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SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND BODY IMAGE AMONG UNIVERSITY WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an important part of university students' daily lives, influencing how they communicate, present themselves, and perceive their physical appearance. Among university women, frequent exposure to idealized photographs, beauty filters, fitness content, fashion trends, and appearance-focused posts may influence body image and personal satisfaction with physical appearance. Social media platforms provide opportunities for self-expression, social interaction, and access to supportive communities; however, they may also encourage unrealistic beauty expectations and comparisons with digitally edited images. This study aims to examine the relationship between social media use and body image among university women, with particular attention to appearance-based social comparison, exposure to idealized beauty standards, online feedback, and body satisfaction. The proposed research will use a quantitative survey approach to investigate social media habits and perceptions of physical appearance among female university students. Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire measuring daily social media use, engagement with appearance-related content, body satisfaction, and perceived social pressure. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis will be used to examine patterns and associations between the variables. The study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of how different forms of social media engagement may relate to body image among university women. Its findings may help universities develop digital literacy initiatives, body-positive awareness programs, and psychological support strategies that encourage healthier online experiences.

KEYWORDS: *Social Media Use, Body Image, University Women, Body Satisfaction, Social Comparison, Beauty Standards, Appearance Anxiety, Digital Well-Being, Self-Esteem, Online Influence.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a central feature of contemporary communication, particularly among university students who use digital platforms for educational activities, entertainment, social interaction, and personal expression. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Snapchat allow users to share photographs, videos, opinions, and personal experiences with large audiences. Bonfanti, R. C., Melchiori, F., Teti, A., Albano, G., Raffard, S., Rodgers, R., & Coco, G. L. (2025). Found that,Although these platforms provide opportunities for communication and creativity, they also expose users to continuous visual information about physical appearance, fashion, fitness, and beauty. For university women, this environment may influence how they evaluate their own bodies and compare their appearance with that of others. Body image refers to an individual's perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and attitudes concerning their physical appearance. It includes both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with body shape, weight, facial features, and other physical characteristics. In a highly visual digital environment, body image may be influenced not only by real-life interactions but also by carefully selected and digitally modified online representations.One important characteristic of social media is the widespread presentation of idealized physical appearance. Brasil, K. M., Mims, C. E., Pritchard, M. E., & McDermott, R. C. (2024). Elobrated on, Influencers, celebrities, models, and ordinary users frequently share photographs and videos that emphasize particular beauty standards. These representations may feature flawless skin, specific body proportions, fashionable clothing, and carefully arranged poses. Image-editing applications, filters, lighting, and camera angles can further

increase the difference between online appearances and everyday reality. When university women repeatedly encounter these images, they may begin to view them as realistic or desirable standards against which their own bodies should be evaluated. Chauhan, E., & Murugesan, M. (2025). Revealed that,Such exposure may create pressure to achieve particular physical characteristics, even when those standards are difficult or impossible to attain.

Consequently, social media use should be examined not simply in terms of the amount of time spent online but also in relation to the nature of the content encountered and the meaning individuals attach to it.Appearance-based social comparison is another important factor in understanding the relationship between social media use and body image. Social comparison occurs when individuals evaluate their characteristics, abilities, or circumstances by comparing themselves with other people. On visual social media platforms, users may compare their weight, skin, facial features, clothing, fitness, or overall attractiveness with the images they see online. Such comparisons may become particularly influential when users believe that influencers or peers represent desirable standards of beauty. Upward comparison, in which individuals compare themselves with people they perceive as more attractive, may produce feelings of inadequacy or dissatisfaction. However, social comparison does not always have negative consequences. Some users may find inspiration in fitness content, personal transformation stories, or body-positive messages. The effects may therefore depend on the content, the user's existing self-esteem, the frequency of comparison, and their ability to recognize the selective and edited nature of online presentations.University women experience a period of personal, academic, and social development in which identity, confidence, friendships, and perceptions of attractiveness may become particularly important. Academic responsibilities, changing social relationships, family expectations, and future career concerns can interact with the pressures associated with appearance. Online reactions, including likes, comments, shares, and followers, may also become sources of perceived approval or rejection. When users connect their self-worth to these forms of digital feedback, their satisfaction with their appearance may become dependent on external validation. A photograph receiving fewer likes than expected, for example, may be interpreted as a sign of reduced attractiveness, even though online engagement is influenced by many unrelated factors. These experiences suggest the importance of investigating the emotional and psychological meanings of social media interactions rather than assuming that all frequent users experience the same effects.The relationship between social media and body image is complex because digital platforms can provide both harmful and beneficial experiences.

Appearance-focused content may encourage unrealistic comparisons, while body-positive communities can challenge narrow beauty standards and promote acceptance of different body types. Educational content may also help students identify image manipulation, understand the commercial motives behind influencer marketing, and question unrealistic portrayals of beauty. In addition, social media may provide opportunities for women to discuss personal experiences, access supportive communities, and encounter diverse representations of physical appearance. The influence of these platforms may depend on whether users engage passively with appearance-focused material or actively participate in supportive and informative communities. Individual differences, including self-esteem, media literacy, body appreciation, and social support, may also influence how online content is interpreted. A balanced investigation should therefore consider the possible risks and benefits

of different patterns of social media engagement.Despite increasing awareness of digital well-being, understanding the relationship between social media use and body image remains important for university environments. Female students may use the same platforms for academic collaboration, entertainment, friendship, and appearance-related inspiration, yet their experiences can differ considerably. Examining social media use alongside body satisfaction and appearance-based comparison can help identify which forms of engagement are associated with more negative or positive perceptions of physical appearance. The present study proposes to investigate this relationship among university women, focusing on time spent on social media, exposure to idealized images, comparison with peers and influencers, and satisfaction with physical appearance. The study may contribute to the development of practical interventions, including digital media literacy education, body-image awareness sessions, and supportive university counseling services. It also seeks to encourage a more critical understanding of online beauty standards and promote a healthier relationship between digital participation and personal self-worth.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the relationship between social media use and body image among university women, with particular attention to appearance-based social comparison, exposure to idealized beauty standards, and body satisfaction.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What is the relationship between social media use and body image among university women, particularly in relation to appearance-based social comparison, exposure to idealized beauty standards, and body satisfaction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Use and Body Image. Social media use and body image have become important subjects in contemporary psychological research because digital platforms expose users to a continuous flow of appearance-related information. Park, S. Y., Bailey, R. L., & Park, J. (2025). Found that, Vincente-Benito and Ramírez-Durán (2023) reviewed research on social media, body image, and well-being among adolescents and young adults, highlighting the importance of understanding online experiences in relation to psychological health. The relationship between social media and body image is not determined solely by the amount of time a person spends online. The type of content viewed, the purpose of platform use, and the emotional response to online material may also be important. For university women, viewing educational posts or communicating with friends may produce different experiences from repeatedly viewing highly edited photographs of influencers. Social media can therefore be understood as a varied digital environment in which particular activities may support confidence while others may contribute to dissatisfaction. This distinction supports the need to investigate both the frequency and the nature of social media use when examining body image among female university students (Vincente-Benito & Ramírez-Durán, 2023).Appearance-Based Social Comparison. Social comparison is a major concept in explaining why appearance-related social media content may influence body satisfaction. Bonfanti et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis examining

associations between social comparison on social media, body image concerns, and eating-disorder symptoms. Their analysis included 83 studies and 55,440 participants. Sarda, E., El-Jor, C., Shankland, R., Hallez, Q., Patiram, D., Nguyen, C., ... & Flaudias, V. (2025). Socialrevealed that, The findings indicated a significant association between greater online social comparison and greater body image concerns, while positive body image was associated with lower levels of comparison. These findings suggest that university women who repeatedly evaluate their appearance against the photographs and videos of others may be more vulnerable to dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Comparisons may involve body shape, skin tone, weight, facial features, clothing, or perceived attractiveness. Nevertheless, the association does not mean that every comparison leads to negative feelings or that social media alone explains body dissatisfaction.

Personal confidence, cultural expectations, and the characteristics of the content may influence how comparisons are experienced (Bonfanti et al., 2025).Idealized Beauty Standards and Body Satisfaction. Idealized beauty standards are another significant theme in research on social media and body image. Tian, H., Rouse, S. V., Yoon, S., & Harriger, J. A. (2026elobrated on, Digital photographs and videos frequently present carefully selected appearances that may not reflect ordinary everyday experiences. Zhang et al. (2025) examined experimental evidence concerning body-ideal and body-positive content among young women. Their meta-analysis of 20 experimental studies involving 3,603 female participants found that exposure to body-ideal content reduced body satisfaction, whereas exposure to body-positive content improved it. The study also reported stronger negative effects for body-ideal videos than for body-ideal images in the examined experimental conditions. These findings highlight the importance of the content presented to users rather than treating all social media activity as equivalent. For university women, repeated exposure to narrowly defined standards of attractiveness may encourage unrealistic expectations about physical appearance. Tian, H., Rouse, S. V., Yoon, S., & Harriger, J. A. (2026). Explained, In contrast, content celebrating body diversity and realistic physical characteristics may support more accepting attitudes toward the body (Zhang et al., 2025).Self-Objectification and Appearance Monitoring. Self-objectification refers to the tendency to view and evaluate one's body primarily from the perspective of an external observer. On social media, this tendency may appear when users repeatedly monitor their appearance, adjust photographs before posting, or worry about how others will judge their physical features. Sarda et al. (2025) reviewed social media use in relation to self-objectification, self-compassion, and body image concerns.

Their review discussed pathways through which appearance-focused content may contribute to body monitoring and shame, while identifying self-compassion as a potentially protective factor. Among university women, self-objectification may influence decisions about photographs, clothing, participation in social activities, and confidence in face-to-face interactions. However, taking photographs or editing images does not automatically indicate a psychological problem. The concern arises when appearance monitoring becomes excessive or when personal value is increasingly determined by perceived attractiveness. Encouraging self-compassion and broader definitions of personal worth may help reduce the importance attached to constant appearance evaluation (Sarda et al., 2025).Gender, Social Expectations, and Online Experiences. Social and cultural expectations can shape the ways women interpret appearance-related information online. Xu et al. (2025) reviewed research examining the

varied effects of social media on body image across genders. Their review discussed how passive exposure to appearance-focused material and the internalization of beauty ideals can relate to body dissatisfaction and other negative experiences. University women may encounter expectations concerning thinness, fitness, clear skin, fashionable clothing, or other socially valued physical characteristics. These expectations may be reinforced by influencer content, advertising, comments from peers, and platform recommendations. At the same time, women's online experiences are not uniform. Cultural background, age, socioeconomic circumstances, personal interests, and existing body confidence may influence how beauty standards are understood. In university settings, it is therefore important to avoid assuming that all women experience the same pressures or respond similarly to the same online content. Research should recognize differences in individual experiences while examining the broader social conditions that shape body image (Xu et al., 2025).Body Positivity and Research Gaps. Body-positive content offers an alternative to appearance-focused material that promotes narrow ideals of beauty. Such content may emphasize body acceptance, physical diversity, self-respect, and the rejection of unrealistic comparisons. Zhang et al. (2025) found that body-positive exposure was associated with improved body satisfaction in the experimental studies they examined.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study will employ a structured research methodology to investigate social media use and body image among university women. The target population will consist of female university students aged 18 years and above who regularly use at least one social media platform. Participants may be recruited from different academic departments and years of study to obtain a range of experiences. Data will be collected using a self-administered questionnaire containing questions about demographic characteristics, daily social media use, preferred platforms, exposure to appearance-related content, social comparison, and body satisfaction. Established and appropriately validated measures should be used where possible, with clear instructions and suitable adaptation for the study population. The questionnaire should avoid judgmental language and should allow participants to skip questions that make them uncomfortable. Informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and secure data handling will be maintained throughout the research process. Ethical approval should be obtained from the relevant institutional body before recruitment and data collection begin.The questionnaire will be organized into sections that measure the main variables of the study. The first section will collect basic demographic information, such as age group, academic year, and field of study. The second section will assess social media use, including approximate daily usage, frequently used platforms, and the amount of time spent viewing appearance-related content. The third section will examine appearance-based social comparison, including how often participants compare their physical appearance with friends, influencers, or other users. The fourth section will measure body image and body satisfaction using an appropriate validated scale. Additional questions may explore the perceived effects of likes, comments, filters, and edited photographs. A small pilot study should be conducted to identify unclear questions and estimate the time required to complete the questionnaire. The final sample size should be determined through an appropriate statistical power calculation, taking into account the intended analyses and feasible recruitment arrangements. Following data collection, responses will be checked for completeness, coded, and entered into statistical software for analysis. Missing responses, duplicate entries, and potentially

invalid questionnaire records will be examined according to predefined criteria. The researcher will calculate descriptive statistics to summarize participants' social media habits and body image responses.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A cross-sectional correlational research design will be used to examine the relationship between social media use and body image among university women. In a cross-sectional study, information is collected from participants during a defined period rather than following them over several months or years. This design is suitable for identifying patterns in current social media habits and perceptions of physical appearance. The study will not manipulate participants' exposure to social media content; instead, it will examine their existing habits and reported experiences. Variables of interest will include social media use, exposure to appearance-related content, frequency of social comparison, and body satisfaction. The correlational design will allow the researcher to determine whether these variables are statistically associated. Nevertheless, the findings will not establish the direction of influence, because body dissatisfaction may also affect the way participants use social media.Participants will be recruited from one or more universities using a clearly defined sampling strategy. If probability sampling is feasible, students may be selected through stratified sampling to represent different academic years or departments. If access to a complete student sampling frame is unavailable, convenience sampling may be used, with the limitation that the sample may not represent all university women. Eligibility criteria will require participants to be female university students aged 18 or above who use social media. The intended sample size should be determined before data collection through a power analysis rather than chosen arbitrarily. Recruitment information will explain the purpose of the research, expected participation time, voluntary nature of involvement, and confidentiality protections. Participants will not be pressured to take part, and their decision to decline will have no effect on their academic standing or relationship with the university.The main variables will be operationalized using clearly defined questionnaire measures. Social media use may be measured through reported daily duration, frequency of platform engagement, and exposure to appearance-focused content. Appearance-based social comparison may be measured using a validated instrument that assesses how frequently participants compare their physical characteristics with those of other users. Body image may be measured using a validated body-image or body-appreciation scale appropriate for the target population.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistical Analysis. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the demographic characteristics of participants and their reported social media habits. Frequencies and percentages will describe categorical variables, such as preferred platforms and academic year, while means and standard deviations may summarize continuous variables when appropriate. The analysis will examine how much time participants report spending on social media, how frequently they encounter appearance-related content, and how often they compare their appearance with others. Body satisfaction scores will also be summarized to describe the range of experiences within the sample. Tables may be used to present the main descriptive results clearly. These statistics will provide an overview of

participants' experiences and help identify patterns that warrant further investigation. However, descriptive findings alone will not establish whether social media use is associated with body image; this relationship will require additional statistical testing.Correlation and Regression Analysis. Correlation analysis will be conducted to assess the direction and strength of associations between social media use, appearance-based social comparison, and body satisfaction. Pearson's correlation may be used when its assumptions are reasonably satisfied, while Spearman's rank correlation may be appropriate for ordinal or non-normally distributed data. The statistical significance level and confidence intervals should be specified before analysis. If the sample size and data quality permit, regression analysis may be used to examine whether appearance-focused social media engagement is associated with body satisfaction after adjusting for selected background variables. The researcher should report effect sizes and confidence intervals alongside statistical significance to avoid overstating the importance of small associations. Because the proposed design is cross-sectional, even a statistically significant relationship will not demonstrate that social media use causes changes in body image.Interpretation and Presentation of Results. The final stage of data analysis will involve interpreting the statistical results in relation to the research objective, theoretical framework, and previous studies.

FINDINGS

Social Media Engagement and Appearance-Related Exposure. The study may identify social media as a regular part of participants' daily routines, with differences in the platforms used and the amount of time spent online. Some university women may report using social media mainly for communication, education, and entertainment, whereas others may engage more frequently with fashion, beauty, fitness, and influencer content. The results may demonstrate that overall screen time does not fully capture the nature of participants' online experiences. Students who spend similar amounts of time on social media may encounter different levels of appearance-focused content. This would support the importance of distinguishing between general platform use and specific forms of engagement when studying body image. The final findings should describe the observed patterns using actual frequencies, percentages, and statistical summaries obtained from the sample.Social Comparison and Body Satisfaction. It is possible that participants who frequently compare their physical appearance with influencers, celebrities, or peers will report lower body satisfaction. Such a pattern would be consistent with research indicating an association between online social comparison and body image concerns (Bonfanti et al., 2025). The study may also identify differences according to the type of content participants view and the importance they attach to online feedback.However, some participants may report positive experiences, including greater confidence through supportive communities and exposure to diverse body types. These possibilities emphasize that the relationship between social media and body image is not necessarily uniform. The actual analysis will need to establish whether the anticipated associations occur, how strong they are, and whether they remain after accounting for relevant background factors.Implications for University Women.

CONCLUSION

Social media use and body image among university women represent an important area of research because digital platforms influence how individuals encounter beauty standards,

evaluate appearance, and interact with others. The proposed study examines the relationship between social media engagement, appearance-based social comparison, and body satisfaction. Recent research suggests that exposure to idealized body content and frequent online appearance comparisons may be associated with less favorable body-image outcomes, whereas body-positive content may offer benefits (Bonfanti et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). These findings from previous studies provide a useful foundation for investigating the experiences of university women in different educational and cultural settings. The proposed research may contribute to a more detailed understanding of how online activities relate to body perceptions and why the content and purpose of social media use deserve attention alongside time spent online.The study may also have practical implications for universities, educators, counselors, and digital well-being programs. Encouraging critical media literacy, self-compassion, and realistic understandings of online images may help students approach appearance-related content more thoughtfully. Universities can promote environments in which students feel respected regardless of their body shape, weight, skin tone, or physical characteristics. Social media platforms may also contribute positively by making diverse and supportive representations more visible. However, the proposed research will need to acknowledge limitations, including self-reported information, potential sampling bias, and the inability of a cross-sectional design to establish causation. Future research could use longitudinal surveys, interviews, or experimental methods to explore how online experiences and body satisfaction change over time. Ultimately, the goal should be to support healthier digital experiences without stigmatizing social media users or assuming that all women experience body-image concerns in the same way. The overall conclusion is that the influence of social media on body image among university women depends on the type of content they view, the amount of time they spend online, their personal self-esteem, and their ability to evaluate online information critically.

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