

IMPACT OF USE OF SOCIAL APPLICATIONS AND APPEARANCE-RELATED CONSCIOUSNESS ON BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER SYMPTOMS AND LOWER SELF-ESTEEM AMONG FEMALES

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

To investigate the impact of use of social applications and appearance-related consciousness on Body dysmorphic disorder symptoms and lower self-esteem among females.

STUDY DESIGN

Cross-sectional study

PLACE AND DURATION OF STUDY

The study was conducted in 6 months at Riphah International University from January to August 2022.

SUBJECTS AND METHOD

A total of 200 females were approached via convenience sampling for this study from universities, colleges, and workplaces in Pakistan. Female participants of age range young adults, i.e. 17-35 years, were included in the study. Females actively using social media for more than 6 months were recruited.

RESULTS

It was found that social application use and appearance-related consciousness both were positively related to symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder. However, it was showed that social application use and appearance-related consciousness were negatively related to self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrated that individuals who excessively use social applications are more likely to be unhappy with their own body image and experience more negative feelings after viewing appealing self-images on social media. Higher body dysmorphic and worse self-esteem were revealed to be positively correlated with appearance-related awareness.

KEYWORDS

Appearance-related Consciousness, Body Dysmorphic Disorder, Lower Self-esteem, Social applications

INTRODUCTION

The internet has become a vital medium for scholarly, professional, and interpersonal interaction over the past ten years. The Internet is currently accessible to 400 million people globally, and its use is only growing.¹ It is not surprising that some individuals exhibit negative behavior related to spending too much time online, given how reliant our culture has evolved on such technologies. These social networks are also utilized for self-evaluation, social comparisons, and self-perception.² Some studies indicate that increased use of social media may heighten body dissatisfaction due to an increase in remarks from friends about one's looks.³ Additionally, because of increased exposure to social comparisons, regular use of social media has been associated with poorer self-esteem in adults.⁴ Thus, the present study intended to explore the role of the use of social applications and appearance-related consciousness, causing symptoms of Body dysmorphic disorder and lower self-esteem among females.

Any platforms or apps that enable users to create and upload original material that can be seen and remarked by others are considered social media.⁵ Social software, usually referred to as social apps, consists of communication and interactive tools that are frequently web-based. These programs concentrate on creating and maintaining connections between users by aiding the mechanics of discussion and conversation. The common social applications include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, WeChat, Tumblr, YouTube, and many more. Although these applications have been significantly helpful in terms of connecting, sharing expertise, increasing visibilities, and building relationships but at the same time has caused some psychological disturbances in users especially when it comes to female's certain circumstances have load towards the symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder, social comparison, and decreased self-esteem.

Appearance-related consciousness is defined as the degree to which a woman's behaviours and thoughts demonstrate an acute awareness of whether she might appear beautiful to a social media audience.⁶ Attractiveness is frequently at the heart of a sense of self-worth, especially among young women, and young people are especially conscious to evaluations of one's physical appearance in relation to other. According to Jones,⁷ young audience while using social media discuss their physical look and methods for enhancing it. Peers in this way spread cultural beauty norms, possibly escalating



body dissatisfaction by promoting social comparison and internalising beauty standards.⁷ Overuse of social media platforms could make these issues worse than they typically place a strong emphasis on physical attractiveness and offer unheard-of opportunities for peer and social comparison and comments on looks.⁸ It was discovered that excessive body comparison, body surveillance, and worse self-esteem were all positively linked to higher levels of appearance-related consciousness.⁹

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is characterised by DSM-5¹⁰ as an excessive worry about physical attributes, particularly an incessant obsession with a presumed defect, which causes severe distress and impairs interpersonal interactions.¹¹ Safety behaviours, such as asking others for confirmation and comparing oneself to others in reaction to anxieties about appearance, are symptoms.¹² BDD is characterised by excessive anxiety over one's defects in appearance. It has been shown that using social media increases body dissatisfaction.¹³ Heavy usage of social media may occasionally cause concerns, which may cause body comparisons.

Self-esteem refers as person's opinion of themselves, whether favourable or negative. This states to how much they value and respect themselves.¹⁴ Self-esteem is the evaluative emotional element of a person's self-concept.¹⁵ People who use Facebook frequently have higher rates of sorrow and lower levels of happiness, according to studies.¹⁶ The filtered selfies that the young girls in the study saw had a negative impact on their perceptions of their bodies and their self-worth. In this instance, the girls started feeling bad about themselves because they thought they did not measure up to their filtered selfies.¹⁷

BDD symptoms have been linked to unfavourable judgments of appearance,¹⁸ which shows that those who regularly and repetitively utilise social applications and compare their appearances online may suffer an increase in negative appearance appraisal, and hence a greater risk of acquiring BDD symptoms. Hendrickse et al¹⁹ examined how women frequently compared their own Instagram and selfie photos to those of other women while using applications like Instagram. They found that most women felt the urge to do this. Due to the greater degrees of body dissatisfaction, the outcomes of the social comparison.²⁰ It was seen in a study, that women who were shown pictures of other woman around their age felt the desire to compete with them by posting their own impressive natural selfies or using more filters to hide any inadequacies, this attitude towards self was leading the females to body dysmorphia.¹⁹

According to Taqui et al 25.8% of Pakistani student population satisfied the BDD criteria, in addition to experiencing greater levels of body dissatisfaction, the teenage girls who compare themselves to social media app posts also felt a stronger need to rely on their filtered appearances, which made them less confident.

Social media may make these procedures worse for young people who have always been conscious of their own and their peers' physical appearances and engaged in appearance-based social comparisons.²¹ According to Choukas-Bradley⁸ using cosmetic filters to alter one's look and cover up flaws has become "normal" among people, mainly young women. One of the numerous reasons why so many young women use beauty filters is because of these unattainable beauty standards. As the female knows, the reality is the opposite and they lack the perfection they found in filters. This leads them towards a contradictory situation, making them not to accept the reality. Eventually they had symptoms of social anxiety, body dysmorphia and many more.

People who examine attractive photographs on Facebook are more likely to be unhappy with their own body image and have more negative emotions subsequently, according to research.¹¹ It was discovered that increased body comparison, body surveillance, and worse self-esteem were all positively correlated with higher levels of appearance-related consciousness.⁸ A recent study by Hanna et al²² showed that peer comparison and consciousness mediate the interaction between body image concerns, Facebook use, self-esteem, and psychological health. A latitudinal study also revealed that passive media use has been shown to predict an upsurge in young boys' appearance social comparisons, which was consequently linked to greater body dissatisfaction.²³

The Social Comparison Theory²⁴ postulates that people have a natural desire to assess their own beliefs, skills, growth, and position in life. People choose standards to measure themselves and others against in order to satisfy this urge. One of those influences is outward appearance, with social pressure to compare oneself to others being especially powerful for women. Women are more likely than males to compare themselves to others by evaluating their body type and weight in contrast to others.²⁵ In Western culture, the focus is on a thin female form as attractive, either because of the social value placed on thinness²⁶ or pressure from evolution to find a mate. According to several studies, people who compare their physical attributes to those of people they believe to be more attractive than themselves, such as models or celebrities, are more likely to feel unsatisfied with their bodies and go on to develop an eating disorder. As a result, many women may experience pressure to lose weight so that they look just like their ideal peers and other role models, such as those in the media.²⁷

The purpose of this research is to figure out the psychological symptoms due to the use of these apps. One of the leading causes of BDD is using the filters of Snapchat and comparing self with others. Results of 2021 show that the ratio of females



using these apps was 55.6 percent while for males was 43.9%. According to a survey conducted in GC Sialkot, females had a higher prevalence of positive body image dissatisfaction. Likewise, positive BID scores were more prevalent amongst females.²⁸

SUBJECTS AND METHOD

Study uses cross-sectional research design to examine the association of social applications and appearance-related consciousness with symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder and lower self-esteem. A total of 200 females were approached via convenience sampling for this study from universities, colleges, and the workplace of Pakistan. Female participants of age range young adults, i.e. 17-35 years, were included in the study. Females actively using social media for more than 6 months were recruited.

Procedure

Before data collection, informed consent was taken from the research participants. To obtain details about the participants, a demographic sheet was created. The demographic sheet asked questions on the participant's age, years of schooling, and employment history. The relationship status of the participant, religion, amount of time spent online, type of application use, etc.

Instruments

Social Media Engagement Questionnaire²⁹

This scale was used to assess the degree of social media use on personal devices as well as the scope of everyday activities for social media users. The five items on the scale tracked how often he used social media throughout the day, from when he woke in the morning to when he went to bed. A seven-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (seven times), is used to score each item. Individual scores are calculated by adding together the answers to each of the five items, and this yields a reliable comprehensive index ($\alpha = .82$ to $.89$).

Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness (ASMC)⁸

The ASMC comprises 13 items. 7-point Likert Scale i.e. (1=Never, 2=Almost Never, 3=Rarely, 4=Sometimes, 5=Often, 6=Almost Always, 7=Always) was used to measure response of participants and a higher score show greater tendencies to indulge in maladaptive thoughts related to appearance on social media. Cronbach's alpha for this scale is reported to be satisfactory, i.e. 0.92.

Body Image Disturbance Questionnaire (BIDQ)³⁰

BIDQ was used to measure symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder. Seven elements from the BDDQ are included in the BIDQ. Items 1-2 evaluate obsession and worry with appearance, whereas items 3 test felt distress and

items 4-7 examine functional impairment and avoidance. The average of the seven items on a range of 1 to 5 determined the score, which had to be higher than 3. The threshold for diagnosing BDD was set at 0. Cronbach's alpha for this scale is reported to be satisfactory i.e. 0.92.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale³¹

The 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale assesses both positive and negative thoughts about oneself to determine one's overall sense of worth. It is thought that the scale is one dimension. The responses to each question are given on a 4-point Likert scale, with the options from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Among these 10 items, 5 items (3,5,8,9 and 10) are reversely scored. A higher score suggests higher self-esteem. This scale has excellent internal consistency (i.e. $\alpha = .92$)

RESULTS

The present research aimed to find out the relationship between use of social applications and appearance-related consciousness, causing symptoms of Body dysmorphic disorder and lower self-esteem among females (N=201).

Table 1

Relationship between use of social applications, appearance-related consciousness, symptoms of Body dysmorphic disorder, and lower self-esteem among females (N=201)

Scale	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Social applications	201	76.0	10.58	-	-	-	-
		9					
2. Appearance-related consciousness	201	29.2	6.13	0.58*	-	-	-
		1		*			
3. Body dysmorphic disorder	201	27.9	4.60	0.75*	.54**	-	-
		8		*			
4. Self-esteem	201	26.3	5.54	-.31**	-.11	-.39**	-
		7					

Note. M=mean, SD=standard deviation

** $p < .01$ (one tailed) * $p < .05$ (one tailed)

Table 1 showed the results of Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. It was found that social application use and appearance-related consciousness both were positively related to symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder. However, it was shown that social application use and appearance-related consciousness were negatively related to self-esteem.

This reflects that more usage of mobile phone applications and high consciousness about the appearance of oneself in front of media is likely to associate with greater symptoms of body dysmorphia and lower the level of a person's own self-esteem.



Table 2
Linear Regression predicting symptoms of body dysmorphic and self-esteem among females

Scale	Self-esteem		Body dysmorphic disorder			
	B	SE	B	B	SE	B
Social applications	.14	.05	.15**	.07	.06	.09
Appearance-related consciousness	.34	.02	.66***	-.16	.03	-.37***
R^2	.59		.10			

Note. *** $p < .001$ (one tailed), ** $p < .01$ (one tailed), * $p < .05$ (one tailed)

Table 2 shows that use of social applications and appearance-related consciousness significantly positively predicted symptoms of Body dysmorphic disorder and lower self-esteem among females. Result showed that use of social applications and appearance-related consciousness came out to be the significant positive predictors of body dysmorphic disorder ($F(2, 198) = 143.00, P = .00$) and the model explained a variance of 59%. Similarly, only appearance-related consciousness negatively predicted self-esteem ($F(2, 196) = 11.55, p = .00$) and explained the variance of the model was just 10%.

DISCUSSION

The usage of social networking sites has been increasing in people's lives because of smartphones and better internet access.²³ Social media plays a significant role in daily life but besides the benefits of these applications, past research suggested many debilitating effects on the human mind.³² In fact, according to study, the average daily hour occupied with social media applications like Facebook has increased to almost two hours from the 45 minutes that was claimed to be almost ten years ago.³³ As a result, there is growing fear about the emergence of both problematic and excessive social application usage, which is indicated by an upsurge in the amount of time people spend using social media, a preoccupation with it, and an inability to control how they use it, all of which have a detrimental impact on their life.³⁴ But more recently, studies have looked at the use of social media is related to poor levels of self-confidence and body image dissatisfaction.³² Thus, it is necessary to investigate the processes and countermeasures that can help us comprehend how appearance-related psychopathology manifests and grows.

The result supported the first hypothesis that there was likely to be a positive relationship between use of social applications symptoms and appearance-related consciousness with body

dysmorphic disorder and lower self-esteem among females. Result demonstrated that social application use and appearance-related consciousness both were positively related to symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder. Concerns about one's physical appearance are a common aspect of many mental conditions. For instance, body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is considered by extreme worry over perceived physical faults or abnormalities that are minor or undetectable to others.¹⁰

Secondly, it was hypothesised that the use of social applications and appearance-related consciousness will be a positive predictor of Body dysmorphic disorder and lower self-esteem among females. Results found out that use of social applications and appearance-related consciousness significantly positively predicted symptoms of Body dysmorphic disorder. According to Bradley,⁸ the usage of beauty filters by young women to enhance their look and cover up flaws has become "standard." One of the numerous reasons why so many young women use makeup filters is because of these unattainable ideals of beauty. As the female knows, the reality is the opposite and they lack the perfections they found in filters. This leads them towards a contradictory situation, making them not to accept the reality. Eventually they had symptoms of social anxiety, body dysmorphia and many more. People who examine attractive photographs on Facebook are more likely to be unhappy with their own body image and have more negative feelings subsequently, according to research.¹¹

However, only appearance-related consciousness negatively predicted self-esteem among females. Results are consistent with literature that state that, when it came to problematic social networking, female adolescents had greater levels of cognitive preoccupation and poorly self-regulated social application usage, making them much more likely than male adolescents to utilise social applications to control their emotional states.³⁵ Moreover, a number of studies have reported that extensive social media usage is related to increased negative mood and low self-esteem, which led to even more problematic use of social media sites.³⁶

Moreover, appearance-related consciousness fully mediated the relationship between social application use and self-esteem. Females who frequently use social media without moderation and who exhibit odd behaviours and thoughts about whether they appear attractive to a social media audience are also more likely to describe low self-esteem, body dysmorphia, a sense of isolation, feelings of inadequacy, or worsening ability to focus. According to Hanna et al,²² Facebook use, self-esteem, and mental health are all



mediated through social comparison and self-objectification. Similarly, according to research by Ridolfi et al,³⁷ such a negative comparison raises people's risk of rumination, which can result in maladaptive thoughts like self-criticism and dysfunctional attitudes as well as lower self-esteem. According to Taqui et al,²⁰ 5.8% of a sample of Pakistani students satisfied the BDD criteria. In addition to experiencing higher levels of body dissatisfaction, teenage girls who compare themselves to social media app postings also felt a stronger need to rely on their filtered appearances, which made them less confident.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrated that individuals who excessively use social applications are more likely to be unhappy with their own body image and experience more negative feelings after viewing appealing self-images on social media. Higher body dysmorphic and worse self-esteem were revealed to be positively correlated with appearance-related awareness.

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