93 while convergent validity was also confirmed as the Greek MBSRQ-AS subscales correlated positively with the ASI-R and the SATAQ-3. For the current study, the items yielded a Cronbach alpha of .89.

Method of Data Collection: The scales were hand-distributed by the researcher to various undergraduates in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in various settings (classrooms and hostels). The researcher explained the nature of the study to the participants, what they were required to do, and who was undertaking the research. Each section in the questionnaire had clearly stated instructions on how it should be completed. Participation in the research was voluntary and no incentives for participation were given. Some questionnaires were completed immediately

while the researcher had to come back for some. A total of 570 copies of the questionnaires were distributed out of which 559 were returned. Seventeen (17) copies were improperly filled or mutilated, leaving a total of 542 valid copies of the questionnaires which were analysed showing a 95% completion rate.

Data and Statistical analysis: The study made use of descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), Pearson’s correlation and hierarchical multiple linear regression which was used to test the study hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested under the 95% level of significance ($p < .05$).

Results

This section presents the results of the data analyses. Table 1 showed the correlations between the demographic variables and the main study variables. Age was negatively associated with being male ($r = -.26, p < .001$). Social media use associated positively with body image dissatisfaction ($r = .56, p < .001$). The mean score of 57.20 indicates a moderate level of the social media use. The participants had a moderate level of self-esteem as shown by the mean score of 21.69. In respect to body image dissatisfaction, the mean score of 27.18 was obtained indicating a slightly high level of it among the participants.

Table 1: Pearson’s correlations of demographic variables, social media, self-esteem, and body image dissatisfaction among young adults.

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4
Age	21.84	2.77	-			
Gender	-	-	-.26***	-		
Social Media	57.20	15.51	.03	-.01	-	
Self-Esteem	21.69	4.35	.03	-.01	.06	-
Body Image Dissatisfaction	27.18	8.93	-.00	-.02	.56***	-.02

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; Gender (1 = male, 2 = female); Social Media (Range = 19-95); Self-esteem (Range = 10-40); Body Image Dissatisfaction (Range = 9-45).

Results of the hierarchical multiple regression for the test of the hypotheses is shown in Table 2. In Step 1, age and gender were added as control variables. Gender was not a significant predictor of body image dissatisfaction among young adults, $\beta = -.03$. Age was not a significant predictor of body image dissatisfaction among young adults, $\beta = -.04$. The model was not significant, $F(2, 529) = .17, R^2 = .00$. The R^2 of .00 indicated that 0% of the variance in body image dissatisfaction among young adults was explained on account of the control variables.

In Step 2, social media was a significant positive predictor of body image dissatisfaction among young adults, $\beta = .56, p < .001$. The B showed that for each one unit

rise in social media, body image dissatisfaction among young adults’ increases by .32 units. The model was significant, $F\Delta(1, 528) = 238.56, R^2 = .31$. The $R^2\Delta$ of .31 indicated that 31% of the variance body image dissatisfaction among young adults was explained by social media.

In step 3, self-esteem was not a significant predictor of body image dissatisfaction among young adults, $\beta = -.05$. The model was not significant, $F\Delta(1, 527) = 1.61, R^2\Delta = .00$. The $R^2\Delta$ of .00 indicated that 0% of variance in body image dissatisfaction among young adults was explained by self-esteem. All the variables in the study explained 31% of the variance in body image dissatisfaction among young adults.

Table 2: Hierarchical multiple regression predicting body image dissatisfaction among young adults by social media and self-esteem, with age and gender as control variables

Predictors	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	B	β	T	B	β	t	B	B	t
Age	-.04	-.01	-.25	-.06	-.02	-.51	-.06	-.02	-.47
Gender	-.52	-.03	-.57	-.35	-.02	-.45	-.34	-.02	-.45
SM				.32	.56	15.43***	.33	.56	15.48***
SE							-.09	-.05	-1.27
R ²		.00			.31			.31	
R ² Δ		.00			.31			.00	
F		.17 (2, 529)			79.54 (3, 528)***			60.11 (4, 527)***	
F Δ		.17 (2, 529)			238.56 (1, 528)***			1.61 (1, 527)	

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; SM. = Social Media; SE = Self-esteem

Discussion

The study examined the predictive role of social media and self-esteem on body image dissatisfaction among the undergraduate students of University of Nigeria. Two hypotheses were tested; the first hypothesis which stated that social media will predict body image dissatisfaction was confirmed. The results revealed that social media positively predicted body image dissatisfaction among the undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria. This aligns with previous studies (e.g. Jiotsa et al., 2021; Tadena et al., 2020; De Vries et al., 2019). Alruwayshid et al. (2021). On the other hand, Vuong et al., (2021) a study did not corroborate with our findings.

This finding also makes sense considering Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. In this instance, college students use comparisons to judge their own social and personal worth in relation to those they believe to be doing better or worse. For example, utilizing Instagram, a social media network mostly used for posting photographs and videos, exposes users to those who are thought to lead better lives. Feelings of dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance are likely to result from an inability to manage the pressure of these exposures.

The second hypothesis tested in the study was not confirmed. The result indicated that self-esteem did not predict body image dissatisfaction. Thus, having high or low self-esteem does not necessarily matter in getting discontented with one's body part or structure. High self-esteem individuals might not feel the need to measure themselves against others. Therefore, even if there are differences between one's self-state and another, someone with a high sense of self-worth might not notice them and might not be as prone to body image issues. Individuals with strong self-esteem are also aware that having negative thoughts about their physical appearance is a decision, and they will make an effort to avoid thinking about it. Also, the findings suggest that people who have either high or low self-esteem may not necessarily bother about what their body looks like since there could be other factors that will determine this feeling. Their level of self-esteem may play a role in other day-to-day activities like interaction with people.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of the study have been able to demonstrate that social media significantly and positively predicted body image dissatisfaction among the undergraduate students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This implies that the more social media is

used among the undergraduate students, the more the discontent with some or all of their body parts. This might also explain the proliferation of tinted hair, craze for muscles and six packs among male students and an obsession with certain body shapes among females etc. in the university community. Similarly, this occurrence is most likely to spill over and extend to other places outside the higher institution. Among other challenges, other youth are likely to create avenue for the transmission of the behaviour as it continues to spread among the undergraduates.

Limitations of the study

There are several restrictions on this study. For example, the study setting appears to restrict how broadly the results may be applied. Furthermore, a significant portion of the samples come from the Igbo extraction, which makes generalization challenging. In this study, the ratio of male to female participants was quite large. Causal implications cannot be drawn from this study's cross-sectional design, which uses self-report measurements. The impact of moderating or mediating variables, such as social support and emotion control, was not investigated in this study.

Recommendation for Further Research

It is possible that participants who are addicted to social media see their daily tasks as less demanding and of a lesser nature. Therefore, future studies should increase the sample size significantly to obtain a robust data set and diversify the samples across different geopolitical zones, institutions, and ethnicities in order to maximize generalizability. It is important to look at variables like emotion control and social support as mediators in these interactions. This will provide more depth and insight into the findings.

Conclusion

The advent of social media has brought a craze for body modification and the need to feel among; caused by a discontent with current body states, especially among the undergraduate students and by implication the youth. This calls for urgent attention to reorientation of the youth on the inherent risks involved in use of social media. Since self-esteem did not predict body image dissatisfaction, it therefore means that whether self-esteem is high or not does not matter in how people rate their bodies. This suggests that there could be other factors which would affect the way people see their bodies.

Recommendations

Parents and guardians should encourage their wards to unsubscribe from any social media platforms or accounts that make them feel inferior about themselves and follow more social media platforms that boost self-confidence instead. Business owners can also key into these findings when running ads. They should avoid making people feel less of themselves by making it appear that if you are not light-skinned you are not beautiful or if you're not thin, you are not healthy.

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