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IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER EXPOSURE ON SOCIAL APPEARANCE ANXIETY, BODY IMAGE SATISFACTION, AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The current study investigated the associations among social media influencer exposure, social appearance anxiety, body image satisfaction, and life satisfaction in college and university students. A correlational research design was adopted, and data were gathered through a survey approach. The sample comprised 200 young adults, with 46 males and 154 females, aged 16 to 30 years, recruited from colleges and universities. The primary aim of the research was to evaluate the relationships among social media influencer exposure, social appearance anxiety, body image satisfaction, and life satisfaction. Data collection relied on the Social Media Influencer Rating Scale, the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, the Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale, and the Life Satisfaction Rating Scale. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test the relationships among the study variables. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between social media influencer exposure and social appearance anxiety among college and university students. In addition, social media influencer exposure was significantly and negatively associated with both life satisfaction and body image satisfaction. Social appearance anxiety was also significantly and negatively related to life satisfaction and body image satisfaction. Moreover, body image satisfaction demonstrated a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction. Overall, these findings imply that greater exposure to social media influencers may be linked to higher social appearance anxiety, lower body image satisfaction, and decreased life satisfaction among students.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a key component of contemporary life, influencing how individuals communicate, interact, and view themselves. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube create opportunities for connection, entertainment, learning, and the exchange of

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information. However, excessive use may be related to social comparison, cyberbullying, concerns about privacy, and adverse mental-health outcomes (Kaplan, 2010; Keles et al., 2020).

Young adults are especially likely to encounter idealized and digitally edited images of physical appearance. Frequent exposure to unrealistic beauty standards can widen the discrepancy between actual and desired appearance, which may promote body dissatisfaction, negative self-perceptions, and harmful behaviors such as overly strict dieting or excessive exercise (Chan et al., 2020).

Body image refers to an individual's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors regarding physical appearance. Social media may shape body image by emphasizing appearance-based standards and facilitating social comparison. In turn, body dissatisfaction may undermine self-esteem. Self-esteem denotes a person's general sense of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965).

Social appearance anxiety describes the fear of negative assessment rooted in physical appearance (Hart et al., 2008). Because social media is heavily centered on images, it may intensify appearance comparison and evaluation, leading to social unease, avoidance behaviors, and diminished well-being.

Overall, although social media can provide social connection, health-related information, and body-positivity content, unrealistic appearance standards may contribute to body dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and increased social appearance anxiety. Encouraging media literacy and promoting realistic portrayals may support young adults in forming healthier body perceptions and improving psychological well-being.

Literature review

Adolescence and young adulthood are important developmental periods when appearance and social acceptance become increasingly significant. Body image involves perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to appearance and is influenced by family, peers, social relationships, and media, increasing vulnerability to body dissatisfaction (Rohde et al., 2019).

Body image is closely linked to self-esteem and psychological well-being. Positive appearance perceptions are generally associated with higher self-esteem, while negative body image may contribute to psychological distress, particularly among adolescent girls (Weber & Freund, 2016).

Social appearance anxiety refers to fear of negative evaluation based on physical appearance. It is associated with social anxiety, negative body image, and concerns about attractiveness (Hart et al., 2008). Social comparison, idealized appearance standards, body shame, low self-esteem, and social media use may further increase appearance anxiety among adolescents (*Psychological Factors Influencing Appearance Anxiety Among Adolescents*, 2025).

Overall, body image, self-esteem, and social appearance anxiety are interconnected and may influence psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Positive body image and self-acceptance may protect against these negative outcomes.

Method

Participants

In this study, a sample of N=200 participants, including both males and females, was selected. The participants consisted of university students enrolled in BS programs as well as college students. Data were collected through an online survey administered using Google Forms.

Inclusive Criteria

In this study, 200 university students, both male and female, with ages ranging from 16 to 30 years were included

Exclusion criteria

Participants younger than 16 years or older than 30 years were excluded. Additionally, the study

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does not include students from private or government schools.

Instruments

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale

It is developed by Trevor A.et al, in 2008. It consists of 16 items and is 5-point Likert scale from 1 = not at all satisfied; 2 = Slightly satisfied; 3 = slightly satisfied; 4 = very satisfied; 5 = extremely satisfied. Reliability of this scale reported 0.85

Social Media Influencer Scale

It is developed by Leary, M. R. et al. (2013). It consists of 15 items and is 7-point Likert scale anchored from SD-SA from 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Neutral; 5 = Slightly Agree; 6 = Agree; 7 = Strongly Agree. Reliability of this scale reported 0.70.

Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale

It is developed by Cash, Thomas F., It consists of 18 items and is 5-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree. Reliability is reported 0.70.

Satisfaction with Life Rating Scale

It is developed by Ed Diener. It consists of 5 items and is 7-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 5 =Slightly Agree; 6 = Agree; 7= Strongly Agree. Its reliability is reported 0.87.

The current study investigated the association between exposure to social media influencers, social appearance anxiety, body image satisfaction, and life satisfaction among college and university students. A correlational research design was employed, and data were gathered through the survey method. The study sample included 200 young adults, comprising 46 males and 154 females, aged 16 to 30 years, recruited from colleges and universities. The primary aim was to assess the relationship among exposure to social media influencers, social appearance anxiety, body image satisfaction, and life satisfaction. Data were collected with the Social Media Influencer Rating Scale, the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, the Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale, and the Life Satisfaction Rating Scale. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to evaluate the relationships among the study variables. The results indicated a significant positive association between exposure to social media influencers and social appearance anxiety among college and university students. In addition, exposure to social media influencers was significantly and negatively related to both life satisfaction and body image satisfaction. Social appearance anxiety also showed significant negative associations with life satisfaction and body image satisfaction. Moreover, body image satisfaction demonstrated a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction. Overall, these findings imply that greater exposure to social media influencers may be linked to higher social appearance anxiety, lower body image satisfaction, and diminished life satisfaction among students.

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Results

Table 1

Demographics Properties of the Participants

Frequencies and percentages of demographic variables of Study (N = 200)

Variables	Category	*f*	%
Gender			
	Boys	46	23
	Girls	154	77
Education			
	College	27	13.5
	University	173	86.5
Age			
	Below 20	97	48.5
	Above 20	103	51.5

Note: Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. Most participants were girls (77%), while boys constituted 23% of the sample. The majority of respondents were university students (86.5%), whereas 13.5% were college students. Regarding age, 48.5% of participants were below 20 years, and 51.5% were above 20 years.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients for Study Variables(N=200)

				Range			
Variable	*k*	*α*	*M (SD)*	Potential	Actual	Skew	Kurt
DAAS	200	.857	37.02(12.92)	16-80	16.00-80.00	.793	.371
BISRS	200	.717	51.36(7.931)	18-90	18.00-90.00	.289	5.36
SMIS	200	.812	64.26(15.41)	15-110	15.00-110.0	.018	1.401
LSRS	200	.787	22.93(6.06)	5-35	5.00-35.0	.192	-.085

Note. SAAS=Social Appearance Anxiety Scale; BISRS= Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale; SMIS=Social Media Influencer Scale; LSRS=Life Satisfaction Rating Scale

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The internal consistency reliability of the study variables was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All scales demonstrated acceptable to good reliability.The Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (DAAS) showed good internal consistency, α = .86. The Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale (BISRS) demonstrated acceptable reliability, α = .72. The Social Media Influencer Scale (SMIS) showed good reliability, α = .81, while the Life Satisfaction Rating Scale (LSRS) also demonstrated acceptable reliability, α = .79Overall, all measures used in the study showed acceptable to good internal consistency, ranging from α = .72 to α = .86, indicating that the scales were reliable for use in the present sample.

Table 3 Mean, Standard Deviations and t-values along gender on Variables (N=200)

	Male (n=46)	Female (n=154)			95% CI		
Variables	M(SD)	M(SD)	t(198)	P	LL	UL	Cohen's d
SAAS	39.0(12.07)	36.4(13.15	1.1(198)	.237	-1.561	5.648	0.0420
BISRS	51.1(7.90)	51.4(7.96)	-.16(198)	.869	-2.626	2.414	-0.0046
SMIS	61.3(17.8)	65.1(14.5)	-1.46(198)	.144	-4.286	1.305	-0.0066
LSRS	23.1(6.74)	22.8(5.87)	.331(198)	.741	-1.891	2.353	0.0511

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; *LL* = Lower Limit; *UL* = Upper Limit.

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to examine gender differences in study variables. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females in SAAS, BISRS, SMIS, or LSRS (all $p > .05$). Effect sizes were small across all variables (d = -0.04 to 0.24), suggesting negligible practical differences between genders.

Table 4 Correlation of study variables (N=200)

	Variables	1	2	3	4
1	SMI	--	.24**	-.65*	-.63*
2	SAA		--	-.33**	-.21**
3	BIS			--	.42**
4	LS				--

Note. ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05

Pearson product–moment correlation analysis revealed that social media intensity (SMI) was significantly positively associated with social appearance anxiety (SAA), $r(198) = .24$, $p < .01$. SMI was significantly negatively correlated with body image satisfaction (BIS), $r(198) = -.65$, $p < .05$, and life satisfaction (LS), $r(198) = -.63$, $p < .05$. In addition, SAA was negatively associated with BIS, $r(198) = -.33$, $p < .01$, and LS, $r(198) = -.21$, $p < .01$. BIS showed a significant positive

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correlation with LS, $r(198) = .42$, $p < .01$. Overall, higher social media intensity and social appearance anxiety were associated with poorer psychological outcomes, whereas greater body image satisfaction was linked with higher life satisfaction.

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the intricate web of social media influence and its psychological correlates specifically social appearance anxiety, body image, and overall life satisfaction among the student population. The findings provide a compelling look at how the "idealized" digital world translates into real-world psychological outcomes.

The findings of the present study supported Hypothesis 1, as social media influencer exposure (SMI) showed a significant positive relationship with social appearance anxiety (SAA) *($r = .239$, $p < .01$)*. This indicates that students who are more frequently exposed to social media influencers tend to experience higher levels of anxiety related to their physical appearance and social evaluation. The study of Jarrar et al. (2022) highlighted that social media creates constant comparison and competition regarding appearance, especially among young adults. Such comparisons contribute to appearance concerns and anxiety in social settings.

The findings of the present study supported Hypothesis 2, indicating a significant negative relationship between social media influencer exposure (SMI) and life satisfaction (LS) among college and university students *($r = -.63$, $p < .05$)*. This result suggests that students who are more frequently exposed to social media influencers tend to report lower levels of life satisfaction. Previous research by Crocker et al. (2004) and Noser & Zeigler-Hill (2014) suggested that when individuals base their self-worth on appearance and external validation, they are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. Social media influencers often reinforce appearance-based standards and material success, which may negatively shape students' self-evaluations and satisfaction with life.

The findings of the present study supported Hypothesis 3, revealing a significant negative relationship between social media influencer exposure (SMI) and body image satisfaction (BIS) among college and university students *($r = -.65$, $p < .05$)*. This result indicates that students who are more frequently exposed to social media influencers tend to report lower levels of satisfaction with their body image. Jiotsa et al. (2021) emphasized that body dissatisfaction develops through negative thoughts and feelings about one's appearance, which are strongly shaped by social media exposure. Since influencers often promote unrealistic beauty ideals through filters, editing, and curated content, students may internalize these standards and become increasingly critical of their own appearance.

The findings of the present study supported Hypothesis 4, indicating a significant negative relationship between social appearance anxiety (SAA) and life satisfaction (LS) among college and university students *($r = -.209$, $p < .01$)*. This result suggests that students who experience higher levels of anxiety regarding their physical appearance tend to report lower levels of satisfaction with their lives. Research of Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003; Grogan, 2016 has shown that individuals with greater appearance anxiety often experience lower self-esteem and poorer psychological well-being.

The findings of the present study supported Hypothesis 5, demonstrating a significant negative relationship between social appearance anxiety (SAA) and body image satisfaction (BIS) among college and university students *($r = -.33$, $p < .01$)*. This result indicates that students who experience higher levels of social appearance anxiety tend to report lower satisfaction with their body image. Hart et al. (2008) described social appearance anxiety as the fear of being negatively evaluated because of one's appearance. Similarly, Levinson and Rodebaugh (2011) found that social

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comparison, peer pressure, and cultural beauty standards significantly contribute to appearance anxiety and body dissatisfaction.

The findings of the present study supported Hypothesis 6, revealing a significant positive relationship between body image satisfaction (BIS) and life satisfaction (LS) among college and university students ($r = .422$, $p < .01$). This result indicates that students who are more satisfied with their body image tend to report higher levels of life satisfaction. The findings are supported by recent studies examining body image and well-being among young adults. The study titled *"Impact of Body Appreciation and Social Appearance Anxiety on Life Satisfaction among Young Adults"* (2023) found that body appreciation and positive body image were positively associated with life satisfaction

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