

Scrolls, Likes, and Filters: The New Age Factor Causing Body Image Issues

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Abstract:- The increasing rate of body image issues among individuals from ages as young as 13 is extremely worrisome. In a society where the ideal body is 'thin and fit', social media sites and platforms are playing an active role in planting the societal standards in the minds of individuals. This study analysis the social media sites popularly used, hours spent on social media, mental effects of consuming information and content relating to body image and using 'thinspo' as motivation/inspiration. This study concludes that social media plays a more prominent role in affecting the younger population, especially sites like Instagram. The type of content consumed by each generation is different and thereby as a different effect on them. The study also provides certain suggestions to reduce the impact of social media on a person's perception of self.

Keywords:- Body Image Issues, Social Media, Perception.

I. INTRODUCTION

Body image issues may be called a negative self-perception of one's appearance, wherein a person feels that they are not fulfilling the ideal beauty standards projected on to them. In the past, traditional media played a significant role in creating these said issues in people. Post globalisation India had a great shift in its beauty standards. Over time, however, the current generation has moved towards social media. Exposure to social media is believed to increase the possibility of generating dissatisfaction with appearance. This is often because one compares oneself to images of people with thin, lean or muscular bodies on social media and objectifies oneself with them, making them feel depressed, anxious, and stressed. The popularity of fitness and wellness culture has skyrocketed, and there are two commonly observed reactions from viewers. While some find it motivating, others may find that it has a negative impact on their body image issues. "Thinspiration" or "fitspiration" are common hashtags that are going viral and causing body image obsessives to spend their time and money on diet and exercise.

Social networks can have a greater impact than traditional forms of media such as TV shows, films or magazines, simply because the former are more personalized and accessible. There are millions of body aesthetics content and multiple platforms to choose from. In addition, traditional media includes conventionally attractive celebrities. But social media can be used by ordinary people with seemingly perfect lives. Further, in the era of online

dating apps, it seems more like the ideal partner is swiped right on the basis of how they look, or at least it is the predominant factor. Therefore, when a person constantly feels undesirable, the lack of social validation may have grave consequences and make them more sensitive to criticism, risking chances of body image problems as serious as eating disorders. This might tempt them to get external validation through posting of altered images with the hopes of receiving likes and compliments.

The inherent search for validation regarding their appearance plays a pivotal role in nurturing a person's self-esteem. The extent to which a person may get influenced will be on the basis of a variety of factors including their childhood, the area from where they were raised, their parent's perception, past positive as well as negative experiences, and their own beliefs on what makes them or others attractive. As the famous quote goes, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder". Therefore the standard of beauty depends from person to person and what may trigger one, may not trigger another. But looking around us, it is evident that the ideal body type for both men and women is being fit and tall. It includes having Eurocentric facial features, straight voluminous hair, straight teeth, clear skin, etc.

When a baby is born, it does not have an idea of who or what is beautiful. However, the bias called "halo effect" show that people are more likely to believe a person deemed appealing to the eye is more intelligent, qualified and kind. Despite this, the idea of what is pretty and what is not is a gamble of past trends and other external factors that shape our beliefs.

Adolescent social media usage is a growing concern in itself, but it is all the more terrifying due to its association with the rise in eating disorders among this demographic. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns have amplified this issue, both the increased phone consumption, as well as the altered perceptions of their bodies, as they increasingly turned to social media for personal connection and entertainment during periods of quarantine. Considering increased cases on eating disorders, there is a dire need to ascertain potential triggers when a person may engage in viewing content which modifies their perceptions of body. This may allow us to formulate action plans to reduce the prevalence of eating disorders and insecurities. We can also teach people of all age groups to appropriately limit viewing content that might trigger them by understanding their past experiences and employing certain blocks on their social media platforms.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Groesz et al. (2001) in *“The effect of experimental presentation of thin media images on body satisfaction: A meta-analytic review”*, A meta-analysis was conducted to assess the impact of experimental manipulations reflecting the thin beauty ideal as portrayed in mass media on female body image. The study analysed data from 25 research studies, comprising 43 effect sizes, to investigate the overall influence of slender media images and the moderating effects of factors such as pre-existing body image issues, participant age, stimulus presentation frequency, and research design type. The findings revealed a significantly more negative impact on body image following exposure to thin media images compared to images featuring models of average size, plus-size models, or inanimate objects. This effect was particularly pronounced in between-subjects designs, participants under 19 years of age, and individuals susceptible to the activation of a thinness schema. These results align with the sociocultural perspective, supporting the notion that mass media contributes to the promotion of a slender ideal that triggers body dissatisfaction.

Gibson et al. (2019) in *“Examination of the temporal sequence between social media use and well-being in a representative sample of adults”* Heightened body dissatisfaction poses an increased risk for adopting unhealthy dieting practices and developing disordered eating patterns. The involvement with or exposure to image-centric content on social media may adversely influence both body image perceptions and dietary choices among otherwise healthy young adults. Therefore, when health professionals formulate social media campaigns targeted at this demographic, careful consideration of image-related content is imperative to avoid exacerbating body dissatisfaction and its potential repercussions on eating behaviors.

Tiggemann et al. (2013) in *“Net Girls: The Internet, Facebook, and body image concern in adolescent girls”*, The main objective of this study was to investigate the correlation between Internet exposure and body image concerns in adolescent girls, specifically emphasizing the impact of the social networking site Facebook. The findings led to the conclusion that the Internet serves as a powerful socio-cultural medium significantly influencing the body image perceptions of adolescent girls.

Marques et al. (2021) *“A prospective examination of relationships between social media use and body dissatisfaction in a representative sample of adults”*, In the complete sample, elevated social media usage was notably linked to increased body dissatisfaction a year later. This association persisted even when accounting for initial levels of body dissatisfaction and social media use. The forward trajectory from social media use to heightened body dissatisfaction remained statistically significant across all age groups. Conversely, the reverse relationship, from body dissatisfaction to increased social media use, was only significant in specific instances.

Gobin et al. (2021) in *“Testing a self-compassion micro-intervention before appearance-based social media use: Implications for body image, Body Image”*, The findings indicated that the implementation of a self-compassion intervention resulted in a reduction of dissatisfaction with weight and appearance, and these positive effects persisted even following engagement with Instagram. In contrast, individuals in the control condition exhibited an increase in concerns related to body image after using Instagram. These early observations suggest that a self-compassion micro-intervention could potentially act as a valuable protective measure against specific negative impacts of social media on body image.

Roberts et al. (2022) in *“Incorporating social media and muscular ideal internalization into the tripartite influence model of body image: Towards a modern understanding of adolescent girls’ body dissatisfaction”* The outcomes revealed that the self-compassion intervention resulted in a reduction of weight dissatisfaction and appearance dissatisfaction, and these positive effects persisted even after participants engaged with Instagram. Conversely, those in the control condition exhibited an increase in body image concern following Instagram use. These initial findings imply that a self-compassion micro-intervention could potentially act as a valuable safeguard, mitigating specific negative impacts of social media on body image.

Pedalino (2022), in *“Instagram Use and Body Dissatisfaction: The Mediating Role of Upward Social Comparison with Peers and Influencers among Young Females”* the findings indicate that engaging with Instagram was linked to diminished levels of body appreciation, and this relationship was entirely mediated by upward social comparison with social media influencers, rather than with close or distant peers. Interestingly, activities such as commenting on others' looks and posting personal content were not found to be associated with body dissatisfaction in this context.

➤ Research Gap

There are several studies relating to social media and its impact on body image issues. Many discuss about the psychological impact social media has on young teenagers who regularly consume media. Moreover, it discusses about the thin-ideal standard. However, most of the research previously done gives more importance to adolescent or young adult women and not men. It also does not include people above the age of 25. In this study, the researcher aims to study the impact of the present gym culture and its impact on all age grouped men and women.

➤ Statement of the Problem

With the increase in easy access to social media sites, people have been using it to a great extent. The particular research topic was selected as although easy access to media has increased several physical and mental problems such as body image. This detailed study is done among people of all age groups and gender so as to understand social media's generational impact on their body image.

➤ *Objectives of the Study*

- To know whether there is a positive or negative effect on people’s body image when consuming social media.
- To know whether women are more affected by body image issues than men.
- To know whether social media promotes unattainable beauty standards and worships the idea of ‘thin and fit’.
- To know whether people who use social media compare themselves to the people they see.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher has produced the research by utilising primary as well as secondary data. The entire research and discussion are on the basis of primary data. The primary data was collected from 101 respondents residing in Chennai city through a well-structured questionnaire circulated through mail. The respondents were from all age groups and all genders. The questionnaire included details of age, gender, occupation, average time spent on social media, preferred platform and questions relating to social media and their body image. The secondary data were collected through related articles, national and international reputed journals, government reports of countries, etc.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Socio-Economic Data

Basis	Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Age	Less than 20	68	68
	Between 20 to 30	12	12
	Between 31- 40	7	7
	Between 41- 50	6	6
	Above 50	8	8
	Total	100	100
Occupation	Student	70	70
	Service	9	9
	Business	8	8
	Others	14	14
	TOTAL	100	100
Gender	Male	33	33
	Female	63	63
	Transgender	1	1
	Non-Binary	3	3
	Prefer not to say	1	1
	TOTAL	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Among the respondents, 68% of the respondents were belonging to in the age group of less than 20 years, followed by 11.9% in the age group of 20-30 years and 8%, in the age group of above 50 years. Further, 7% of the

respondents belonged to the age group of 31-40 years, followed by 6% in the age group of 41-50. It clearly shows that majority of people surveyed are from the younger generation having age up to 30 years.

With respect to the occupation, the majority of the respondents are Students, i.e., 69.3%. Followed by Others category who make up 13.9%. Service sector makes up 7.9% of the respondents, followed by business which make up 7.9%. Students are majority of the respondents, considering the fact that social media is more popular among the younger generations. Among the respondents, 62.4% of the respondents were female, followed by 32.7% were male, and 3%, in the age group were non-Binary. Further, 1% of the respondents were transgender, and 1% preferred not to say.

Table 2: Regularly used Social Media Site of the Respondents

S. No.	Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentages
1	Instagram	76	76
2	Facebook	22	22
3	Snapchat	39	39
4	Twitter	25	25
5	Tumblr	1	1
6	Pinterest	31	31
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

When asked about the social media site regularly used by the respondents, over 3/4th of the respondents have chosen Instagram, i.e., 75.2%. The next popular site is snapchat, which was used by 38.6% of the respondents. Followed by Pinterest, 30.7%. Twitter and Facebook were closely challenged making up 24.8% and 21.8% respectively. The least used site was Tumblr, which was only regularly used by one respondent.

Table 3: Hours Spent Every Day on Social Media Approximately by the Respondent

S.No.	Particulars	No. of Respondents	Percentages
1	less than 1 hour	23	23
2	1-3 hours	52	52
3	4-6 hours	23	23
4	7-9 hours	3	3
5	10+ hours	0	0
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Over 51.5% of the people surveyed spent 1-3 hours every day on social media. 22.8% of the respondents spent less than 1 hours, which was the same for 4-6 hours. 2.9% of the respondents spent over 7-9 hours on a daily average. None of them spent more than 10 hours on social media.

Table 4: Perception of Social Media and Body Image

S.No.	Question	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		R	%	R	%	R	%	R	%	R	%
	R= No. of Respondent %= Percentages										
1	Do you think that social media promotes unattainable beauty standards and worships the idea of 'thin and fit'?	31.7	31.7	47.5	47.5	13.9	13.9	5.9	5.9	1	1
2	Do you look up inspiration and motivation for weight loss and workout related content?	-	-	51.5	51.5	23.8	23.8	24.8	24.8	-	-
3	Do you ever search up people with ideal and societally praised bodies to induce guilt?	-	-	16.8	16.8	33.7	33.7	50	50	-	-
4	Do you compare yourself and feel insecure when looking at people's bodies and lifestyle on social media?	-	-	36.6	36.6	28.4	28.4	35	35	-	-
5	"I obsessively look at people's profiles and feeds on social media"	1	1	18.8	18.8	27.7	27.7	31.7	31.7	20.8	20.8
6	"I compare myself to celebrities and fitness influencers and it has more of a negative effect than a positive one on my body image"	5.9	5.9	18.8	18.8	28.7	28.7	21.8	21.8	24.8	24.8
7	"I feel jealous of other people's bodies and appearances"	10.9	10.9	22.8	22.8	17.8	17.8	17.8	17.8	30.7	30.7
8	"Social media makes me feel ugly"	7.9	7.9	20.8	20.8	15.8	15.8	36.6	36.6	18.8	18.8
9	"I alter and edit photos of myself to feel more attractive"	1	1	12.9	12.9	28.7	28.7	23.8	23.8	33.6	33.6
10	"I get motivated when I look at fit and attractive people on social media. It strives me to work hard and achieve their look."	9.9	9.9	24.8	24.8	31.7	31.7	23.8	23.8	9.9	9.9
11	Do you think you have control over the media you consume?	-	-	38.6	38.6	48.5	48.5	12.9	12.9	-	-
12	Do you think social media affects body image more than other real-life factors like family and peers?	-	-	50	50	38	38	12	12	-	-
13	Do you think only women have body image issues?	-	-	10.9	10.9	19.8	19.8	69.3	69.3	-	-
14	Do you think in order to become famous on social media, say become an Instagram influencer, the person should be attractive?	-	-	24.8	24.8	28.7	28.7	46.5	46.5	-	-
15	Social media has made me believe that in order to be successful in life, I must look a certain way	5	5	27.7	27.7	26.7	26.7	21.8	21.8	18.8	18.8
Total		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The respondents were mainly asked regarding social media and its reputation of promoting unattainable beauty standards and the idea of 'thin and fit'. Several questions were asked regarding using social media as body inspiration and motivation in order to decide whether the said motivation was negative or positive. When asked if social media promotes unattainable beauty standards and worships the idea of 'thin and fit', the majority of 47.5% agreed while 31.7% strongly agreed. 13.9% were neutral. 5.9% of the respondents disagreed while a meagre 1% strongly disagreed.

51.5% of the respondents agreed to looking up inspiration and motivation for weight loss and workout related content on social media. 24.8% of the respondents disagreed while the remaining 23.8% were neutral. When asked if they ever search up people with ideal and societally praised bodies to induce guilt, the majority of over 50% disagreed. 33.7% were neutral, followed by 16.8% who agreed to doing that. 36.6% of the respondents agreed to comparing themselves and feeling insecure when looking at people's bodies and lifestyle on social media. Closely followed by

over 35% of the respondents who disagreed. The remaining were neutral regarding it. When asked if they obsessively looked at people's profiles and feeds on social media, the majority of 31.7% disagree, followed by 27.7% of the respondents who were neutral regarding the question. 20.8% disagreed while 18.8% agreed and 1% strongly agreed.

The respondents were asked if they compared themselves to celebrities and fitness influencers and if it had more of a negative effect than a positive one on their perceptions. Surprisingly, the majority of the persons strongly disagreed (24.8%) or disagreed (21.8%). 28.7% of the persons were neutral while the remaining strongly agreed (5.9%) or agreed (18.8%). 30.7% of the respondents said that they strongly did not feel jealous of other people's bodies and appearances in social media. Followed by 22.8% who agreed to feeling jealous. 17.8% of the respondents disagreed and 17.8% were neutral. 10.9% strongly agreed to feeling jealous of other people's bodies and appearances. On whether social media made them feel ugly, the majority of 36.6% disagreed, followed by 20.8% who agreed. 18.8% strongly disagreed while 15.8% were neutral and 7.95 strongly agreed.

When asked if they alter and edit their pictures to feel more attractive, the majority strongly disagreed, followed by 28.7% who were neutral. 23.8% disagreed while 12.9% agreed. The remaining 1% strongly agreed. Most importantly, the respondents were asked if they got motivated when they looked at fit and attractive people on social media and whether it strived them to work hard and achieve their look. 31.7% were neutral regarding it. Agree and disagree were very close, 24.8% and 23.8% respectively. Again, exactly 9.9% of the respondents strongly agreed and strongly disagreed with the question.

When asked if the respondents had control over the media they consumed, 48.5% of them were neutral regarding it. 38.6% of the respondents agreed that they had control over the content they viewed and 12.9% disagreed. 50% of the respondents believed that social media affects body image more than other real life factors like family and peers. 38% were neutral regarding it while the minority of 12% disagreed. 69.3% of the respondents believed that both men and women can get affected by body image issues. 19.85 were neutral about it while 10.9% believed only women can have body image issues.

When asked if they believed in order to become famous on social media, say become an Instagram Influencer, the person should be attractive, 46.5% disagreed, followed by 28.7% who were neutral regarding it. 24.8% of the respondents agreed. Lastly, when asked if they believed that in order to be successful in life, they must look a certain way, the majority of 27.7% agreed, closely followed by 26.7% who were neutral. Followed by 21.8% who disagreed and 18.8% who strongly disagreed. The remaining 5% strongly agreed.

V. FINDINGS

From the study conducted, it is evident that there are categories of social media sites. There are older sites like Facebook which was created in the year 2004 was more popularly used by Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers. Facebook has over 2.94 billion monthly active users. This statement implies that individuals were accessing at least one of the primary offerings within Facebook's portfolio, encompassing Facebook itself, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Messenger.

From the findings, we could see that while the younger respondents regularly used sites like Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, twitter etc., the majority of Facebook users were over the age of 30. It was also found that the older respondents only spent between 1 to 3 hours every day on social media. Some only spent less than an hour. However, in cases of younger respondents, some spent over 7-9 hours on social media every day. Moreover, many of the older respondents didn't feel the need to look up societally praised individuals with conventionally attractive bodies to induce guilt. 80% of the respondents agreed that social media promotes unattainable beauty standards and worships the idea of 'thin and fit'. Social media has had the bad reputation of causing not just physical medical conditions but also deep mental and psychological imbalances. Body image issues through social media seems more common in younger respondents than in the older respondents.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Younger generations often use more recent and popular social media platforms dominated by Gen-Z. While sites like Facebook have lesser triggering content. Social media sites need to provide trigger warnings on body related content and could perhaps censor images. Also, it is very crucial to avoid editing or altering photos to reduce chances of body dysmorphia. Teens who already have body image issues through other factors like peers and family may avoid obsessive scrolling of social media. By hiding or reporting posts, or blocking certain influencers or celebrities that trigger one's body issues, will create a safer space for the individual.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

For this study, only 101 samples were considered. Due to constraints, the area was limited and therefore all the respondents were residents of Chennai. This study does not apply to all people in India as only a handful of them were selected. Moreover, this sample may not accurately represent the entire population of Chennai region. Sufficient number of people over the age of 20 did not respond to the questionnaire sent, therefore, there is not equal representation of all age groups.

VIII. CONCLUSION

It is a scientific belief that the pre-adolescent age is the period wherein there is substantial levels growth in the development of a human being, be it in terms of identity, personality or other emotions. Understandable so, this is the period wherein one must strive to creating a sense of self. This stage in life often defines a person at the end of the day and may be quite difficult to change the core beliefs. Therefore, at such a period of time, any form of distress on a person's body image might have long lasting effects on the life of a person. Teenagers now have access to the deep ocean of social media which was not very prevalent during older days. This creates stress and doubts regarding the ideal body type and beauty standards and creates stress as well as insecurities. Considering the new found elevated possession towards gym culture, we could visibly see the difference in the idea and outlook towards social media in various age groups and genders. It is understandable that an individual may feel jealous or insecure, however, it is not normal when it starts affecting a person's daily life.

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