



SOCIAL MEDIA: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital technology has positioned social media as a central influence in adolescents' daily lives, significantly shaping their emotional well-being, self-esteem, and body image. As platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Snapchat continue to expand globally, adolescents increasingly engage in online self-presentation, peer interaction, and social comparison. This review synthesizes empirical findings from national and international studies examining the relationship between social media use and adolescents' emotional well-being, self-esteem, and body image. The literature indicates that social media plays a dual role. On one hand, it fosters social connection, emotional support, identity exploration, and opportunities for self-expression, contributing positively to psychological well-being when used mindfully and actively. On the other hand, excessive use, passive consumption, appearance-focused engagement, and upward social comparison are consistently associated with increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and heightened body dissatisfaction. Visual-centric platforms particularly intensify internalization of unrealistic beauty ideals, reinforcing gendered appearance pressures. The review highlights that the psychological impact of social media is not uniform but depends on usage patterns, individual vulnerabilities, cultural context, parental guidance, and media literacy. The findings underscore the need for balanced digital engagement, preventive interventions, and policy-level strategies aimed at promoting healthy online experiences while mitigating risks to adolescent mental health.

Keywords: Social media, Emotional wellbeing, Self Esteem, Body image

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital technology and the widespread access to the internet have significantly changed how people communicate, interact, and shape their social identities. One of the most influential developments of the digital era is the rise of social media platforms, which have become a central part of daily life, especially for teenagers. Platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok enable users to instantly create, share, and view content across geographical and cultural boundaries. For adolescents, social media is more than just a communication tool; it serves as a key space for social engagement, self-expression, and identity development.



THE STANFORD JOURNAL

(AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH) IJIN VALUE/

IMPACT FACTOR : 8.3

Volume-3, Issues-3

July-September: 2026

Adolescence is a crucial stage of development characterized by major physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During this time, young people are particularly sensitive to peer judgment, social approval, and external validation. Important aspects of personal development—such as self-esteem, emotional well-being, and body image—are shaped during these years, making adolescents especially susceptible to social influences. In today's digital world, social media has become one of the most powerful forces influencing how young people view themselves and others.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms are intentionally designed to encourage visibility, comparison, and feedback through features like likes, comments, shares, and follower counts. Although these features can strengthen social connections and create a sense of belonging, they can also increase social comparison and self-criticism. Adolescents frequently measure their appearance, lifestyles, and accomplishments against the carefully selected and often idealized images they see online. Social media has emerged from the broader development of information and communication technologies and represents a fundamental shift in the way people communicate, interact, and share information. Social media refers to a group of internet-based platforms and applications that enable users to create, exchange, and disseminate content in virtual networks and communities. Unlike traditional mass media, which is largely one-way and producer-driven, social media is characterized by interactivity, participation, user-generated content, and real-time communication. Scholars commonly describe social media as a product of Web 2.0 technology, which emphasizes collaboration, connectivity, and content creation by users rather than passive consumption. Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content, while Boyd and Ellison emphasize the role of social networking sites in enabling individuals to construct public or semi-public profiles and establish connections with others. These definitions highlight the interactive and social nature of social media platforms, which distinguish them from earlier forms of digital communication. Social media encompasses a wide range of platforms, including social networking sites (such as Facebook and Instagram), microblogging services (such as X/Twitter), video-sharing platforms (such as YouTube and TikTok), messaging applications (such as WhatsApp and Snapchat), and online forums and communities. Each of these platforms differs in format, purpose, and mode of interaction, yet they share common features such as user participation, content sharing, networking, and feedback mechanisms. These features collectively contribute to the growing influence of social media in everyday social life. A defining characteristic of social media is user-generated content. Users are no longer passive recipients of information but active producers of text, images, videos, and opinions. This shift has democratized communication by giving individuals the power to express themselves and reach wide



audiences. However, it has also blurred the boundaries between personal and public life, as private experiences are increasingly shared in public digital spaces. For adolescents, this blurring is particularly significant, as they are still developing an understanding of identity, privacy, and social boundaries.

Social networking has rapidly become an essential part of contemporary life. In the early 21st century, platforms such as facebook, twitter, and instagram transformed the way people communicate. These sites made global connectivity easier than ever, allowing individuals to instantly share information, ideas, and personal experiences. Over time, social media has expanded to include platforms tailored to various interests and styles of interaction.

Creating networks of contacts who exchange and engage with information enables users to stay connected. The term “social networks” Refers to both newly formed and existing relationships developed through these platforms. The word “social” Highlights the ongoing communication that strengthens connections, ranging from close acquaintances to complete strangers.

Social media usage continues to increase worldwide. In 2015, facebook had 1.44 billion monthly active users, showing that a large proportion of americans were using social media. Even in countries with comparatively lower usage rates, such as indonesia and india, tens of millions of people were active users. Globally, linkedin had 364 million users, twitter had 236 million, instagram surpassed 300 million users within a year, and pinterest had 73 million users.

Because social media significantly influences daily life, it has become an important area of research, especially as its impact remains widely debated. Issues such as privacy concerns, misinformation, cyberbullying, and social media addiction are major areas of controversy. Understanding the effects of social media is essential to addressing these challenges while also enhancing its positive aspects. Furthermore, the rapid expansion of these platforms and the evolving behavior of users make continued research increasingly necessary.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Mackson, Brochu, and Schneider (2019) found that Instagram users experienced lower levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness, along with higher self-esteem compared to non-users, with loneliness and self-esteem mediating the link between Instagram use and mental health outcomes. At the same time, among Instagram users, anxiety was predicted by Instagram-related anxiety, while depression was predicted by social comparison. These findings suggest that Instagram can positively influence psychological well-being by reducing loneliness and enhancing self-esteem, but it may also pose risks to mental health when maladaptive patterns such as excessive comparison or platform-related anxiety occur.



Dr. Sinta Santoso and Dr. Raka Santoso (2020) in their study “The Effect of Social Media on Self-Esteem and Body Image”, found that while social media provides adolescents with opportunities for connection, communication, and self-expression, it also contributes to increased anxiety, social comparison, and body image dissatisfaction, particularly on highly visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok. They conclude that these negative effects can be reduced through a balanced approach that integrates digital awareness, media literacy programs, parental guidance, and ethical platform design. This would allow social media to serve as a tool for empowerment and healthy identity formation rather than a source of emotional distress.

Lee et al. (2020) and Mabe et al. (2014), supporting **Lup et al. (2015)**, found that greater Instagram use was associated with higher depressive symptoms, while positive social comparison was linked to lower depression levels. These findings conclude that social media plays a dual role in adolescents’ mental health—on one hand contributing to risks like depression through excessive engagement, while on the other offering protective effects when social comparison processes are positive.

D. GunaGracyal and DeepaViswam (2021) conducted a study titled “*Social Media and Emotional Well-Being: Pursuit of Happiness or Pleasure*,” They found that while social media enables young people to maintain connections and strengthen relationships, excessive reliance on these platforms often replaces offline interactions, leading to social dysfunction and negatively affecting emotional well-being. Their study concludes that youth engagement with social media is frequently shaped more by the pursuit of virtual pleasure and social identity than by genuine happiness, highlighting the complex impact of digital dependency on real-world experiences.

Urvashi Singh and ManjuManju (2022), in their study “*Correlates of self-esteem and body image among adolescents: A systematic review*,” found that adolescence is a critical stage where self-identity develops, and factors like parental and peer support play a vital role in shaping psychological well-being. Their review concludes that positive body image is essential for healthy development, and equipping adolescents, parents, and teachers with the skills to counter societal and cultural pressures of unrealistic beauty standards is crucial. This study highlights the significant social and psychological influences on adolescents’ self-esteem and body satisfaction.

Soojung Jo and Mi Young Joung (2022), in their study “*Concept analysis of adolescent use of social media for emotional well-being*,” found that healthy social media use can enhance adolescents’ emotional well-being by fostering better relationships, supporting internet-based communication, and promoting happiness with emotional health. Their review concludes that social media helps adolescents feel safe, access information, and build stronger connections, while highlighting the importance of guidance and interventions to ensure its balanced and positive use.



ZohaibAzhar and Mohammad Imran (2024), in their study “*Appearance and Social Media: Navigating Emotional Well-Being*,” found that digital communication and appearance-focused activities on social media strongly shape adolescents’ emotions, self-perception, and mental health through processes of self-presentation and social comparison. They conclude that while these platforms can influence emotional adjustment, their impact is often negative when centered on appearance, underscoring the need to address the risks tied to body image pressures in online spaces.

Jasim Al Mukhtar and Ban YousifYaqoob (2025) found that social media provides benefits like greater social support and improved mood but also leads to negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, poor sleep, reduced life satisfaction, academic decline, cyberbullying, and negative body image when used excessively. They conclude that the impact of social media on adolescents’ emotional well-being is complex, reflecting both positive and harmful dimensions.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF ESTEEM

Ata, Ludden, &Lally, (2006) conducted a study to “*The Effects of Gender and Family, Friend, and Media Influences on Eating Behaviors and Body Image During Adolescence*”,The study found that physical appearance is the strongest predictor of self-esteem across age groups, highlighting the close link between body image and self-worth. The study concludes that appearance-related content, especially in the context of social media, plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents’ self-esteem and overall psychological well-being.

Hayley Dohnt&MarikaTiggemann (2006), in their study “*The contribution of peer and media influences to the development of body satisfaction and self-esteem in young girls: A prospective study*”, found that young girls’ desire for thinness, body satisfaction, and self-esteem were influenced before peer perceptions of thinness, reflecting the powerful role of cultural and media ideals. They conclude that societal and media-driven standards significantly contribute to negative body image and lowered self-worth during formative years, a pattern highly relevant in the context of social media’s impact on adolescents.

Vogel et al. (2014) conducted a study titled “*Social Comparison, Social Media, and Self-Esteem*”, They found that passive social media use, such as scrolling through others’ profiles, was linked to lower self-esteem due to upward social comparisons with seemingly more attractive, successful, or socially active peers. They concluded that for adolescents, who are highly sensitive to peer evaluation, such comparisons can distort self-concept and negatively affect emotional well-being during a critical stage of identity formation.

Krause, Baum, Baumann, and Krasnova (2019) conducted a study on “*Facing the Ugly Truth: Social Norms and User Responses to Beauty Enhancement in Social Media*”, They found that inconsistencies in earlier research on social media and self-esteem arise from not distinguishing between different user activities. Their study concludes that self-



oriented activities such as posting updates or photos and other-oriented activities such as liking or commenting have distinct effects on appearance-related self-esteem over time, highlighting the need to examine specific patterns of engagement rather than social media use in general.

Steinsbekk et al. (2021) found that social media use significantly shapes appearance-related self-esteem from childhood through adolescence, with active engagement influencing overall happiness more strongly than passive behaviors like liking or commenting. They conclude that within the topic "*The impact of social media use on appearance self-esteem from childhood to adolescence – A 3-wave community study*," it is crucial to understand how specific patterns of online interaction affect self-perception and well-being across developmental stages.

Cingel, Carter, and Krause (2022) found that the relationship between social media use and self-esteem is complex, with overall effects being small yet significant—positive for some individuals and negative or negligible for others. They conclude that within the topic "The relationship between social media and self-esteem," these outcomes depend heavily on individual vulnerabilities, usage patterns, and contextual factors, highlighting the need to view social media's influence through person-specific and nuanced perspectives rather than broad generalizations.

Chamsi, Katir, Korchi, Belbachir, and Ouanass (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study in the Moroccan context to examine the impact of social media on young people's self-esteem and self-image. Using a questionnaire and satisfaction scale with a sample of 200 participants, the study found that frequent use of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook contributed to lower self-esteem, often linked with negative outcomes such as anxiety and depression. The findings align with existing literature, showing that social media encourages constant social comparisons, which negatively influence self-image and psychological well-being. The authors concluded that while social media serves as a significant medium for communication and lifestyle exchange, it also has harmful effects on young people's social behavior and emotional health.

Shoaib Hasan (2018) found that female social media users reported higher self-esteem than male users, while low-intensity users demonstrated significantly higher self-esteem compared to high-intensity users, with educational level also playing a role. He concludes that within the topic "*A study between Social Media usage and Self-Esteem among youths*," both demographic factors such as gender and education, as well as the intensity of social media use, are crucial variables influencing self-esteem outcomes.

Omer Farooq, Farrukh, and Khan (2023) found a significant negative association between the number of daily hours adolescents spent on social media and their levels of self-esteem, with those engaging more in visual content reporting lower self-esteem than those interacting with text-based content. In the context of "*The Influence of Social*



Media on Adolescents' Self-Esteem, they conclude that excessive social media use poses risks to self-perceptions, highlighting the need for digital literacy and open discussions around self-worth and body image to promote healthier engagement and safeguard adolescent well-being.

Keerthana Sathyan and Stutima Basistha(2025) reported that social comparison and social media effect on self Esteem use generally have a negative impact on self-esteem. Constant exposure to idealized bodies, beauty standards, and curated lifestyles fosters unrealistic comparisons, leading to body dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, especially among adolescents and young adults. While social media can offer self-expression and support, excessive reliance on likes, comments, and followers often results in validation-seeking behaviour and decreased psychological well-being.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BODY IMAGE

Susan Grogan (1998) authored the book *Body Image: "Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children"*, She highlighted that body image is a psychological construct reflecting one's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about their body, whereas body dissatisfaction arises from negative evaluations often shaped by social influences like media imagery. This distinction underscores how online visual content can significantly affect adolescents' self-perceptions and contribute to either positive body image or dissatisfaction.

Brown, Amy, &Dittmar, Helga (2005) found that exposure to thin media models heightened women's body-focused anxiety and perceived threat, while exposure to average-sized models or no models led to more positive internal perceptions. Within the topic "Think 'thin' and feel bad: The role of appearance schema activation, attention level, and thin-ideal internalization for young women's responses to ultra-thin media ideals." these findings conclude that thin-ideal portrayals in media can negatively shape self-perceptions, highlighting the harmful influence of unrealistic beauty standards on psychological well-being.

Tiggemann and Slater (2013) conducted a study titled *NetGirls: "The Internet, Facebook, and Body Image Concern in Adolescent Girls"*, which examined the relationship between Internet exposure and body image concerns among adolescent girls. The study found that time spent on the Internet was significantly related to internalization of the thin ideal, body surveillance, and drive for thinness. Additionally, 75% of the girls had a Facebook profile and spent an average of 1.5 hours daily on the platform. Facebook users scored significantly higher on all body image concern measures than non-users. The study concluded that the Internet, particularly social networking sites like Facebook, represents a potent socio-cultural medium influencing the body image of adolescent girls.

Tiggemann and Slater (2014) examined broader social media use and its impact on adolescent girls' body image. They found that greater time spent on social media increased internalization of thin body ideals and body surveillance. Importantly, passive



content consumption, such as scrolling through others' profiles, was linked more strongly to negative body image than active participation, such as posting updates or photos. The study highlighted that visual-centric platforms foster comparison-based engagement, which can significantly heighten body image concerns among young users.

Karazsia, Murnen and Tylka (2017) conducted a cross-temporal meta-analysis titled *Is Body Dissatisfaction Changing Across Time? A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis*. The study examined trends in body dissatisfaction across decades and found that levels of body dissatisfaction have generally increased over time, particularly among women, reflecting the growing influence of sociocultural and media-driven beauty ideals. These findings underscore the persistent and escalating nature of body image concerns, highlighting the need for interventions aimed at promoting body acceptance and reducing societal pressures.

Brown (2018) conducted a study titled *"The Impact of Social Media Usage on Body Image Perception Among Adolescents"*. The study found that high social media use, particularly on visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok, was strongly associated with greater body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem among adolescents. It concludes that visually driven platforms pose significant risks to young people's self-perceptions, emphasizing the need for media literacy programs and self-esteem-building initiatives in schools to mitigate harmful effects.

Vittoria Franchina & Gianluca Lo Coco (2018), in their study *"The influence of social media use on body image concerns"*, found that social networking platforms strongly influence adolescents' body image concerns through exposure to idealized portrayals, such as the thin-ideal for girls and the muscular-ideal for boys. They conclude that media influence is highly gendered and highlight the need for further research to better understand how social media pressures specifically affect male body image experiences.

Kleemans et al, (2018) conducted a study titled *"Picture Perfect: The Direct Effect of Manipulated Instagram Photos on Body Image in Adolescent Girls"*. The study found that adolescent girls exposed to digitally altered Instagram images reported significantly lower body satisfaction than those who viewed unedited peer photos, showing how manipulated content reinforces unattainable beauty ideals and harmful comparisons. It concludes that even minor digital alterations on visual platforms can distort beauty standards and negatively affect body image, self-esteem, and overall emotional well-being.

Jones (2019) conducted a study titled *"The study found that prolonged exposure to idealized body images on social media was associated with declining body satisfaction and reduced self-esteem among adolescents over a two-year period. It concludes that social media can have cumulative negative effects on young people's self-perceptions, underscoring the importance of promoting positive body image and media literacy programs to counter harmful online influences."*



Damayanthi (2020), in their study *“Body image satisfaction among young adults in urban Indonesia: A qualitative study,”* found that body image awareness is rising among urban youth, with campaigns and community programs promoting body positivity and improved self-esteem, even as media influence continues to pose challenges. The study concludes that online platforms and local initiatives can play a constructive role in reducing harmful beauty pressures and fostering healthier self-image among adolescents.

Yang, Wang, Tng, and Yang (2020), in their study *“Effects of social media and smartphone use on body esteem in female adolescents: Testing a cognitive and affective model,”* found that excessive smartphone and screen use lowered healthy body esteem among female adolescents by increasing internalization of societal ideals, appearance-based comparisons, and anxiety about negative evaluation. The study concludes that digital engagement contributes to body image concerns through multiple pathways, highlighting its complex influence on young females’ well-being.

Lee, S., and Lee, A. R. (2020) conducted a study to *“The Influence of Social Media on Body Image Perception and Self-Esteem Among Korean Adolescents”*, They found that Korean adolescents often experience body dissatisfaction due to societal pressures and media portrayals, with social media further intensifying these concerns through constant exposure to idealized images. The study concludes that cultural and media influences strongly shape body perceptions, while targeted interventions such as school programs and community activities can help improve adolescents’ self-confidence and body satisfaction.

AmilaLokumannage (2020) conducted a study on *“Social Media and Its Impact on Adolescents’ Sense of Body Image in Sri Lanka”*, The study found that social media exposure among Sri Lankan adolescents significantly shaped perceptions of attractiveness and fashion, with girls feeling pressured to appear thinner and boys striving for a stronger, muscular look. Greater online time was linked to higher body dissatisfaction. The study concludes that social media exerts a strong negative influence on adolescent body image by reinforcing gendered beauty pressures and unrealistic ideals.

Smith (2020) conducted a study on *“Types of Social Media Platforms and Their Impact on Body Image Perception Among Adolescents”* The study concluded that adolescents who engage more with visually oriented platforms like Instagram and TikTok experience greater body dissatisfaction compared to those using text-focused platforms, underscoring how platform type influences body image outcomes. This finding highlights the need for balanced usage, media literacy education, and platform-specific interventions to mitigate the negative effects on adolescent self-perception and well-being.

Johnson B. (2021) conducted a study titled *“The Moderating Role of Parental Guidance on Social Media's Impact on Body Image Perception Among Adolescents”*, The study concluded that higher levels of parental monitoring significantly reduce the negative



effects of social media on adolescents' body image and self-esteem, making parental involvement a protective factor. It emphasizes the vital role of parental engagement and guidance in fostering healthier online experiences and safeguarding adolescents' psychological well-being.

Garcia (2022) conducted a study titled "*Analysis of Social Media and Its Impact on Body Image Perception Among Adolescents*", The study concluded that idealized body images, diet culture, unrealistic beauty standards, and peer comments on social media contribute to body dissatisfaction among adolescents, while diverse and inclusive content can help counter these harmful effects. The study highlights the importance of content type in shaping self-perceptions and calls for content moderation and promotion of positive representation to support adolescents' mental health.

Mazzeo, Weinstock, Vashro, Henning, and Derrigo (2024) concluded that instead of expecting adolescents to avoid social media, emphasis should be placed on strategies that minimize harm, such as promoting body-positivity movements, implementing culturally sensitive interventions, and exploring policy-level regulations. In the context of "Mitigating Harms of social media for adolescents body image and eating disorder", this study highlights the importance of targeted interventions and further empirical research to effectively reduce the negative influence of social media on body image and disordered eating behaviours.

Conclusion

This review demonstrates that social media exerts a complex and multifaceted influence on adolescents' emotional well-being, self-esteem, and body image. While digital platforms provide valuable opportunities for connection, self-expression, and community building, they simultaneously create environments that encourage social comparison, appearance-based evaluation, and validation-seeking behaviors. Adolescence, as a critical developmental stage marked by identity formation and heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation, increases vulnerability to these influences.

Evidence consistently shows that passive engagement, excessive screen time, and exposure to idealized or manipulated images are linked to lower self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. In contrast, active, purposeful, and socially supportive use of social media may enhance feelings of belonging, reduce loneliness, and promote positive self-concept. These findings reinforce the importance of distinguishing between different types of social media activities rather than treating usage as a single, uniform construct.

Protective factors such as parental monitoring, digital literacy education, culturally sensitive interventions, and promotion of body-positive and diverse content can reduce harmful outcomes. Rather than advocating complete avoidance, current research supports a harm-reduction approach that encourages balanced usage, critical media awareness, and supportive offline relationships. Future research should continue to explore longitudinal



effects, gender differences, and platform-specific impacts to better understand how evolving digital environments shape adolescent development. Promoting responsible platform design and evidence-based educational strategies remains essential for safeguarding adolescent psychological well-being in an increasingly digital world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

IqraSuhail& Dr. Shoaib Hasan gratefully acknowledges Integral University, Lucknow, India for providing the necessary research facilities, infrastructure and institutional support under the project referenceIU/ R & D/ 2026-MCN0004764. The academic environment and support extended by the University significantly contributed to the successful completion of this research.

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THE STANFORD JOURNAL

(AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH) IJIN VALUE/

IMPACT FACTOR : 8.3

Volume-3, Issues-3

July-September: 2026

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(AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH) IJIN VALUE/

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Volume-3, Issues-3

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