

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM
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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to examine how social media affects NIFT students' perspectives on body image and self-esteem. In the past few years, social media has increased quickly and is now utilized on a daily basis by everyone, particularly teens and young adults. Social media has many advantages, such as making communication between people effortless, but it also has disadvantages and a bad impact on people. The abundance of social media usage demonstrates its important role in supplying information, entertainment, social, and educational needs. The expansion of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok has exposed young adults to a controlled and idealized view of fulfilment, fitness, and appearance. The study looks at the relationship between social media usage patterns and self-esteem through surveys and interviews with college students. It focusses how regular interaction with unrealistic appearance expectations can result in body dissatisfaction, unfavourable self-comparisons, and low self-esteem. The findings highlight the necessity of psychological assistance and media literacy programs in order to assist students in navigating the complexities of online image culture and maintaining positive self-perceptions.

KeywordsBody image, self-esteem, social media influence, female gender *biased*.**1. INTRODUCTION:**

The internet has become an inventive way of communication for families and individuals due to recent advancements in technology. Over the past decade, social media networks have contributed to an online trend that has expanded in popularity. Some of the benefits of social media are that social media enables young adults to establish online identities, communicate, and build social networks, offering crucial support to those experiencing exclusion, disabilities, or chronic illnesses. But it has disadvantages too such that social media has made students more sensitive to frequent mood swings. Many students push themselves to share lovely pictures of themselves and friends since they are self-conscious about their appearance.

Self-esteem is a subjective sense of personal worth, influencing motivation, mental well-being, and quality of life. A healthy self-esteem balances high and low levels, ensuring motivation and mental well-being. Self-esteem comprises self-confidence, security, identity, belonging, and competence, with terms like self-worth, self-regard, and self-respect often used interchangeably. Body image encompasses beliefs, feelings, and experiences about one's appearance, height, weight, and shape, with positive body image promoting satisfaction and acceptance, and negative body image causing dissatisfaction. Body image encompasses beliefs, feelings, and experiences about one's appearance, height, weight, and shape, with positive body image promoting satisfaction and acceptance, and negative body image causing dissatisfaction.

Social media platforms have significantly influenced individuals' perceptions of themselves and others, particularly in terms of appearance and lifestyle, by presenting idealized beauty and fitness standards, often resulting in unrealistic expectations. College students' online images, often comparing to influencers and celebrities, can lead to dissatisfaction with their bodies, as they seek social acceptance and self-concepts. Heavy social media usage is linked to negative self-perception, with students experiencing feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem, leading to unhealthy behaviours like excessive dieting and cosmetic procedures. Heavy social media usage is linked to negative self-perception, with students experiencing feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem, leading to unhealthy behaviours like excessive dieting and cosmetic procedures.

1.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To identify a role of social media on body image on body image perception of students.
- To assess college students' awareness level of social media's influence on their self-esteem.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT:

The study aims to explore the impact of social media consumption on college students' mental health, specifically body image and self-esteem. In order to discover viable solutions and preventive strategies to address these concerns, it seeks to determine the frequency, type, and engagement patterns that contribute to these issues.

1.3. DEFINITIONS:

- Social media – It refers to digital technology that facilitates the exchange of ideas and information via online communities and networks, including text and images.
- Body image - The sentiments and ideas you have about your body make up your body image. A person's experiences with their body can range from happy to bad, and they may experience positive, negative, or a combination of both at different times.
- Self-esteem - Self-esteem refers to an individual's perception of their worth in the world, impacting aspects like self-confidence, relationships, motivation, and emotional or mental well-being.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

In recent years, social media has become a central part of young adults' lives, particularly college students. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook showcase idealized images of beauty and success, which can strongly influence perceptions of body image and self-esteem. (Boursier V et. al., 2020) conducted a study on today's world, using social media has become a common everyday activity, particularly among teenagers who frequently share graphic images. One of the most common social media activities among teenagers is sharing selfies to gain approval from their peers, which can help boost how they feel they are perceived by others.

However, constantly seeing visual content on social media can lead to comparisons with others and concerns about appearance. This means that people who are dissatisfied with their looks might use social media to control how they present themselves online, which can have negative effects on their social media habits and mental well-being. The study assessed the understudied predicted effects of social anxiety and selfie expectations on problematic social media use as well as any potential gender differences between boys and girls. The findings indicated that boys' concerns about their appearance and their belief that taking selfies will boost their confidence were both indicators of their problematic usage of social media. Contrarily, even though girls had a higher level of social anxiety, it had no effect on how they used social media.

(Tiggemann and Slater, 2014) found that social media use among young women increases body dissatisfaction. The study suggests that this dissatisfaction arises primarily from upward social comparisons, where individuals compare themselves with idealized figures online. Social media often presents highly edited and curated images, creating unrealistic beauty standards that affect users' perceptions of their own bodies. College students, particularly women, are susceptible to negative body image as they are constantly exposed to images that promote thinness, flawless skin, and fitness as ideals.

(Research by Fardouly et al., 2015) echoed similar findings, stating that frequent exposure to social media led to more social comparisons, contributing to poor body image and, in some cases, disordered eating behaviours. Female students are particularly vulnerable, as they often compare themselves to the "perfect" bodies and lives displayed on platforms like Instagram. The pressure to conform to these beauty standards can lead to heightened feelings of inadequacy.

Male college students also experience negative body image, although their pressures are slightly different. Men are often encouraged to pursue muscularity and fitness. (Leit et al., 2002) noted that the constant portrayal of muscular and fit male bodies on social media has led to dissatisfaction among male students, who feel the need to adhere to these standards.

Self-esteem, defined as one's overall sense of self-worth, is also influenced by social media use. The desire for validation through likes, shares, and comments can affect how students feel about themselves. (Valkenburg et al., 2017) observed that while social media interaction might boost self-esteem temporarily when students receive positive feedback, it can significantly lower self-esteem when students receive little to no online engagement. The constant need for approval often makes students feel that their worth is tied to how others perceive them online.

Additionally, (Perloff, R.M, 2014) discusses how social media encourages a cycle of comparison and self-evaluation, which negatively impacts self-esteem over time. College students, already in a critical phase of identity formation, are particularly susceptible to these pressures. The study found that excessive engagement with social media leads to lower self-esteem, as students continually compare themselves with their peers, influencers, and celebrities who portray seemingly perfect lives.

Cultural and gender norms further shape how social media impacts body image and self-esteem. Research by (Grabe et al., 2008) emphasizes that women are more prone to body image issues due to societal expectations of thinness. Social media magnifies this pressure, as female students are more frequently exposed to content promoting unattainable beauty standards. Male students, while also affected, tend to focus on fitness and muscularity ideals. Cultural variations also play a role, as different regions have diverse beauty standards that influence how students perceive themselves in comparison to online content.

Despite the negative impacts, social media has also given rise to body positivity movements that challenge traditional beauty norms. The body positivity movement encourages individuals to embrace diverse body types and reject societal beauty standards. (Puhl et al., 2020) suggest that engagement with body-positive content can help improve body image and self-esteem among students, as it promotes self-acceptance and discourages harmful comparisons. These movements offer a promising alternative to the often toxic beauty ideals promoted by mainstream social media content.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

3.1. Research Approach

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) data.

3.2. Data Collection

Primary Data: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three professors, one psychiatrist and four students. A structured questionnaire was designed for students. It included Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions.

Secondary Data: The existing research papers based on our topic of study and information given online were examined to place in context.

3.3. Sample Size Determination

Yamane's formula was used to calculate the sample size, ensuring statistical significance. A confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% were maintained. Population is 140 approximately and sample size is 103.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (mean) was used to summarize the data. Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to measure relationships between variables.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Responses from professor interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

4. DATA ANALYSIS:**4.1. Age**

1. Age									
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Bootstrap for Percent ^a			
						Bias	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
								Lower	Upper
Valid	17-21	51	54.3	54.3	54.3	.1	5.3	43.6	64.9
	22-25	39	41.5	41.5	95.7	-.1	5.3	30.9	52.1
	26 above	4	4.3	4.3	100.0	.0	2.0	1.1	8.5
	Total	94	100.0	100.0		.0	.0	100.0	100.0

(Table 1- Age wise population)

In the above table, most participants (54.3%) are aged 17–21. 41.5% fall in the 22–25 age range. Only 4.3% are 26 years and above.

4.2. Gender

2. Gender									
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Bootstrap for Percent ^a			
						Bias	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
								Lower	Upper
Valid	Male	23	24.5	24.5	24.5	.6	4.5	17.0	34.0
	Female	71	75.5	75.5	100.0	-.6	4.5	66.0	83.0
	Total	94	100.0	100.0		.0	.0	100.0	100.0

(Table2- Gender wise population)

In the above table, 23 participants (24.5%) are male and 71 participants (75.5%) are female.

4.3. Course of study

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Foundation Program	27	28.7	28.7	28.7
	Bachelors in Textile Design	27	28.7	28.7	57.4
	Masters in Fashion Management	40	42.6	42.6	100.0
	Total	94	100.0	100.0	

(Table 3- Course wise population)

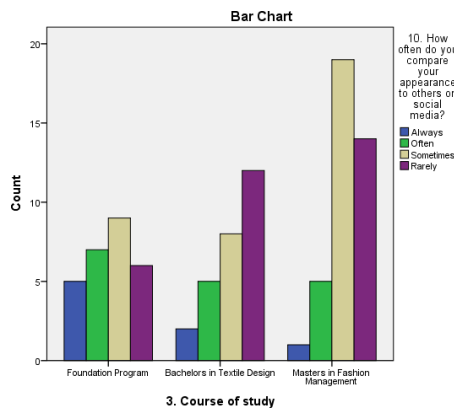
In the above table, 27 students (28.7%) are in the Foundation Program. 27 students (28.7%) are pursuing a Bachelor's in Textile Design. 40 students (42.6%) are enrolled in a Master's in Fashion Management. The cumulative percentages show the proportion of students in each course, summing to 100%.

4.4. Course wise study on the appearance to others on social media

Crosstab						
		10. How often do you compare your appearance to others on social media?				Total
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	
3. Course of study	Foundation Program	5	7	9	6	27
	Bachelors in Textile Design	2	5	8	12	27
	Masters in Fashion Management	1	5	19	14	39
Total		8	17	36	32	93

(Table 4 - Course wise study on the appearance to others on social media)

In the table 4, from all the respondents,38.7% sometimes compare their appearance to others on social media. 33.3% students of Foundation Program sometimes compare their appearance while 29.6% students of Bachelor’s in Textile Design sometimes compare, and 44.4% students rarely compare. And 48.7% students of Master’s in Fashion Management sometimes compare their appearance. This shows that the course of study moderately influences how often participants compare their appearance, with Master's students more likely to engage in this behavior. (Graph 1)



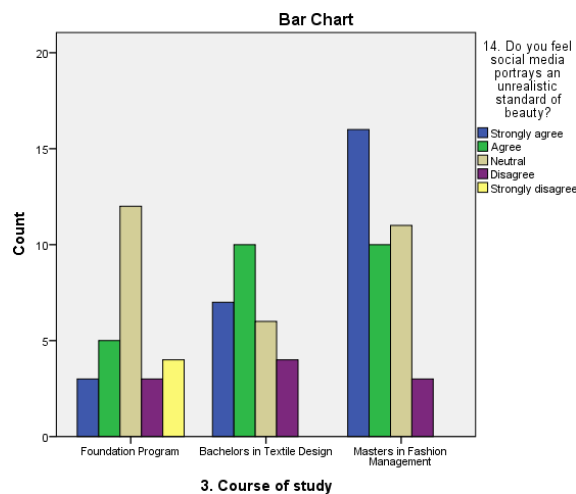
(Graph 1 - Course wise study on the appearance to others on social media)

4.5. Course wise study on social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty

		14. Do you feel social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty?					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
3. Course of study	Foundation Program	3	5	12	3	4	27
	Bachelors in Textile Design	7	10	6	4	0	27
	Masters in Fashion Management	16	10	11	3	0	40
Total	26	25	29	10	4	94	

(Table 5 - Course wise study on social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty)

From the respondents in Table 5, 30.9% of students are neutral that they feel social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty. 11.1% of students in the Foundation Program strongly agree that social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty, 18.5% agree, 44.4% feel neutral, 11.1% disagree, and 14.8% strongly disagree. Among Bachelor’s in Textile Design students, 25.9% strongly agree, 37.0% agree, 22.2% feel neutral, and 14.8% disagree, with no students strongly disagreeing. For Master’s in Fashion Management students, 40.0% strongly agree, 25.0% agree, 27.5% feel neutral, and 7.5% disagree, with no students strongly disagreeing. This indicates that Master’s students are more likely to strongly agree, while those in the Foundation Program tend to have a neutral stance.



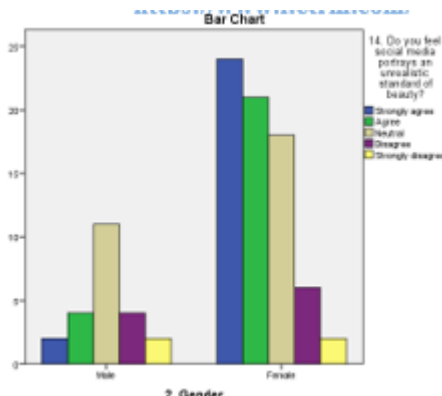
(Graph 2 - Course wise study on social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty)

4.6. Gender wise study on social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty

		14. Do you feel social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty?					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
2. Gender	Male	2	4	11	4	2	23
	Female	24	21	18	6	2	71
Total		26	25	29	10	4	94

(Table 6 - Gender wise study on social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty)

In the table 6, from the respondents, 30.9% are neutral that they feel social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty. **47.8% of males** are neutral about social media portraying unrealistic beauty standards, while **17.4% agree**. Among females, **33.8% strongly agree**, and **29.6% agree**. This shows that the Females are significantly more likely than males to strongly agree with this perception.



(Graph 3 –

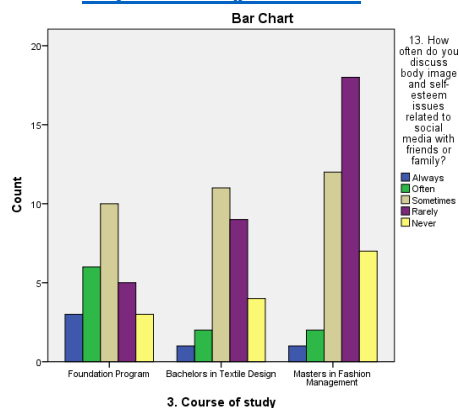
Gender wise study on social media portrays an unrealistic standard of beauty)

4.7. Course wise study on body image and self-esteem issues related to social media with friends or family

		13. How often do you discuss body image and self-esteem issues related to social media with friends or family?					Total
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
3. Course of study	Foundation Program	3	6	10	5	3	27
	Bachelors in Textile Design	1	2	11	9	4	27
	Masters in Fashion Management	1	2	12	18	7	40
Total		5	10	33	32	14	94

(Table 7 - Course wise study on body image and self-esteem issues related to social media with friends or family)

From the respondents in Table 7, 35.1% sometimes discuss body image and self-esteem issues with friends or family. **37.0% of Foundation Program students** sometimes discuss body image and self-esteem issues, while **18.5% never discuss**. Among **Textile Design students**, **40.7% sometimes discuss**, and **14.8% never discuss**. For **Fashion Management students**, **30.0% sometimes discuss**, while **17.5% never discuss**. This shows that Discussions about social media’s impact on body image are relatively consistent across different courses. (Graph 3.13)



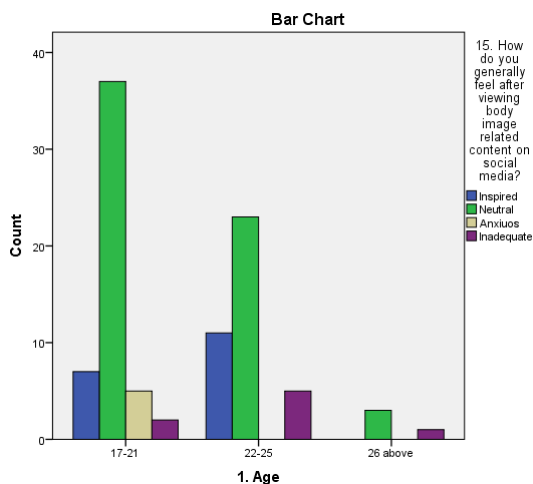
(Graph 4 - Course wise study on body image and self-esteem issues related to social media with friends or family)

4.8. Age wise study with ref to body image related content on social media

		15. How do you generally feel after viewing body image related content on social media?				Total
		Inspired	Neutral	Anxious	Inadequate	
1. Age	17-21	7	37	5	2	51
	22-25	11	23	0	5	39
	26 above	0	3	0	1	4
Total		18	63	5	8	94

(Table 8 - Age wise study with ref to body image related content on social media)

From the respondents in Table 8, 72.5% of participants aged 17-21 feel neutral about viewing body image-related content, while 13.7% feel inspired. In the 22-25 age group, 59.0% feel neutral, and 28.2% feel inspired—the highest percentage of inspiration among all age groups. For those aged 26 and above, 75.0% are neutral, with no participants feeling inspired. This suggests that younger individuals (17-21) are more likely to have neutral responses, while those aged 22-25 are more inclined to feel inspired by such content. (Graph 1.15)



(Graph5 - Age wise study with ref to body image related content on social media)

5. FINDINGS:

- 38.7% of participants reported "sometimes" comparing their appearance to others on social media.
- 30.9% of participants were neutral about social media portraying unrealistic beauty standards.
- Females are significantly more likely than males to perceive social media as portraying unrealistic beauty standards, with 63.4%.
- Discussions about social media's impact on body image and self-esteem are relatively consistent across all courses, with around 30–40% of students "sometimes" engaging in such discussions.
- Emotional responses to body image-related content on social media show minimal variation across age groups, with most participants feeling neutral (67.0% overall), a small correlation (Pearson 0.036, $p=0.730$) between age and emotional response, and younger age groups reporting slightly more inspiration while older participants report more inadequacy.

5.1. Faculties interview:

Professor Rahul Khushwaha, Professor Vidhu Sekhar, Professor Shubham Kaushal and Dr. Sneha Vadher highlight the negative impact of social media on students' mental health and body image. Professor Rahul Kushwaha notes that while social media has both positive and negative effects, it often promotes unrealistic body standards, leading to dissatisfaction and self-esteem issues. He calls for better education and support in schools to address these problems. Professor Vidhu Sekhar points out that students are aware of social media's unrealistic portrayals but often do not discuss the mental health effects. He emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and listening to experienced voices over influencers, as extreme behaviours like fad diets can harm students. Dr. Sneha focuses on how comparisons with idealized images on social media lower students' confidence and increase body dissatisfaction. She suggests promoting mental health awareness on social media and making professional help easily accessible on campuses. Professor Shubham highlights the significant role of social media in students' lives, offering information but also having negative impacts, such as cybercrimes and self-comparison. Students face challenges in managing these issues due to a lack of tools and awareness. Colleges can help by raising awareness about the correct and incorrect uses of social media, and implementing proper guidelines for its usage is essential to mitigate its negative effects. Together, they emphasize the need for proactive education, awareness, and support to combat the negative effects of social media.

5.2. Students' interview:

Ryan Pandya, Anurag Sharma, Mukti Patel, and Anushka Giral share their perspectives on how social media impacts body image and self-esteem. Ryan, inspired by fashion influencers, gains confidence but acknowledges the contradiction in body positivity content and advocates for diverse representation on Instagram. Anurag finds social media boosts his productivity and confidence through diet-focused content but highlights the importance of mindset, inclusivity, and positive energy to counter unrealistic standards. Mukti views fitness and beauty content but emphasizes cultural traditions and realistic accounts to improve mental well-being. Anushka, a textile design student, focuses on following positive influencers who enhance her self-esteem and suggests recognizing authentic content while prioritizing self-awareness and constructive feedback. Collectively, they stress balancing social media use with honest feedback, self-confidence and mindful consumption to navigate its effects.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The study's sample size is relatively small, which may limit the statistical power and the relevance of the findings to larger populations. Another limitation of this study is the overrepresentation of female participants compared to males. This imbalanced sample may introduce gender-related biases in the findings, potentially limiting the relevance of the results to male populations. Future research should aim to include a more balanced gender distribution to ensure broader applicability of the conclusions.

7. SUMMARY:

This study investigates the influence of social media on body image and self-esteem among college students, particularly at NIFT. Social media's rapid expansion has brought benefits such as improved communication and social support but also drawbacks like heightened sensitivity to appearance-related pressures. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok often promote idealized beauty and fitness standards, which contribute to body dissatisfaction and lowered self-esteem through unfavorable social comparisons.

The research identifies a correlation between heavy social media use and negative self-perceptions, manifesting in behaviors such as excessive dieting or cosmetic procedures. Both male and female students are affected, though in different ways: women often face pressure to meet unattainable beauty standards, while men are encouraged to pursue muscularity. Cultural and gender norms further shape these impacts.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, using surveys and interviews to assess social media's role in shaping body image and self-esteem. Key findings highlight the need for media literacy programs and psychological support to help students navigate online image culture. Despite its challenges, social media also supports body positivity movements, which promote self-acceptance and challenge harmful beauty norms. Quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS, while qualitative insights were thematically analyzed, offering a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The study explores the impact of social media on body image and self-esteem among students from various courses of study. It finds that most participants are aged 17-21, with a majority being female. The students' course of study varies, with significant representation from the Foundation Program, Bachelors in Textile Design, and Masters in Fashion Management. A large portion of students "sometimes" compare their appearance to others on social media, with Master's students being more likely to engage in this behavior. When it comes to perceptions of unrealistic beauty standards on social media, females are more likely than males to strongly agree. Discussions about body image and social media's impact on self-esteem are relatively consistent across all courses, with many students "sometimes" discussing these issues with friends or family. The emotional responses to body image-related content on social media show that most students feel neutral, with younger students being slightly more likely to feel inspired. Interviews with professors and students highlight concerns about the negative effects of social media on mental health and body image, stressing the need for education, critical thinking, and mental health support. However, the study's small sample size and gender imbalance limit the broader applicability of its findings. Future research should aim for more balanced representation to improve the generalizability of the conclusions.

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