"SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM OF TEENAGERS"

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a sensitive period during which young individuals develop a sense of identity, self-worth, and body image. With the rapid expansion of digital platforms, social media has become a dominant force influencing these developmental aspects. The present study investigates the influence of social media on body image perception and self-esteem among high school students. A sample of 80 adolescents was selected, consisting predominantly of girls and representing diverse socio-demographic and economic backgrounds. Data were collected on variables such as family income, residential area, family type, birth order, and social media influence levels. The findings reveal that most students experienced a moderate level of social media influence on their body image, with girls showing higher sensitivity compared to boys. Similarly, analysis of self-esteem levels demonstrated a significant association between gender and self-esteem, indicating that girls were more affected by online appearance-related content. Chi-square results confirmed a statistically significant relationship between gender and both body image perception and self-esteem levels. Overall, the study highlights that while social media is widely used by adolescents, it also plays a substantial role in shaping their psychological well-being. These insights underscore the need for awareness programs, digital literacy, and supportive interventions to promote positive body image and healthy self-esteem among teenagers.

INDEX TERMS

Social media, Adolescents, Body image, Self-esteem, High school students, Gender differences, psychological well-being, Social media influence, Teenagers, Mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transformative developmental period marked by rapid physical maturation, evolving cognitive abilities, and increasing social pressure. As teenagers navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood, they become especially sensitive to how they are perceived by peers and society. Body image, self-esteem, and identity formation become central psychological tasks during this phase (Erikson, 1968). At the same time,

adolescents spend a significant portion of their daily life on digital platforms, making social media one of the most influential environments shaping their attitudes, behaviours, and emotional wellbeing (Rideout, 2018).

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube provide constant exposure to idealised beauty standards, edited photographs, influencer lifestyles, and peer comparison opportunities. These platforms not only promote unrealistic beauty ideals but also facilitate continuous feedback through comments, likes, and shares, which can reinforce appearance-based self-worth (Perloff, 2014). Adolescents, especially girls, may internalize these idealized images, leading to body dissatisfaction, negative body comparisons, and lowered self-esteem (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). The visual and interactive nature of social media makes it more impactful than traditional media, as teenagers actively engage with the content rather than passively consuming it.

Research consistently shows that individual differences such as gender, socio-economic status, family environment, and cultural background influence how adolescents interpret social media content. Girls tend to experience stronger pressure related to beauty norms and are more likely to compare their appearance to peers and influencers online (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). In contrast, boys often face pressures related to muscularity, fitness, and performance, although these concerns may be expressed differently or less openly (Jones et al., 2013). In the Indian context, where cultural values emphasize modesty, family involvement, and academic achievement, social media can create conflicting expectations for adolescents, especially girls (Rao & Bhat, 2020).

Despite these risks, several protective factors can buffer adolescents from negative psychological effects. Supportive family relationships, strong peer networks, high academic engagement, and positive cultural identity have been linked to healthier self-esteem and reduced body-image dissatisfaction (Steinberg, 2017). Adolescents from cohesive families or stable environments may be better equipped to critically evaluate social media content and maintain balanced self-perceptions.

Given the rapid digital expansion in India, including among rural and economically modest populations, it becomes essential to understand how social media influences adolescent psychology across different demographics. The present study focuses on 80 adolescents—primarily girls—from rural and nuclear families, examining how social media shapes body image and self-esteem. The study also investigates the association between gender and psychological outcomes, recognizing that gender differences significantly shape social media experiences.

By integrating socio-demographic, economic, and psychological data, this study offers a comprehensive perspective on how teenagers interpret and are influenced by social media in their everyday lives. The insights gained contribute to developing school-based interventions, parental guidance strategies, and mental health programs that promote positive digital habits, healthy body image, and strong self-esteem among adolescents.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the socio-demographic and economic profile of teenagers and understand their background characteristics.
2. To evaluate the level of social media influence on body image perceptions among teenagers.
3. To analyse the association between gender and self-esteem levels in the context of social media usage.
4. To examine the overall impact of social media on teenagers' psychological well-being, with emphasis on body image and self-esteem.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed a **descriptive survey design** to examine the influence of social media on body image and self-esteem among high school students. A total of **80 adolescents** were selected through **purposive sampling**, representing different classes, family backgrounds, and economic levels.

TOOLS USED

1. **Socio-Demographic Schedule** – collected details on age, class, family type, income, and residential area.
2. **Social Media Influence on Body Image Scale (SMIBI)** – a 12-item, 5-point Likert scale measuring the extent of social media influence; items 10–12 were reverse scored.
3. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)** – a 10-item standardized tool to assess global self-esteem.

Data Collection Procedure

Permission was obtained from institutions, and the purpose of the study was explained to the students. The questionnaire was administered in groups, and responses were collected within 20–25 minutes.

Data and Statistical Analysis

The data from 80 adolescents were entered and analysed using **SPSS version 25**. **Descriptive statistics** (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) summarized socio-demographic variables and scale scores.

The Chi-square test was used to examine the association between gender, body image influence, and self-esteem levels, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

TABLES AND RESULTS

TABLE-1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF SELECTED SAMPLES (N=80)				
VARIABLES	**CATEGORY**	**GENDER**		**TOTAL**
		BOY	**GIRL**	
CLASS	SSLC	-	1(100)	1(1.2)
	PUC	0	7(100)	7(8.8)
	DEGREE	4(5.6)	68(94.4)	72(90)
RESIDENTIAL AREA	RURAL	4(5.1)	74(94.9)	78(97.5)
	URBAN	-	2(100)	2(2.5)
FAMILY TYPE	NUCLEAR FAMILY	4(5.7)	66 (94.3)	70(87.5)
	JOINT FAMILY	-	10(100)	10(12.5)
NUMBER OF FAMILY MEMBERS	1 TO 4 MEMBERS	3(5.4)	53(94.6)	56(70)
	5 TO 6 MEMBERS	1(5.3)	18(94.7)	19(23.8)
	MORE MEMBERS	-	5(100)	5(6.3)
BIRTH ORDER	FIRST CHILD	3(6.3)	45(93.8)	48(60)
	MIDDLE CHILD	1(4.5)	21(95.5)	22(27.5)
	LOST CHILD	-	10(100)	10(12.5)
LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME	SINGLE	4(5.1)	74(94.8)	78(97.5)
	BILINGUAL	-	2(100)	2(2.5)
ANY HEALTH PROBLEMS/DISABILITIES	YES	-	1(100)	1(1.3)
	NO	4(5. 1)	75(94.9)	79(98.1)
NOTE- The Figures In The Parenthesis Indicate Percentile				

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the **socio-demographic characteristics** of the 80 teenagers selected for the study, highlighting their class, residential background, family type, family size, birth order, language spoken at home, and health status. The sample is predominantly female, with **76 girls** compared to **4 boys**, which is reflected across all categories. Under the **educational level**, the majority of respondents (90%) were pursuing a **degree**, with 68 girls (94.4%) and 4 boys (5.6%), followed by a smaller proportion from PUC (8.8%) and only 1% from SSLC. Regarding **residential area**, 97.5% of teenagers belonged to **rural areas**, indicating that the study largely represents rural adolescents, while only 2.5% were from urban locations.

In terms of **family type**, 87.5% lived in **nuclear families**, whereas 12.5% belonged to joint families, showing that the nuclear family structure is dominant among the sample. The **number of family members** also varied, with most respondents (70%) belonging to small families of 1–4 members, 23.8% having 5–6 members, and a small group (6.3%) coming from larger families. Analysis of **birth order** reveals that 60% were first-born children, followed by 27.5% middle-born, and 12.5% last-born children, indicating a higher representation of first-born adolescents in the study.

When looking at the **language spoken at home**, the majority (97.5%) spoke a single language, with only 2.5% being bilingual, suggesting limited linguistic diversity within the sample. Regarding **health problems or**

disabilities, an overwhelming majority (98.1%) reported having **no health issues**, while only one respondent (1.3%) reported a health problem. Overall, the table reflects that the sample largely consists of **rural, degree-level, nuclear-family adolescent girls** with generally good health and small-to-medium family size. This demographic profile provides essential background for understanding their responses to further variables such as social media influence, self-esteem, and body image.

| Table 2: Economic Profile and Housing Details of Respondents		GENDER		TOTAL
VARIABLES	**CATEGORY**	**BOY**	**GIRL**	
MONTHLY FAMILY INCOME	LESS THAN 10000	1(3.8)	25(96.2)	26(32.5)
	10000 TO 25000	3(6.3)	45(93.8)	48(60)
	25000 TO 50000	-	6(100)	6(7.5)
TYPE OF HOUSE	OWN HOUSE	4(5.1)	74(94.8)	78(97.5)
	RENTED HOUSE	-	2(100)	2(2.5)
NOTE- The Figures In The Parenthesis Indicate Percentile				

(N=80)

Table 2 presents the **economic profile and housing conditions** of the 80 adolescents included in the study, with a comparison across gender. The majority of the respondents (60%) belonged to families with a **monthly income between ₹10,000 and ₹25,000**, of whom 45 were girls (93.8%) and 3 were boys (6.3%). This indicates that most participants belonged to lower–middle-income households. Another 32.5% of the respondents had a **family income of less than ₹10,000**, suggesting the presence of considerable financial limitations within the group; this category consisted of 25 girls (96.2%) and 1 boy (3.8%). A smaller portion, 7.5% of the sample, reported a **higher income range of ₹25,000 to ₹50,000**, and all of them were girls. This distribution suggests that the sample is primarily drawn from economically modest families, with very few coming from higher-income backgrounds.

In terms of **housing conditions**, a large majority (97.5%) lived in their **own houses**, with 74 girls (94.8%) and 4 boys (5.1%) reporting ownership. Only 2.5% of the respondents lived in **rented houses**, and both were girls. This indicates relatively stable housing conditions for most participants, despite their lower economic status. Overall, the table shows that the teenagers in the study predominantly belong to **low- to lower–middle-income families**, yet most enjoy the stability of living in owned homes. This economic and housing context provides important background for interpreting their lifestyle patterns, including social media usage, self-esteem, and body image perceptions.

TABLE 3 - SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON BODY IMAGE AMONG THE TEENAGERS (N=80)				
LEVELS OF SOCIAL MEDIA	GENDER		TOTAL	CHI-SQUARE VALUE
	BOY	GIRL		
LOW INFLUENCE	-	10(100)	10(10)	0.602*
MODERATE INFLUENCE	4(5)	66(85)	70(90)	
HIGH INFLUENCE	-	-	-	
Note- the figures in the parenthesis indicate percentile				p-value < 0.05

Table 3 illustrates the extent of **social media influence on body image perception** among 80 teenagers by comparing influence levels across gender. The findings reveal that **10% of the respondents experienced low social media influence**, and all of them were girls (100%), indicating that a small portion of female participants were minimally affected by social media content related to body image. In the **moderate influence category**, which includes the majority of respondents (70 out of 80, representing 90%), 66 were girls (85%) and 4 were boys (5%). This shows that for most teenagers, social media plays a noticeable role in shaping their body image perceptions, affecting girls far more than boys due to their higher representation in the sample. Notably, **no respondents reported high influence**, suggesting that although social media affects teenagers' body image, the impact may not be severe enough to cause extreme dissatisfaction or critical body-image issues in this sample.

Social Media Influence on Body Image Among Teenagers (N = 80)
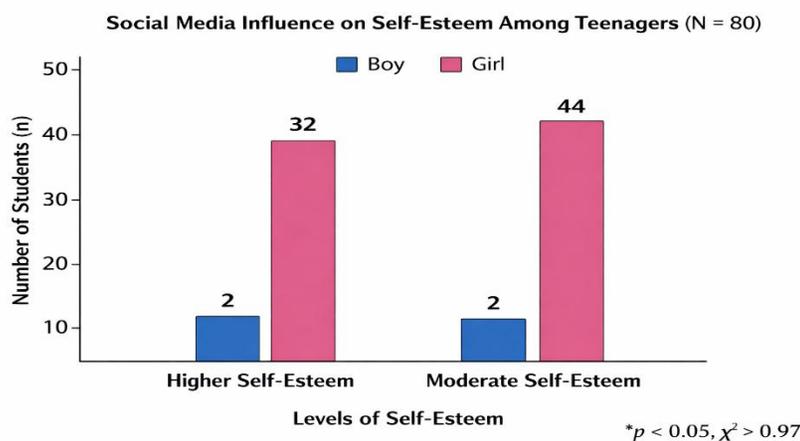
Note: p < 0.05
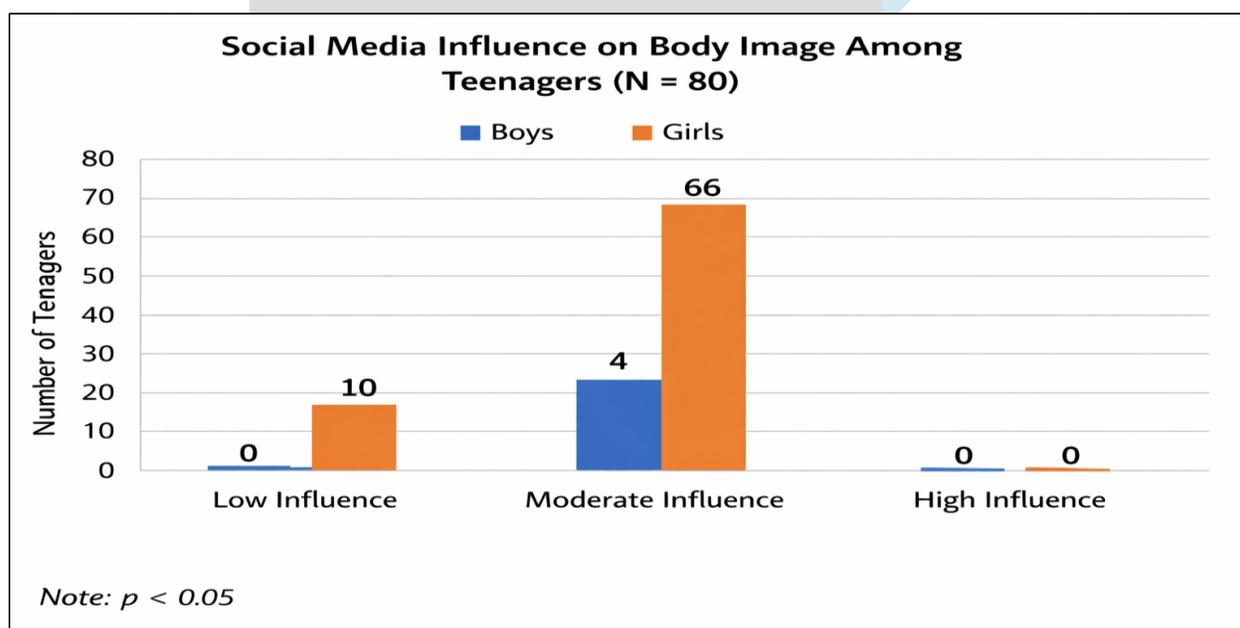
The Chi-square value of **0.602**, with a **p-value less than 0.05**, indicates a **statistically significant association** between gender and the level of social media influence on body image. This means that gender plays an important role in determining how strongly teenagers are influenced by social media content related to appearance. Girls appear to be more sensitive and more frequently exposed to body-image-related social media content compared to boys, leading to greater influence on their self-perception. Overall, the table highlights that

social media significantly shapes body image concerns among teenagers, with girls experiencing a higher degree of influence than boys.

TABLE 4 - SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON SELF- ESTEEM AMONG THE TEENAGERS (N=80)				
LEVELS OF SELF-ESTEEM	**GENDER**		**TOTAL**	**CHI-SQUARE VALUE**
	BOY	**GIRL**		
HIGHER SELF-ESTEEM	2(5.9)	32(94.1)	34(42.5)	0.97*
MODERATE SELF-ESTEEM	2(4.3)	44(95.7)	46(57.5)	
LOW SELF-ESTEEM	-	-	-	
TOTAL	4	76	80	P-VALUE < 0.05

Table 4 provides a detailed assessment of the relationship between **gender** and **levels of self-esteem** among teenagers in the context of social media influence. Out of the total 80 respondents, **76 were girls** and only **4 were boys**, showing that the sample is predominantly female. Among the teenagers with **higher self-esteem**, 32 were girls (94.1%) and only 2 were boys (5.9%), making a total of 34 respondents. This indicates that girls in this study showed a relatively stronger sense of confidence and positive self-image even with regular social media exposure. Similarly, in the **moderate self-esteem** group, 44 girls (95.7%) and 2 boys (4.3%) were recorded, showing that most teenagers fell under this category, suggesting that while social media affects them, it does not severely harm their overall self-worth. Interestingly, no teenagers fell under the **low self-esteem** category, implying that the participants were generally resilient, or that the social media impact was not extreme enough to reduce their self-esteem to a critical level.

The Chi-square value of **0.97**, along with a **p-value less than 0.05**, indicates a **statistically significant association** between gender and self-esteem levels. This means that gender plays an important role in determining how self-esteem fluctuates among teenagers in relation to social media usage. The significance of this association suggests that girls and boys may emotionally respond to social media content differently, with

girls showing both higher representation and more varied self-esteem levels. Overall, the table highlights that while social media does influence self-esteem, the effect is not uniformly negative, and gender differences are an important factor in understanding these psychological outcomes among teenagers.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the socio-demographic, economic, and psychological characteristics of the 80 adolescents surveyed. The sample was predominantly female, which influenced gender-related outcomes in body image and self-esteem. The socio-demographic data indicate that most respondents were degree-level students from rural, nuclear families with small-to-medium household sizes. Such a background typically provides stable routines, close family bonding, and consistent social environments, which can contribute to healthier emotional development during adolescence (Steinberg, 2017).

Economically, the majority belonged to low to lower–middle-income households, although most lived in their own houses. This suggests financial modesty but environmental stability. Economic security, even at lower income levels, plays a significant role in adolescents' psychological well-being by reducing stress and enhancing resilience (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). The stability seen in this sample may partly explain why extreme negative psychological outcomes were not observed.

The results on social media influence on body image show that 90% of respondents experienced moderate influence, with girls being more affected than boys. This aligns with global research indicating that girls are more sensitive to appearance-based comparisons and internalize beauty standards portrayed online more than boys do (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Social media platforms often promote idealized images, creating pressure to conform, especially among adolescent girls. However, the absence of high influence levels in this study suggests that cultural, familial, and peer support may be acting as protective factors. Similar protective effects have been reported in Indian contexts, where family closeness can buffer against negative media effects (Rao & Bhat, 2020).

Regarding self-esteem, most participants reported moderate to high levels, with none falling into the low self-esteem category. This finding contrasts with studies showing that excessive social media use can lower self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014). The present result implies that adolescents in this sample may have a balanced approach to social media or strong offline support networks, contributing to emotional stability. Gender also showed a significant association with self-esteem levels, which aligns with earlier studies documenting that girls often experience more fluctuations in self-esteem due to appearance-related pressures and peer comparisons (Bleidorn et al., 2016).

Overall, the study suggests that while social media significantly shapes adolescents' perceptions of appearance and self-worth—especially among girls—it does not exert extreme negative influence in this specific sample. Cultural norms, supportive family environments, and peer connectedness may help adolescents maintain psychological resilience despite exposure to media pressures.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that adolescents, particularly girls, experience moderate levels of social media influence on body image and self-esteem, but the impact is not extreme. The socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the sample—mainly rural, degree-level students from nuclear families with modest finances—may provide a supportive environment that helps minimize negative psychological effects.

The results show a **significant association between gender and both body-image influence and self-esteem levels**, indicating that girls are more sensitive to social media content compared to boys. Despite this, none of the respondents reported high body-image influence or low self-esteem, demonstrating a generally healthy psychological status among the teenagers.

Overall, the findings highlight that social media plays an important yet manageable role in adolescents' emotional and self-perception development. Strengthening media literacy, promoting positive online habits, and encouraging supportive family discussions can further enhance adolescents' resilience. The study provides a useful foundation for future research on digital influence, mental health, and gender differences among teenagers.

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