

Exploring The Influence Of Social Networks On Body Dissatisfaction Among Preadolescents

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Abstract: Social networks propose beauty standards that have dangerous implies on users' body satisfaction and multifaceted on body image of preadolescents, a vulnerable age group facing unique challenges in the digital era. With the proliferation of social media platforms, preadolescents are increasingly exposed to carefully curated images and ideals of beauty, which can significantly influence their self-perception and body image. This study examines the impact of social networks on body image in a sample of 137 preteens. An anonymous questionnaire was used to investigate the time spent on social networks and the role of sociocultural influences on body image. The findings from this research underscore the pressing need for targeted interventions and educational programs that equip preadolescents with the skills and knowledge to navigate social network use in a way that promotes a positive body image and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Social Networks; body image; preadolescence

1. Introduction

Body image constitutes a multifaceted construct, encompassing four fundamental dimensions: the individual's perception of one's physical appearance, the emotional experiences tied to their corporeal self the cognitive beliefs and attitudes regarding the body (Cash & Smolak, 2012). Disruptions in one's body perception can substantially impact psychological well-being (Tomas-Aragones & Marron, 2014). Extensive research underscores the substantial influence of socio-cultural factors in developing body dissatisfaction (Cafri et al., 2005). Negative body image can originate from various sources, including familial influences, peer interactions, media representations, and societal pressures (Shen et al., 2022), ultimately influencing self-esteem, competence, and social functioning (Hosseini & Padhy, 2023). In recent times, the explosive growth of social media has exposed an ever-expanding user base to content that upholds beauty standards, emphasizes thinness, and champions the absence of imperfections. Consequently, body dissatisfaction can emerge as a result of internalizing these appearance ideals and struggling to conform to the beauty standards propagated by the media (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Adolescents who spend more time on social media platforms receive heightened feedback concerning their physical



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appearance (De Vries et al., 2016). Social media platforms open doors for young individuals to receive continuous evaluations of their physical appearance in the form of comments and "likes" (De Vries et al., 2019). In contemporary society, a prominent transformation is the progressive convergence between the real and the virtual realms, a phenomenon primarily driven by the dynamics of social networking platforms (Floridi, 2015). These digital mediums, exemplified by platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others, serve as environments where individuals curate and mold their digital identities. In this context, users are meticulous in selecting and presenting facets of themselves, often portraying an idealized version of themselves.

The virtual interactions facilitated by these platforms enable individuals to engage with others, share multimedia content, and create a digital presence that can exist independently of their physical experiences. Furthermore, individuals frequently engage in social comparisons with the content they encounter on social networks, which often features meticulously edited and filtered imagery. These comparisons can give rise to unrealistic beauty standards and engender concerns regarding one's body image.

Moreover, the feedback and validation received through social networks wield a substantial influence on an individual's self-esteem and self-worth. The reception of likes, comments, and reactions from one's social network, which includes friends and followers, can either bolster or diminish one's self-perception.

Online communities, often characterized by shared interests, ideologies, or lifestyles, can substantially contribute to the construction of an individual's identity, values, and beliefs. In some cases, these online communities can exert a more pronounced influence than one's physical social circles.

These dynamics can significantly impact self-perception, potentially leading to body dissatisfaction and a negative self-image. The continuous exposure to seemingly perfect lives and experiences portrayed on social media can foster feelings of inadequacy and envy, thereby affecting an individual's self-esteem and overall well-being. Furthermore, the pursuit of online validation in the form of likes and positive comments can instigate a dependence on external validation, linking one's sense of self-worth to online approval.

A critical aspect of social networks is their interactivity, which empowers users to actively engage in content creation and curation. This interactivity enables individuals to play an active role in shaping their online presentation and self-perception.

These dynamics raise substantive concerns, particularly regarding younger users. Adolescents and young adults are notably susceptible to the influence of social media on self-perception, given that they are in a pivotal phase of identity development and are more susceptible to the beauty standards and ideals projected via social media.

Social networks play an instrumental role in the dissolution of the boundary between reality and virtuality. They serve as platforms for the construction of digital identities and exert a substantial influence on self-perception, including its impact on self-esteem and self-worth. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is indispensable for addressing potential challenges that emerge from the influence of social media on self-perception, especially among younger users.

Despite the extensive body of literature exploring the impact of social media on adolescents' body image, limited attention has been given to the youngest age group. Preadolescence is regarded as a vulnerable period that amplifies the risk of various issues, such as eating disorders, social anxiety, and depression (Khan & Avan, 2020).

The formation of preteens' body image commences during this developmental stage, and the constant comparisons with the beauty ideals promoted by social media may significantly influence their body satisfaction. Even though many platforms have set age restrictions, preadolescents often manage to access social networks. In this context, implementing educational initiatives centred around fostering positive body image and promoting the safe use of social media may offer a potential solution.

2. Materials and Methods

A group of 137 preadolescents, aged between 10 and 14 (comprising 48,9% males and 51,1% females, with an average age of 12 years old), participated in this study. They completed an anonymous self-administered questionnaire that aimed to investigate several aspects, including their use of social networks (types of platforms used, the average daily time spent on social media, addiction to social networks), as well as their level of body satisfaction.

Participants reported the amount of time they spent on each social network per day, ranging from 15 minutes to over 4 hours. To calculate the total time spent online, researchers derived an average based on participants' responses regarding their daily usage time and the number of social networks they used.

The degree of addiction to social networks was assessed using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) (Andreassen et al., 2017), a six-item self-report scale. Respondents rated their behaviors on a 5-point scale, ranging from 0 (very rarely) to 5 (very often).

Lastly, participants' body dissatisfaction was evaluated using the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4-Revised (SATAQ-4R) (Stefanile et al., 2019). This questionnaire consists of 31 items for females and 28 items for males, all rated on a 5-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 1 (definitely disagree) to 5 (definitely agree). The questionnaire is divided into two main sections: Internalization and Pressures. The Internalization section encompasses questions related to perceptions of thinness, body fat, muscularity, and overall attractiveness. The Pressures section explores the influence of family, peers, significant others, and media on body image. Mean scores were calculated for each section to analyze the participants' responses.

3. Results

3.1. Use of social media

Among the respondents, 86.4% (n=118, with a mean age of 12 years old) indicated their use of social networks. This figure rose to 97.5% for messaging apps (n=133). The most utilized platforms included WhatsApp (89%), YouTube (78%), TikTok (67%), and Instagram (67%). On average, respondents utilized approximately 5.72 social networks (SD 3.16), spending an average of 2.25 hours daily (SD 0.68) on

each social network. Notably, boys reported a higher mean daily usage time (mean 2.37; SD 1.32) compared to girls (mean 2.13; SD 1.25).

3.2. Descriptive statistics of BSMAS and SATAQ-4R

BSMAS and SATAQ-4R descriptive statistics for the entire sample and both gender groups are shown in Table I and II. The BSMAS score ranges from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 36, with 19 being the cutoff value; scores beyond this threshold identify the respondent as tending toward dependent use of social networks. In the overall sample the BSMAS item scores ranged from 6 to 27. In the female group, the lowest recorded score was 6, and the highest was 24. In the male group, lowest recorded score was 6, and the highest was 27.

The SATAQ-4R score is computed by averaging scores across its different sections. A score approaching 5 signifies a higher degree of body dissatisfaction. The range of means for the SATAQ-4R, in the female group ranged from 1.70 to 3.89, in the male group ranged from 1.65 to 3.80. In the female group, media pressure score (3.23) is higher compared with the influence of family (2.30), peers (1.87) and significant others (1.88).

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics of the BSMAS.

Sample	Item	Mean (SD)
Total (n=137)	1	2.38 (1.38)
	2	2.24 (1.28)
	3	2.57 (1.40)
	4	2.08 (1.47)
	5	1.97 (1.32)
	6	1.68 (1.00)
Female (n=69)	1	2.25 (1.37)
	2	1.91 (1.30)
	3	2.39 (1.43)
	4	1.99 (1.58)
	5	2.00 (1.38)
	6	1.72 (0.98)
Male (n=68)	1	2.13 (1.42)
	2	1.81 (1.25)
	3	2.21 (1.37)
	4	1.69 (1.30)
	5	1.60 (1.27)
	6	1.81 (1.05)

TABLE 2. Descriptive statistics of the SATAQ-4R

		Mean (SD) Female	Mean (SD) Male
	Thin/Low Body Fat	3.70 (1.31)	2.40 (1.12)
Internalization	Muscular	1.70 (1.20)	3.26 (1.16)
	General attractiveness	3.89 (1.35)	3.80 (1.21)
Pressures	Family	2.30 (1.23)	2.99 (1.28)
	Peers	1.87 (1.09)	1.95 (1.14)
	Significant Others	1.88 (1.17)	1.65 (1.27)
	Media	3.23 (1.40)	2.90 (1.22)

3.3. Correlation between SATAQ 4-R, Time per day and BSMAS

Data screening suggested that data were normally distributed. Correlational analysis between body image (SATAQ-4R), amount of time spent on social networks and addiction to social media (BSMAS) are shown in Table 3. Body image showed a positive correlation with time spent on social media ($r=0,481$) and addiction to social network ($r=0,462$). Furthermore, there is also a positive correlation between time spent on platforms and addiction to social media ($r=0,374$).

TABLE 3. Correlation table SATAQ-4R-Time per day- BSMAS

		SATAQ-4R	TIME PER DAY	BSMAS
SATAQ-4R	Pearson's Correlation	1	,481**	,462**
	p value		<,001	<,001
	N	137	137	137
TIME PER DAY	Pearson's Correlation	,481**	1	,374**
	p value	<,001		<,001
	N	137	137	137
BSMAS	Pearson's Correlation	,462**	,374**	1
	p value	<,001	<,001	
	N	137	137	137
		(a)	(b)	

4. Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social media usage and individuals' body satisfaction. Our hypothesis, which posited that increased time spent on social media would negatively affect body satisfaction, was validated. Furthermore, we observed that a higher score on a social network addiction scale correlated with a worsened body image, regardless of the time spent online. These findings indicate that social networks exert a comparable impact on body image for both males and females.

Significantly, our research suggests that social media use detrimentally affects body satisfaction during preadolescence. According to SATAQ-4R questionnaire results, media influence on females' body image outweighs that of family, peers, and significant others. It is important to highlight that many existing studies primarily concentrate on female cohorts, while research involving male cohorts remains relatively scarce. This gender disparity indicates a potential bias in the current body of literature and underscores the necessity for more inclusive research that encompasses diverse gender perspectives. Recognizing the impact of social media on body image across both genders is crucial, as it may uncover distinct vulnerabilities and coping strategies. Moreover, as we deepen our understanding of body image and its association with social media, it is essential to acknowledge and incorporate individuals who do not adhere to traditional gender norms of male and female. The experiences and

obstacles encountered by individuals who identify beyond these conventional gender binaries are also pivotal in comprehending how social media influences perceptions of body image. Overlooking this aspect would be a significant oversight, as it is vital to gain insights into the varied and nuanced ways in which social media can affect body image perceptions for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

This study carries substantial practical implications, foremost among them being the imperative to implement educational initiatives aimed at fostering positive body image and responsible social media use. Schools are well-suited to promote health-positive behaviors, including body image development, while media literacy programs can counter unrealistic body portrayals in media (Yager et al., 2013). Long-term media education focused on critical thinking, discourse, active involvement, and essential media competence concepts has shown effectiveness in addressing body dissatisfaction (Conard, 2019).

Intervention strategies should target key factors influencing body image, particularly emotions related to one's body (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Recent research indicates that children with a positive body image exhibit higher interpersonal intelligence, greater adaptability, and improved mood (Amado Alonso et al., 2020). A collaborative approach involving schools, educators, and parents is paramount. Despite potential challenges, schools can play a pivotal role in both media education and the promotion of positive body image. Physical education, when appropriately tailored, can serve as a platform to explore individuals' unique attributes. Furthermore, education should commence at home, with parents providing positive and supportive treatment to their children, emphasizing both appearance and personal qualities, and setting a positive example of body shape and fitness.

5. Conclusions

The current study revealed that the time spent online is linked to body dissatisfaction and addiction to social media. Preadolescents use social networks regardless the age restrictions settled by social media platforms. Social media companies must consider this aspect and develop strategies that limit exposure risks for young people. A new research area to explore might be related to the content and activities on social networks that most afflict the body image of preteens. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop interventions to promote positive body image in young people with the support of educators and parents.

The limitations of this study can be stated as follows. The sample analyzed were small, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Further, we were unable to model all the factors that lead to body image dissatisfaction. Measurements for social network use were self-reported and time spent on the platform might be underestimated or overestimated.

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