



Relationship between Internet Addiction, Self-esteem, and Body Image among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of internet addiction on body image and self-esteem through a review of various publications, papers, and research projects. With the increasing integration of internet addiction platforms into daily life, there has been growing concern about their impact on mental health, particularly self-perception. Internet usage has risen dramatically in the past decade, with over 2.80 billion people, or more than one-third of the global population, projected to be active users as of January 2017 (WeAreSocial, 2017). The research begins by analyzing the prevalence and nature of online comparisons within social media environments. Based on established psychological theories, it investigates how upward and downward social comparisons shape individuals' judgments of their physical appearance and self-worth. Additionally, the study explores the role of social validation, focusing on how online affirmations such as likes, comments, and other interactions contribute to developing positive body image and self-esteem.

Keywords: Internet addiction, Body image, Self-esteem

I. INTRODUCTION

The pervasive use of internet addiction in modern society has become a defining feature of everyday life, with many individuals maintaining multiple online accounts. This raises the question: how do people define their identities in the digital space? Is it through the accumulation of likes and shares their photos receive? How often do individuals follow influencers to stay updated on new content? Furthermore, how common is the tendency to compare oneself to others in these virtual spaces, and how do these comparisons affect one's self-esteem and body image?

Body image refers to an individual's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about their own

body. Various factors, including cultural values, personal experiences, and societal influences shape it. Body image significantly affects behavior, self-worth, and mental health. While our understanding of body image has evolved, it has been a central focus of psychological research since the early 20th century. Early definitions concentrated on the perceptual accuracy of body image, focusing on instances of distorted perception, such as the "phantom limb" phenomenon or the belief of being overweight in cases of anorexia. Modern definitions, however, emphasize body image as an emotional and attitudinal relationship with one's body (Grogan, 2009). Sociocultural factors, including media portrayals, family influences, peer pressure, and cultural beauty ideals, heavily influence body image. The media's unrealistic depictions of "ideal" bodies contribute to body dissatisfaction, particularly among vulnerable groups such as teenagers and young adults (Thompson et al., 1999). Distorted body image is often associated with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders.

Individuals dissatisfied with their body image may engage in harmful behaviors, such as restrictive dieting or excessive exercise, which can negatively impact their physical health (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006). The complex relationship between emotional well-being and body image underscores the importance of understanding and addressing these issues.

Self-esteem, a critical aspect of psychological health, refers to an individual's overall evaluation and sense of self-worth. It influences thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, playing a vital role in mental health and overall life satisfaction. Rosenberg's work on self-esteem development, particularly in adolescence, highlights the social dimensions of self-esteem, suggesting that alignment between one's self-concept and societal norms influences self-esteem. The concept of contingencies of self-worth, introduced by Crocker



et al. (2001), explores how individuals base their sense of worth on certain domains, such as appearance, academic success, or social approval.

In today's world, internet addiction has become a primary means of global connection. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and TikTok provide tools for individuals to share personal moments, post images, maintain relationships, organize social events, gain insight into others' lives, and express personal thoughts, values, and emotions. These platforms serve as a digital space for people to create and share narratives of their lives, fostering a new era of human connectivity (Perkovich, A.C., 2021). Facebook, the leading global social network, allows users to express approval of posts with a simple click of the "like" button. The widespread popularity of this feature is reflected in the nearly 4.5 billion likes generated daily, with half of all users engaging in this form of online affirmation at least once each day (Pew Research Center, 2014). Research suggests that receiving online validation has a positive impact on self-esteem (Bazarova et al., 2015; Burke et al., 2010; Oh et al., 2014; Valkenburg et al., 2006). Internet addiction also exposes users to a constant stream of images, prompting comparisons with others. Perloff (2014) investigates how the creation of unrealistic beauty standards on internet addiction contributes to body dissatisfaction. Tiggemann and Slater (2014) examine the link between Facebook usage, body image concerns, and self-esteem among teenage girls, finding that the pursuit of social validation on these platforms can reinforce cultural beauty ideals, leading to body dissatisfaction and lowered self-esteem. This paper thoroughly explores the impact of internet addiction on body image and self-esteem.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research will primarily rely on a secondary data analysis approach, drawing from existing research and data collected through online websites, journals, and books.

Comprehensive research has been conducted to identify relevant studies, articles, and reports that have investigated the relationship between internet addiction and self-esteem and body image.

The collected data has been analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify common themes and patterns related to the impact of internet

addiction on self-esteem and body image. Key findings from different studies will be compared and contrasted to conclude the overall relationship between these variables.

III. THEORETICAL APPROACH

This theoretical framework focuses on the concepts of online comparison and social validation to examine the complex dynamics of internet addiction's influence on body image and self-esteem. Built on established psychological theories, the study seeks to clarify the intricate relationships between digital interactions, internet addiction engagement, and individual self-perception and body image. A key foundation for understanding these processes is Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954), which explains how individuals evaluate themselves by comparing with others. Social comparison behaviors are partly reinforced by the constant exposure to idealized body images on internet addiction platforms, as discussed by Perloff (2014). This framework incorporates central ideas from Social Comparison Theory, aiming to enhance our understanding of how internet addiction, online comparisons, and social validation contribute to the development of self-esteem and body image.

“Why don't I look like her?” The impact of internet addiction on female body image.

This paper explores and analyzes the role of internet addiction in the development and/or exacerbation of eating disorders, disordered eating behaviors, and body dissatisfaction among college women. College-aged women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of internet addiction on their body image, as they are in a critical period of developing their self-perception and adjusting to the physical changes associated with puberty. The paper examines how advertising and media portrayals of the "slender ideal" pressure women to attain an unrealistic and unattainable physical appearance (Klein, K. M., 2013).

Idealized Body Standards

Internet addiction platforms, particularly those frequented by young women, often promote unrealistic and idealized body standards, which contribute to body dissatisfaction and negative self-perception. The effects of social comparisons on platforms like Facebook about mood and body



image issues are emphasized. Fardouly et al. highlight that Facebook users can curate their profiles with images and personal information, and they can choose to make their profiles public or semi-public. Similar to how images in magazines are digitally altered before publication, users can edit and enhance their photos before posting them to create an idealized or "desired version" of themselves (Manago et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2008). Women have reported comparing themselves to others on Facebook, which contributes to body dissatisfaction (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012). Features on Facebook have further exacerbated these body image concerns among women.

Social Validation and Self-Esteem

While internet addiction is often a source of distress, it can also serve as a platform for social validation. Positive feedback, such as likes and comments, can enhance individuals' self-esteem. However, individuals who receive negative feedback or hate comments may internalize these criticisms, particularly if they have lower self-esteem, and are more likely to seek validation through internet addiction interactions (Vogel et al., 2014).

Upward and Downward Social Comparison

Researchers have suggested that individuals evaluate their status and abilities early by comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). The rise of social networking sites (SNSs) may reinforce this behavior due to their unique ability to provide detailed personal information, making them powerful tools for social comparison (Sabatini & Sarracino, 2015). According to Sabatini and Sarracino (2015), social comparison is driven by the availability of information about others' lives. SNSs, as noted by Krasnova et al. (2015), create an environment conducive to upward social comparison, which can lead to feelings of jealousy and other negative emotions. Since much of the content on SNSs is idealized for impression management, it is more likely to provoke upward comparisons. The vast amount of information on these platforms often leads people to engage in upward social comparisons, making it difficult for them to avoid unfavorable self-comparisons (Lee, 2014; Tandoc et al., 2015). As a result, passive

consumption of content on SNSs is likely to be linked to increased upward social comparison.

Self-Validation Through Internet Addiction

Studies examining the relationship between self-esteem, defined as an individual's overall self-evaluation (Smith et al., 2014), have shown that individuals with lower self-esteem tend to use internet addiction more frequently, often as a means of improving their self-perception (Báachnio et al., 2016). The strong connection between excessive use of social networking sites and self-worth should not be underestimated. A recent study in Poland on Facebook addiction found that individuals addicted to the platform had significantly lower self-esteem compared to non-addicts (Báachnio et al., 2016). Additionally, other research has found that individuals with poor self-esteem often use internet addiction as a coping strategy to gain social validation and make virtual connections (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

Internet Addiction Use and Body Image Disorder

The primary aim of this study was to explore the link between the frequency with which individuals compare their physical appearance to those they follow on internet addiction and the impact this has on body dissatisfaction and the desire for thinness. Concerns about the role of internet addiction in exacerbating body dissatisfaction and promoting the desire for thinness are growing, particularly in the context of today's culture, where teens and young adults widely engage with these platforms. Exposure to idealized images and beauty standards on internet addiction can lead to unrealistic expectations and comparisons, making individuals more susceptible to developing eating disorders.

It is important to recognize the pervasive impact of internet addiction on body image perceptions, especially among younger populations, where it can significantly affect self-perception and overall mental health. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating this knowledge into public health initiatives that promote mental well-being and healthy body image. Furthermore, given the potential effects on vulnerable groups, such as those prone to or currently battling eating disorders, strategies to manage internet addiction influence should be an essential component of personalized treatment programs. By understanding and



addressing the impact of internet addiction on mental health and body image, we can help foster a stronger and healthier generation.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Several studies have found a negative correlation between excessive social media use and body dissatisfaction. Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006) discovered that adolescent girls who frequently compared themselves to others on social media were more likely to develop body image issues.
- The prevalence of idealized body images on social media can contribute to unrealistic expectations and negative self-comparisons. Amazue (2014) found that exposure to unrealistic beauty standards in Nigerian media was linked to lower self-esteem among female teenagers.
- Beyond body image, social media can also negatively impact self-esteem. Yang et al. (2020) discovered that excessive social media use in female adolescents can lead to unhealthy body esteem through intensified cognitive internalization and appearance comparisons.
- The impact of social media on body image and self-esteem may vary across different age groups and cultures. Vall-Roqué et al. (2021) found that younger Spanish females were more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and a drive for thinness during the COVID-19 lockdown, likely due to increased internet addiction use.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study highlights the complex relationship between internet addiction use, body image, and self-esteem, focusing on both the positive and negative psychological effects these platforms can have on individuals. Internet addiction's pervasive influence on self-perception has become a critical area of research, particularly about body image concerns and self-worth. The discussion here synthesizes the findings on internet addiction's impact, with emphasis on social comparison, social validation, and self-esteem.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Festinger's Social Comparison Theory remains a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of human social interactions. The theory, which posits that individuals evaluate themselves through

comparisons with others, continues to be relevant and influential across various disciplines. This theory has become increasingly important in contemporary discussions about the impact of internet addiction on self-esteem and body image.

Furthermore, examining the effect of internet addiction on body image and self-esteem through the lenses of online comparison and social validation reveals a complex interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors. Internet addiction influences not only an individual's self-esteem and body image but also their overall mental health. While internet addiction can serve as a platform for empowerment and positive self-expression, the constant exposure to idealized images and lifestyles perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards that negatively affect self-esteem and body image.

Social comparison, driven by both upward and downward comparisons, is pervasive on internet addiction platforms and significantly shapes individuals' self-perception. The consequences of these comparisons manifest in altered self-esteem and heightened dissatisfaction with physical appearance. By reinforcing and amplifying societal beauty ideals, internet addiction plays a significant role in the internalization of cultural norms. As individuals strive to meet the often unattainable standards presented on these platforms, issues related to body image and self-esteem are exacerbated.

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