

Impact of Social Networking Sites on Physical Appearance: A Correlational Analysis Among Young Adults in Shimla.



Kritika Jhagta^{1*}, Dr. Gayatri Raina²

^{1*}Department of Psychology, Gurugram University, Gurugram Kritika mail id : kritikajhagta6@gmail.com

²Department of Psychology, Gurugram University, Gurugram Dr. Gayatri Raina: gayatri.raina3@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of the use of social networking sites (SNS) on body image concerns among young adults aged between 18 and 22 years in the Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh. The present study focused on examining the impact of social networking site usage on physical appearance issues among young adults of Shimla. Data was collected using structured questionnaires comprising of Likert-scale items, which involved 500 young adults selected in a balanced gender ratio of 250 males and 250 females. The data was analyzed using t-test, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Findings revealed that the independent samples t-test showed a significant gender difference in physical appearance-related issues among young adults, with females scoring high on physical appearance concerns as compared to their male counterparts. Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the use of SNS and concern about physical appearance among young adults. The findings of the present study suggest that greater exposure to body image-related content on social networking platforms contributes to higher dissatisfaction and physical appearance-related issues among young adults, especially females. As a whole, the findings emphasize the intricate influence of social networking sites on the psychological and physical health of young adult males and females.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites Usage, Physical Appearance, Young Adults

The emergence of social networking sites (SNSs) has shifted the ways young adults communicate, interact socially, and view themselves. SNSs are defined as platforms where users are provided with the ability to create public or semi-public profiles and interact with other users through images, comments, and reactions (Carr & Hayes, 2015). They have become a necessity in day to day activities of people, particularly the youth. Users not only interact or get entertained through some of the platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and virtual worlds like Second Life and Sims, but are also able to explore and present their identities (Spies, Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). The increase in use of these platforms, especially among teenagers and young adults (Anderson et al., 2023), has raised concerns regarding their emotional and psychological effects. While social networking sites provide opportunities for connection and self-expression, they also contribute to an increasing focus on physical appearance and social validation. Physical appearance is the way in which individuals assess and are emotionally invested in the visible aspects of their personalities, encompassing their form, weight, size, and beauty (David and Warrier, 2021).

Young adults often engage in upward social comparisons and idealized self-presentation, which can negatively impact self-esteem and body image. Research has found that continuous exposure to filtered content on social networking platforms makes individuals experience dissatisfaction with physical beauty and increases the pressure to live up

to unrealistic beauty standards (Downes and Kim, 2019). Although there may be positive aspects of online interaction, overuse and imbalance of social media have caused psychological pressure among individuals and faulty family and societal relationships (Moreno & Kolb, 2012). Since the lives of young adults are overwhelmed by social networking, the dual role of this phenomenon should be taken into account: as a socializing agent and a source of psychological unease and false perception of their bodies.

Specifically, social media has increased the beauty standards norms in society, which affects the perceptions of people, especially young adults, concerning their bodies. Several reports have also indicated that the use of social networking sites is closely related to the process of negative body image development, especially among young women. Hogue and Mills (2019) showed that the sense of body image in young adult women was supported by the responses of the social networking sites through interaction with beautiful friends. They pointed to the dominance of upward appearance comparisons by body peers rather than family, and the use of attractive strangers over family members as the reason for the elevation in negative self-image.

Knowles et al. (2021) explored the psychosocial effects of Instagram and showed that women suffer from negative self-esteem and body dissatisfaction due to the idealized and filtered photos posted on the platform, which propagate unattainable beauty standards. Furthering the conversation, Sharma (2024) revealed that the glorification of unattainable

beauty standards by celebrities and influencers on social media stirs social anxiety and body dissatisfaction among the youth. Kaur and Sharma (2024) carried out an experimental study in which individuals exposed to Instagram images depicting beauty standards wished to attain reported greater dissatisfaction with their bodies in comparison to individuals in the control group. On a larger scale, Singhal (2025) noted the one-sided social media evolution of gendered body imaging, which often presents unrealistic masculine and feminine ideals. Mehta and Sharma (2023) carried out a study on the medical students in Delhi and discovered that the exposure in the media significantly influenced the eating and body image behaviors among the students. Yang and Crespi (2025) investigated how social media affects mental health with a social and neuropsychological layer to the thesis due to the lack of traditional social interaction. Their review associated too much use of social media with the emergence of self-identity disorders, such as body dysmorphic disorder, eating disorders, and narcissism, and it is important to discuss the necessity to pay attention to how digital interaction contributes to the development of self-perception and social behavior.

The social networking sites have a significant impact on the physical and psychological well-being of young adults. Social network sites like Facebook and Instagram enhance the concerning patterns of physical appearance by promoting the perfect appearance, which, consequently, creates dissatisfaction and social anxiety. Attention has been under fire on bodily image concerns in recent years due to the complexity of social media and its adverse impacts on the health and self-image of young adults. The primary objectives of the present study are enumerated below:

1. To assess the mean difference in Social Networking Sites usage (along with its five variables: Diversion, Cognitive needs, Affective needs, Personal needs, and Social needs) and Physical Appearance concerns among young adult males and females.
2. To examine the relationship between Social Networking Sites usage (along with its five variables: Diversion, Cognitive needs, Affective needs, Personal needs, and Social needs) and Physical Appearance among young adult males and females.
3. To investigate the extent to which Social Networking sites (along with their five variables: Diversion, Cognitive needs, Affective needs, Personal needs, and Social needs) will predict variations in Physical Appearance among young adult males and females.

Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: There will be a significant difference in mean score in terms of Physical Appearance concerns among young adult males and females.

H2: There will be a significant positive relationship between the five sub-variables of Social Networking Sites usage and Physical Appearance among young adult males.

H3: There will be a significant positive relationship between the five sub-variables of Social Networking Sites usage and the Physical Appearance among young adult females.

Method

Sample

For this study, the convenience sampling technique was employed to select a total sample of 500 young adults aged 18 to 22 years (250 males and 250 females) actively using Social Networking Sites (SNS) in the Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh.

Tools

Social Networking Sites usage and Physical Appearance concerns were measured by the following standardized tests:

Social Networking Sites Usage and Need Scale (SNSUN):

The Social Networking Sites Use and Need Scale (SNSUN), developed by Mahmoud Danaee, Ali & Firdaus in 2019, is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess social networking usage patterns and needs (with its five sub-dimensions: diversion, cognitive needs, affective needs, personal needs, and social needs) among young adults. The scale aims to provide insights into individuals' motivations for using social networking sites (SNS) and their perceived benefits or satisfaction derived from such usage. The SNSUN comprises 19 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". The SNSUN scale has a good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .922; test-retest correlations > .60) and strong validity, which is supported by good content validity, construct, and discriminant validity shown by high composite reliability (CR = .810-.882), AVE values tend to be above 0.50, with factor loadings exceeding 0.50.

Appearance Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMCS):

Choukas Bradley, Nesi, Widman, & Galla, in 2020, created the Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMCS). It is a self-report questionnaire that measures how youngsters perceive their physical appearance on social media. The scale exclusively identifies the extent to which youngsters are concerned about their physical appearance, body image, and attractiveness in the context of social media. The scale comprises 13 items, scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Always". The overall score is calculated by summing up the scores of the responses to all 13 items. Higher average scores indicate higher levels of appearance-related social media consciousness.

Whereas Lower average scores indicate lower levels of appearance-related social media consciousness. The Appearance Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMCS) demonstrates exceptional reliability, as evidenced by its Cronbach’s alpha estimates. For the full sample, the Cronbach’s alpha was reported at .95, indicating excellent internal consistency. The validity of the ASMCS is robustly supported by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which affirmed the single-factor model’s satisfactory fit to the data. Key fit indices from the CFA— $\chi^2(65) = 402.16$, $p < .001$; CFI = .948; TLI = .938; RMSEA = .092; SRMR = .033—indicate that the model fits the data well. Each item on the ASMCS exhibited strong standardized loadings greater than .70, while error variances ranged from .28 to .50, indicating minimal random measurement error.

Techniques

(1) Comparison of means (t-test)

t-test was computed to find out the significance of the difference between the means of young adult males and females on five sub-variables of social networking sites, along with physical appearance.

(2) Correlation Analysis

Pearson’s Correlation Analysis was computed to find out the correlation between social networking sites

(and their five sub-variables: diversion, cognitive needs, affective needs, personal needs, social needs) with physical appearance concerns among young adults.

(3) Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to find the best predictor of physical appearance among young adult males and females. A comparative analysis was carried out for the predicted variables among adult males and females.

Procedure

For this study, the convenience sampling technique was employed to select a total sample of 500 young adults aged 18 to 22 years, comprising 250 males and 250 females who actively used Social Networking Sites (SNS). The participants in the study were recruited from several educational institutions and public spaces in Shimla. Prior permission was obtained from relevant authorities in institutional and other settings before data collection, and participants were approached directly.

Results and Discussion

The following results were obtained from the analysis and are discussed in the subsequent section.

Table 1: Showing the Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-ratio of Males and Females young adults on the five Variables of Social Networking Sites usage and Physical Appearance.

SNO	Variables	Young Adult Males (N=250)		Young Adult Females (N=250)		t-ratio
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
A	Social Networking Sites Use Dimensions					
1.	Diversion	11.94	2.15	11.40	2.26	2.253*
2.	Cognitive Needs	15.08	2.70	14.41	2.90	2.695**
3.	Affective Needs	17.46	3.86	18.56	3.63	3.286**
4.	Personal Needs	13.92	3.48	14.34	3.34	1.402
5.	Social Needs	10.76	2.80	11.00	2.53	1.040
B	Physical Appearance	30.18	6.51	46.96	6.36	3.031**

** p< .01 and * p< .05

Table 1 illustrates that there are significant gender differences in some dimensions of SNS use and the physical appearance concerns among young adult

males and females. It is clear from Table 1 that females (M = 46.96) scored significantly (3.03, p < 0.01) higher in experiencing physical appearance issues, contrary to males (M = 30.18), substantiating

Hypothesis H1 that there will be a significant difference in terms of physical appearance among young adult males and females. Hence, the outcomes reveal that young adult females experience higher dissatisfaction with physical appearance as compared to young adult males, suggesting a clear gender disparity. **Thus, proving hypothesis H1 that there will be a significant difference in mean score in terms of physical appearance concerns among young adult males and females.** This difference in means about physical appearance implies that women are more susceptible to body image issues due to increased exposure to social networking sites. Such pressures are increased by the content floating on social networking platforms regarding idealized beauty standards.

The outcomes of the present study were in line with the study conducted by Choudhury and Reddy (2021) conducted a study to determine the relationship between physical appearance dissatisfaction and social media use and found that females were more dissatisfied with their bodies compared to males. The research also showed that the duration of social media use and exposure to idealized images have a positive correlation with magnification of the body image concerns, thus explaining the complex reaction between social networking sites exposure and perceived body image.

Choukas-Bradley et al. (2022), who noticed that social networking sites aggravate appearance anxieties in females. They concluded that social networking platforms left females conscious of their looks, due to being stimulated by exposure through photos and videos to idealistic self-representations and the need to achieve an idealized body. Also, the fact that females are exposed to ideal body forms by peers and celebrities in the digital space makes them more anxious about their physical appearance.

Further Table 1 reveals that the adult males ($M = 11.94$) scored significantly ($2.253, p < .05$) higher on diversion than females ($M = 11.40$), suggesting males use social networking platforms more for relaxation and a source of entertainment to evade boredom than females. This observation was consistent with the results found by Yan et al. (2018). This study revealed that adult males who indulged more in social networking platforms as a source of entertainment, a tool for socializing with others, meeting new people, and evading boredom in comparison to females who tend to focus more on establishing existing relationships.

The study conducted by Casale, Tella, & Fioravanti (2013) revealed that males tend to use social networking sites to make up for lacking social ties, frequently use these sites for leisure and entertainment purposes, whereas females use these networking sites for emotional and social satisfaction.

The results are consistent with the study conducted by Kircaburun et al. (2018), revealing that young males use social networking sites primarily for passing time, gaming, leisure, and relaxation, whereas females tend to focus more on rational use of networking sites and social interactions. Krasnova et al. (2017) found that while females concentrate on communication and information gathering, such as keeping in touch with friends and looking for educational content, males use social media primarily for entertainment, such as gaming and watching videos. This emphasizes how each gender uniquely uses social media.

Also, males ($M = 15.08$) scored significantly ($2.695, p < .01$) higher in cognitive needs than females ($M = 14.41$), indicating that males use the social networking sites more often for educational and academic purposes than females. The outcomes were consistent with the study conducted by Joiner et al. (2005), who found that mostly males use social networking platforms for gaming and amusement; on the other hand, females tend to use them for communication purposes, online discussions, and staying connected to people. predominantly engage with online entertainment, such as gaming or streaming media, that provides amusement or leisure.

As it is evident that social networking sites have a notable impact on behaviour, a study by Khan (2012) on 168 young adults (101 males and 67 females) showed a significant impact of social media. He found that males used social networking platforms more often than females, where the primary search area was academic and resources, seeking information, and the acquisition of knowledge.

Further, Table 1 also illustrates that females ($M = 18.56$) scored significantly ($3.286, p < .01$) higher on affective needs than males ($M = 17.46$). Seligman (2016), indicated that females have higher chances of demonstrating interpersonal warmth on social networking platforms than males. The tendency also presents the most general societal trends according to which females tend to communicate on social networking platforms to develop relationships and demonstrate empathy. In the framework of social networking sites usage, this emotional comfort is demonstrated by behaviors that are characterized by giving support, exchanging personal experiences, and sharing warm interactions.

A study by McAndrew and Jeong (2012) demonstrates that females spend more of their time on Facebook enriching their friendships and relationships than males, which is consistent with the results of the present study. Although both genders use the platform for socializing purposes, females are more prone to do things that create stronger emotional bonds, as males prefer to have a bigger, yet not so close, friend circle. Thus, the

findings are clearly consistent with the outcomes of the present study.

Table 2: Showing Correlation of Five Sub-Variables of Social Networking Sites with Physical Appearance among Young Adult Males.

SNO	Variables	Physical Appearance
1.	Diversion	.251
2.	Cognitive Needs	.233
3.	Affective Needs	.538*
4.	Personal Needs	.525*
5.	Social Needs	.388*

It is clearly evident from Table 2 that there is a significant positive correlation between various dimensions of social networking sites usage and physical appearance concerns among young adult males. As it is seen, there was a significant positive correlation of affective needs ($r = .538, p < .05$), personal needs ($r = .525, p < .05$), and social needs ($r = .388, p < .05$) with physical appearance concerns in young adult males. **Thus, Hypothesis H2 that there will be a significant and positive correlation between the five sub-variables of social networking sites usage and physical appearance among young adult males was partially supported, with affective needs, personal needs, and social needs showing a positive correlation with physical appearance among young adult males.**

Table 3: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of five variables of Social Networking Sites as a predictor of Physical Appearance among Males

Independent variables	r	β	t	R ²	R ² Change	F-ratio (R ² Change)
Social Needs	.388*	.334	6.227**	.150	.150	38.44*

Table 3 shows that the significant predictors of physical appearance concerns among young adult males are social needs ($\beta = 0.334, t = 6.227, p < .01$). Thus, a higher level of physical appearance issues was predicted by a higher level of social need among young adult males. Social needs accounted for 15 percent ($F = 38.44, p < .05$) of the variance in predicting the physical appearance concern among adult males.

As evident from Table 2, there were various notable positive correlations between the sub-variables of SNS use and physical appearance among males and females. In the case of male participants, there was a significant positive correlation of affective needs ($r = .538, p < .05$) with physical appearance. The high positive relationship between affective needs and physical appearance concerns among male young adults can be backed up by previous studies that note emotionally based active responses to appearance-oriented content in social networking platforms. The results of Galliotto and Crowther (2013) showed that muscular and slim male body images contributed to increased body dissatisfaction in men, which happened mostly in terms of internalization of body ideals and upward social comparison. All these processes are indicative of affective needs, as males

consume SNS content to gain emotional comfort and confirmation, which subsequently increases appearance-related dissatisfaction.

Further, Table 2 shows a significant positive correlation of physical appearance with personal needs ($r = .525, p < .05$) and social needs ($r = .388, p < .05$). The great connection between personal needs and physical appearance issues is justified by the research that highlights identity and self-worth that are attached to appearance on social media. Sharma et al. (2019) noted that the level of pressure to meet the ideal body standards portrayed by the media is much higher among male students, which implies that physical appearance has become a meaningful element of personal confirmation and self-assessment and is strengthened with the help of SNS exposure.

Moreover, Casale, Gemelli, and Calosi (2019) discovered that the perception of appearance-congruent same-sex profiles prompted the significance of physical appearance as a source of self-definite among males. The current finding corroborates the current finding through demonstrating a positive correlation between personal needs satisfied with the use of SNS and increased physical appearance concerns.

Table 4: Showing Correlation of Five Sub-Variables of Social Networking Sites with Physical Appearance among Young Adult Females.

SNO	Variables	Physical Appearance
1.	Diversion	.286*
2.	Cognitive Needs	.179
3.	Affective Needs	.586**
4.	Personal Needs	.542**
5.	Social Needs	.639*

Table 4 illustrates that there is a significant positive correlation between some sub-variables of social networking sites usage and physical appearance concerns among young adult females. As it is seen, there was a significant positive correlation of diversion ($r = .286, p < .05$), affective needs ($r = .586, p < .01$), personal needs ($r = .542, p < .01$), and social needs ($r = .639, p < .05$) with physical appearance concerns in young adult females. Thus, indicating that as diversion, affective, personal, and social motives to use social networking sites increase, there was a corresponding increase in physical appearance concerns in adult females. **Thus, Hypothesis H3 that there will be a significant and positive correlation between the five sub-variables of social networking sites usage and physical appearance among young adult females was partially supported, with diversion, affective needs, personal needs, and social needs showing a positive correlation with physical appearance among young adult females.**

Table 5: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of five variables of Social Networking Sites as a predictor of Physical Appearance among Females.

Independent variables	r	β	t	R ²	R ² Change	F-ratio (R ² Change)
Social Needs	0.639*	0.368	6.183*	0.408	0.408	29.637*
Personal Needs	0.542**	0.141	2.705*	0.441	0.033	6.475*

Table 5 shows that the significant predictors of the physical appearance concerns among young adult females were the social needs ($\beta = 0.368$ and $t = 6.183, p < .05$) and personal needs ($\beta = 0.141$ and $t = 2.705, p < .05$). therefore, a higher level of physical appearance was predicted by higher levels of social needs and personal needs among young adult females. These variables accounted for a total of 44.1 percent variance in the physical appearance concerns of adult females. Out of this total variance, social need accounted for 40.8 percent ($F = 29.637, p < .05$) and personal needs explained 3.3 percent ($F = 6.475, p < .05$) of the variance in the physical appearance concern among adult females.

As evident from Table 4, females have a strong, significant correlation between diversion ($r = .286, p < .05$) and affective needs ($r = .586, p < .01$) in relation to physical appearance. Thus, it states that as the diversion and affective needs increase, so do the physical appearance issues in females simultaneously. These outcomes are consistent with various studies, such as Fardouly and Vartanian (2015) proved that female undergraduates exposed to Facebook exhibited more body image disturbances and increased desire to appear good, in comparison to those who were exposed to non-appearance contents. This implies that affective use of SNSs, which includes tracking posts and comments

on appearance-related matters, exacerbates the worry over physical looks.

Likewise, in their integrated review, Ryding and Kuss (2020) have also found that passive exposure to appearance-based content and active emotional investment in self-presentation (e.g., posting filtered photos) were all consistently related to greater levels of body dissatisfaction in women. These observations are a clear indication of why affective SNS use demonstrates the greatest correlation with regard to physical appearance concerns amongst females in the current research.

The unintentionally, diversion-oriented SNS use support the appearance standards thus influencing the perceptions of physical appearance by females can be stated through Guo and Chen (2022) concluded that despite the leisure-based use of social media, excessive use of the platform showed individuals to ideal body images, which resulted in body dissatisfaction in the long term.

Further, it is observed from Table 4 that there is a significant positive correlation between personal needs ($r = .542, p < .01$), and social needs ($r = .639, p < .05$) with physical appearance concerns in young adult females, indicating that as the personal and social needs increase, the physical appearance concerns also increase in young adult females. The overall relationship between personal need and

physical appearance can be verified by a study conducted by Casale, Gemelli, and Calosi (2019), as they found females who viewed Instagram accounts with an appearance-focused profile also rated physical appearance as a more significant foundation of self-definition and self-worth. This is in accordance with the fact that SNSs do satisfy their personal needs by enabling them to create and confirm their identities, which is usually based on appearance-related indicators.

Aggarwal (2020) also confirms the same result in the Indian market by demonstrating that female college students rated social grooming, fatness judgment, and negative affect higher, which means that appearance gets into the focus of personal assessment. Therefore, the constructive relationship between the SNS usage and the personal identity reinforcement with the physical appearance concerns among young adult females is positive.

In line with this, Fioravanti et al. (2022) demonstrated that exposure to idealized images on SNSs enhanced body dissatisfaction in women with state appearance comparison as a mediating variable. This is the reason why the satisfaction of social needs by use of SNS is closely linked with increased concerns over physical appearance among females.

Conclusion and Future Implications

The current research examined the effects of social networking site (SNS) usage on young adults in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, focusing on their concerns regarding physical appearance and the mental health indicators of depression, stress, and anxiety. The independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the genders in the level of SNS usage, suggesting that females had a greater impact on the perception of self-image as compared to their male counterparts. This difference in means about physical appearance implies that women are more susceptible to body image issues due to increased exposure to social networking sites. Such pressures are increased by social constructs of idealized beauty standards online. The hypothesized relationships between social networking sites usage and physical appearance are also supported by the correlation analysis. The anxiety about physical appearance was also reported to have a positive correlation with social networking sites use, which implies that overutilization of social media was reported to have body image dissatisfaction in young adults, making them feel they were overweight, unattractive, or dissatisfied with their masculine or feminine appearance. This kind of social media withdrawal appears to derive from the fear of social comparison or such a critique in a social comparison that is more visual on an online platform. The significant differences in means and correlations used in this study validate the catastrophic impact of

social networking sites use on physical appearance perception among young adults, where young females were more prone to body image dissatisfaction in comparison to males. Such results indicate the ambivalence of social networking sites engagement. It may act as an asset and also a possible danger to the exacerbation of mental health problems.

The results of the current research also present significant implications in the future in terms of the increased role of social networking sites in issues of physical appearance among the young adults. The preventive interventions including media literacy programs, body image awareness programs, and psychoeducational approaches that stimulate critical examination of online idealized content are clearly required, especially in emotionally and socially susceptible users. The educational institutions and social media platforms ought to foster more diverse healthy images of body diversity and deemphasize the appearance-based validation. Although the sample size is good and the genders are evenly represented, the cross-sectional nature of the study and the sample participants who are young adults in the Shimla district limit the application of the findings in other cultural or geographical settings. Future studies should take the form of longitudinal and experimental studies, involve participants in different regions and age group and look at more mediating variables like self-esteem, social comparison and media internalization in order to understand the long-term impacts of SNS use on physical appearance concerns.

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