

Role Of Social Media Engagement on Self-Perceived Body Image Among College Students

Tejas Suryakant Chopade¹, Bahubali Jinnappa Geddugol², Akkamahadevi S Bergeri³, Shefali Daruwala⁴ and Samson Wilson Kamble⁵

¹M.Sc. (Nursing), Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Pune. Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) College of Nursing, Sangli Maharashtra, India 416414.

²Associate Professor & Head of the Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Pune. Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) College of Nursing, Sangli Maharashtra, India 416414.

³Clinical Instructor, Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Pune. Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) College of Nursing, Sangli Maharashtra, India 416414.

⁴Clinical Instructor, Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Pune. Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) College of Nursing, Sangli Maharashtra, India 416414.

⁵Clinical Instructor, Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University), Pune. Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) College of Nursing, Sangli Maharashtra, India 416414.

*Corresponding Author
Bahubali Jinnappa
Geddugol

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Abstract: Social media has become deeply embedded in the lives of young adults, shaping identity, communication, and self-perception. While these platforms offer opportunities for connection and learning, their highly visual and curated content can contribute to unrealistic beauty ideals and negative body image. College students, particularly those in the developmental stage of late adolescence and emerging adulthood, may be especially vulnerable to these influences. Against this background, the present study sought to assess the role of social media engagement on self-perceived body image among college students in selected colleges of Sangli and Miraj city. A descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted, and a total of 405 students aged 18 to 24 years were recruited using a multistage sampling method. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that included demographic information, patterns of social media use, the Social Media Engagement Scale (11 items), and a combined Body Image and Body Esteem Scale (47 items). Validity of the tools was established through expert review, and reliability testing yielded Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 and 0.76, confirming internal consistency. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic variables, engagement levels, and body image categories, while Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between engagement and body image. The results showed that while most students (64.2%) had normal levels of social media engagement, a considerable proportion (35.8%) demonstrated abnormal engagement. With respect to body image, the majority (73.1%) reported neutral perceptions, whereas 23.2% indicated negative body image and only 3.7% expressed positive body image. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.794$, $p < 0.001$) was observed between social media engagement and body dissatisfaction, indicating that greater engagement was associated with poorer body image outcomes. These findings suggest that social media engagement significantly influences body image perceptions among young adults. Interventions aimed at digital literacy, balanced online use, and the promotion of body positivity are essential to mitigate risks and support the mental well-being of college students in this population.

Keywords: Social media engagement; Body image; College students; Media literacy; Mental health.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented digital revolution,⁽¹⁾ with social media emerging as one of the most powerful forces shaping human interaction, perception, and identity. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube have not only redefined communication but have also restructured the very ways in which individuals perceive themselves and others ⁽²⁾. Within this virtual ecosystem, young adults and college students have become the most engaged demographic, often spending several hours daily navigating online spaces where appearance, validation, and comparison are central. The implications of this engagement are profound, particularly with respect to self-perceived body image, a psychological construct that encompasses how individuals think, feel, and evaluate their physical appearance ⁽³⁾.

Body image is not a static entity; rather, it evolves through continuous interaction with social, cultural, and environmental factors. Social media adds a complex new dimension to this process by constantly presenting users with idealized portrayals of beauty, fitness, and lifestyle ⁽⁴⁾. Unlike traditional media, social media is interactive and immersive, allowing users not only to consume but also to contribute content. This dual function intensifies the cycle of comparison, as individuals not only view but also measure themselves against curated images of peers, celebrities, and influencers. Studies suggest that such continuous exposure fosters dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and a distorted sense of reality, particularly among youth who are in the process of forming stable self-identities ^(5,6).

India, with its vast adolescent and young adult population, presents a critical context for understanding

these dynamics. By 2024, more than 61.5% of internet users in India were active on at least one social networking platform, with the majority falling between 18 and 24 years of age (7). This statistic underscores the pervasive presence of social media in the everyday lives of college students. Furthermore, semi-urban regions such as Sangli and Miraj reflect this trend, where students increasingly integrate digital media into their social, educational, and personal domains (8). The intersection of globalized beauty ideals and traditional cultural norms creates a unique set of challenges for these students, making them especially vulnerable to negative influences on self-perceived body image.

Research from both Western and Indian contexts highlights the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use. Prolonged engagement with appearance-focused content has been linked to body dissatisfaction, (9,10) low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and disordered eating behaviours. Visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have been identified as particularly influential, given their emphasis on photographs, reels, and videos that often depict unattainable or heavily edited standards of attractiveness. Importantly, the influence of social media is not uniform across genders. Young women are more likely to internalize the “thin ideal,” while men often aspire toward hyper-muscular physiques, both of which are reinforced by online representations (2,11). These ideals, however, often stand in contrast to the diverse body types and cultural standards within India, creating cognitive dissonance and dissatisfaction.

The college years constitute a sensitive developmental phase where individuals are simultaneously striving for autonomy, social belonging, and identity formation. In this stage, validation from peers becomes a critical determinant of self-esteem (12). Social media intensifies this process by making peer approval quantifiable through likes, comments, shares, and followers. For many students, self-worth becomes intricately tied to online visibility and acceptance, creating cycles of anxiety, comparison, and self-criticism. In addition, peer and parental influences play a key role in shaping perceptions, as discussions about appearance and comparisons with others often spill over from the digital to the offline world. This convergence makes body image a particularly pressing concern for students in this age group.

The “need for the study” becomes apparent when one considers the mental health consequences of poor body image. Research indicates that dissatisfaction with physical appearance is associated not only with low self-esteem but also with clinical conditions such as depression, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation (13). Social media serves as both a catalyst and a platform for these vulnerabilities, exacerbating them through constant exposure and comparison (14–16). While much of the existing evidence comes from Western populations,

there is a relative scarcity of data in the Indian context, especially in semi-urban cities like Sangli and Miraj. Given the cultural diversity, socioeconomic variations, and unique digital consumption patterns in India, localized research is necessary to accurately capture the magnitude and nuances of this issue.

Nursing and mental health professionals have a particular responsibility in addressing this problem. Psychiatric nurses are often at the frontline of identifying and managing psychological distress in young adults (16–19). By exploring the role of social media engagement in shaping self-perceived body image, nursing professionals can better understand the underlying factors contributing to students’ mental health challenges. This knowledge can inform early interventions such as workshops on media literacy, psychoeducation on body positivity, and the development of resilience skills that equip students to critically evaluate digital content. The findings can also contribute to broader public health strategies that address the digital well-being of young adults in India.

This study, titled “A Study to Assess the Role of Social Media Engagement on Self-Perceived Body Image among College Students in Selected Colleges of Sangli & Miraj City”, is designed with these objectives in mind. It seeks to assess the patterns of social media usage, determine levels of engagement, explore students’ self-perceived body image, and analyse the correlation between social media engagement and body image perception. The study assumes that most students are not only active users of one or more social media platforms but are also able to self-report their usage patterns and perceptions. By focusing specifically on college students in Sangli and Miraj, the study aims to provide insights relevant to semi-urban Indian populations that are often underrepresented in digital behaviour research.

The conceptual framework of the study is anchored in Pender’s Health Belief Model (HBM), which emphasizes constructs such as perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy (17). Applied to this context, the model helps explain how students’ engagement with social media influences their susceptibility to body dissatisfaction, their perceptions of its severity, and the barriers they face in maintaining a positive body image. Cues to action in the form of digital content and peer validation play a pivotal role, while self-efficacy determines students’ confidence in resisting or critically engaging with unrealistic standards. The integration of this theoretical framework ensures that the study is not only descriptive but also interpretive, offering pathways for understanding how social media and body image are interconnected.

In conclusion, the introduction of this study underscores the urgent relevance of examining the link between social media engagement and self-perceived body image

among Indian college students. In the semi-urban contexts of Sangli and Miraj, where digital media usage is rising alongside traditional cultural influences, the interplay of these factors has significant implications for young adults' mental health and well-being. By systematically analysing patterns of usage, engagement levels, and body image perceptions, this study aims to contribute to both academic knowledge and practical interventions. Ultimately, it seeks to foster healthier online practices, promote body positivity, and support the holistic development of students as they navigate the dual challenges of academic life and digital culture.

METHODS

Research Design and Approach This study employed a quantitative, analytical cross-sectional design to explore the relationship between social media engagement and self-perceived body image among college students in Sangli and Miraj, India. A cross-sectional design was considered appropriate, as it allows the simultaneous measurement of exposure (social media engagement) and outcome (body image perception) within a specific population at a single point in time. This design facilitated the identification of patterns and associations without requiring extended follow-up. The quantitative approach provided objective and measurable data, enabling the application of statistical techniques to examine the correlation between variables with precision.

Study Setting The research was conducted in selected senior colleges of Sangli and Miraj, two semi-urban cities in Maharashtra that reflect India's rapid digitalization and increasing social media penetration. Colleges were chosen based on feasibility, accessibility, and willingness to grant institutional permission. The academic environment of these colleges offered a representative setting to study young adults who are highly engaged with digital platforms and are in a developmental stage where body image perceptions are particularly sensitive.

Study Population The target population consisted of college students aged 18 to 24 years enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs at the selected institutions. This age group was chosen deliberately, as it represents late adolescence and emerging adulthood, a stage marked by heightened self-consciousness and identity exploration. Individuals in this group are among the most active social media users in India and are therefore especially vulnerable to the influence of digital content on self-perception.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Participants were included if they:

1. Were male or female college students between the ages of 18 and 24 years.
2. Were enrolled in the selected colleges in Sangli and Miraj.

3. Were active users of one or more social media platforms.
4. Provided informed consent to participate.

Exclusion criteria were applied to ensure the reliability of data:

1. Students absent during the data collection period.
2. Students with pre-existing physical or psychological conditions that could confound body image perception, such as severe psychiatric disorders or medical conditions affecting weight and appearance.
3. Non-users of social media, as they fell outside the scope of the study objectives.

Sample Size Determination The sample size was calculated based on an expected prevalence of social media usage of 61.5% (7) among Indian internet users, with a precision of $\pm 5\%$, a 95% confidence level, and a 10% margin of error. Using standard prevalence-based sample size formulas, the minimum required number of participants was estimated to be 364. To account for potential non-response or incomplete data, an additional 10% was added, bringing the final sample size to 405 students. This robust sample ensured sufficient statistical power to detect significant associations between the study variables.

Sampling Technique A two-stage cluster sampling method was employed to recruit participants. In the first stage, colleges within Sangli and Miraj were randomly selected. In the second stage, students were proportionally recruited from these colleges based on their enrolment numbers. This multistage strategy ensured that the sample was representative of the larger student population across institutions while minimizing selection bias.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into four sections:

Demographic Information This section captured participant characteristics such as age, gender, year of study, and commonly used devices for social media access. These variables provided context for subgroup analysis and helped identify demographic trends related to social media engagement and body image perception.

Social Media Usage Patterns Participants reported the frequency and duration of social media use, preferred platforms, and types of content most often consumed (e.g., fitness, beauty, lifestyle, entertainment, or educational content). This information facilitated a nuanced understanding of the patterns that may influence body image outcomes.

Social Media Engagement Scale (SME Scale) Engagement was assessed using an 11-item scale adapted to measure behavioural and emotional involvement in social media use. Responses were coded

on a three-point Likert scale (Always = 3, Sometimes = 2, Never = 1). The cumulative scores ranged from 11 to 33, categorized into:

Normal engagement (11–22): Balanced social media use with minimal negative consequences.

Abnormal engagement (23–33): Excessive reliance on social media, potentially interfering with daily life and emotional well-being.

Self-Perceived Body Image Scales Body image was measured using standardized and validated instruments, including the Body Image Scale (BIS) and the Body Esteem Scale (BES). The combined questionnaire comprised 47 items, with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5). Negatively worded items were reverse scored, ensuring consistency. Based on total scores, participants were classified into three categories:

- Good body image (<100): Positive self-perception and confidence.
- Neutral body image (100–149): Mixed or moderate satisfaction.
- Poor body image (≥ 150): High dissatisfaction with appearance.

The instruments were selected for their proven reliability and applicability in body image research, and their adaptation to the Indian student population ensured cultural relevance.

Validity and Reliability Content validity of the tools was established through expert review. The instruments were evaluated by 28 subject matter experts, including nursing faculty, psychiatrists, psychologists, statisticians, and senior college principals. Twenty-three responses were received and incorporated into the final version of the tools, with minor modifications made based on feedback. Reliability was confirmed through a pilot study conducted at Willingdon College, Sangli, involving 45 students. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The Social Media Engagement Scale yielded a coefficient of 0.7014, indicating acceptable reliability, while the Body Image Scale achieved a coefficient of 0.7612, reflecting good reliability. These findings confirmed that the instruments consistently measured the intended constructs.

Pilot Study The pilot study also tested the feasibility of data collection procedures. Conducted over one week, it allowed the researcher to identify logistical challenges, such as time management, institutional permissions, and participant recruitment during examination periods. The pilot confirmed that the questionnaire was comprehensible to participants and that the time required for completion was manageable. Adjustments were made to optimize clarity and flow in the final survey.

Ethical Considerations Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, College of Nursing, Sangli (IECBVDUCON). Written permission was also secured from the administrative authorities of the participating colleges.

Participants were fully informed of the study objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, with assurance that involvement was entirely voluntary and that withdrawal was possible at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained; no identifying details were recorded, and all data were securely stored.

Additionally, participants displaying extreme patterns of social media engagement or poor body image were provided with psychoeducation on healthy digital practices and body positivity. Where necessary, parents were advised to seek professional consultation from psychologists or psychiatrists, ensuring participant well-being was safeguarded throughout the study.

Data Collection Procedure Final data collection took place between January 1 and January 31, 2025, across three selected institutions: Dr. Patangrao Kadam Senior College (Sangli), SM Dr. Bapujirao Salunkhe Senior College (Miraj), and M.M. College (Miraj). A total of 405 students participated. Questionnaires were distributed in classroom settings, with clear instructions provided by the investigator. Responses were collected on the spot to minimize attrition. The systematic process ensured completeness of data and minimized response bias.

Data Analysis Data were coded and analyzed using appropriate statistical software. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were employed to summarize demographic variables, social media usage patterns, engagement levels, and body image perceptions. Inferential statistics were applied to examine relationships between variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess the strength and direction of association between social media engagement and self-perceived body image. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Reliability of the scales was reconfirmed using Cronbach's alpha on the final dataset, ensuring consistency of responses. Data analysis not only quantified the extent of social media engagement and body image concerns but also provided evidence of correlation between these constructs.

Summary This Methods section describes the systematic approach undertaken to assess the role of social media engagement in shaping self-perceived body image among college students in Sangli and Miraj. Through a carefully designed cross-sectional study with validated

tools, robust sampling, and rigorous ethical safeguards, the study ensured methodological rigor and relevance. By combining descriptive and correlational analyses, the

research provides a comprehensive foundation to understand the interplay between digital behaviors and body image within an Indian semi-urban context.

RESULTS

Demographic profile:

Out of 405 participants, 53.3% were between 18–19 years of age, 39% were aged 20–21, and 7.7% were in the 22–24 years group. Females constituted the majority (59%), while males accounted for 41%. Most participants were first-year students (43%), followed by third-year (30.4%) and second-year students (26.7%).

TABLE 1: Patterns of social media usage N=405

Sr. No.	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Most used devices for social media content		
a.	Mobile Phone	392	96.8
b.	IPAD	8	2
c.	Laptop	30	7.41
d.	Tab	8	2.0
e.	Android TV, Google TV	68	16.79
2.	Most commonly watched contents of social media		
a.	Celebrity Lives	82	20.25
b.	Cooking	132	32.59
c.	Entertainment	211	52.10
d.	Educational	182	44.94
e.	General Information	110	27.16
f.	Health & Beauty	64	15.80
g.	Sports	75	18.52
3.	Most used platforms		
a.	Facebook	54	13.24
b.	Instagram	243	60
c.	Snapchat	124	30.39
d.	WhatsApp	207	50.74
e.	You Tube	208	50.98
f.	Others	01	0.25
<i>(Note: Q1 to Q3: The percentages do not sum to 100% as multiple responses were sought.)</i>			
4.	Overall item spent on social media (hours/day)		
a.	Less than 1	156	38.52
b.	1 to less than 3	175	43.21
c.	3 to less than 5	55	13.58
d.	5 to less than 7	10	2.47
e.	More than 7	09	2.22
5.	Age of initiation of social media usage (In Years)		
a.	Less than 12	17	4.20
b.	12 to 14	51	12.59
c.	14 to 16	104	25.68
d.	16 to 18	171	42.22
e.	18 to 24	62	15.31
6.	Posting frequency on social media (times in week)		
a.	Barely Post	226	55.80
b.	Once	123	30.37
c.	2-3	30	7.41
d.	4-5	18	4.44
e.	6-7	8	1.98

Mobile phones were the primary device for accessing social media (96.8%). Instagram was the most frequently used platform (60%), followed by YouTube (50.9%) and WhatsApp (50.7%). A large proportion of students reported spending 1–3 hours daily on social media (43.2%), while 38.5% reported less than one hour. Most students began using social media between 16–18 years of age (42.2%). More than half of the respondents (55.8%) reported that they barely post content.

TABLE 2: Levels of social media engagement N=405

Sr.No.	Social Media Engagement	f	%
1.	Normal Social Media Engagement	260	64.2
2.	Abnormal Social Media Engagement	145	35.8

Overall, 64.2% of students demonstrated normal SME, whereas 35.8% showed abnormal SME, indicating higher levels of dependence and emotional reliance on social media platforms.

TABLE 3: Self-perceived body image N=405

Sr. No.	Body Image Perception	f	%
1.	Good	15	3.7
2.	Neutral	296	73.1
3.	Bad	94	23.2

The majority of students (73.1%) reported a neutral self-perception of body image. However, 23.2% expressed dissatisfaction, while only 3.7% reported positive perceptions of their bodies.

TABLE 4: Correlation between Social Media Engagement and Self Perceived Body Image

Sr. No.	Body Image Concern	Mean	S. D	R-value	p-value	Correlation
1.	Social Media Engagement	21.26	3.870	0.794	0.000**	Strong positive with highly significant.
2.	Self-Perceived Body Image	137.56	20.066			

Note: N= 405 Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Pearson’s correlation revealed a strong positive relationship between SME and SPBI concerns ($r = 0.794$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher engagement with social media is significantly associated with more negative perceptions of body image.

Summary of Findings

The results indicate that while most students maintain normal levels of social media engagement, more than one-third display excessive use, which is associated with heightened body image concerns. Although the majority reported a neutral body image, nearly one in four participants expressed dissatisfaction with their appearance. The statistically significant positive correlation underscores the role of social media as a key determinant of body image perceptions among young adults. These findings highlight the urgent need for interventions promoting balanced digital engagement and positive body image within college populations.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the role of social media engagement on self-perceived body image among college students in selected colleges of Sangli and Miraj. Using validated tools, the research revealed that more than one-third of students displayed abnormal social media engagement and nearly one-fourth reported poor body image. Most importantly, a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.794$, $p < 0.001$) was observed between levels of engagement and body dissatisfaction. These findings hold significant implications for understanding the digital behaviours of young adults and their impact on psychosocial well-being.

Social Media Engagement in Context The finding that 35.8% of students exhibited abnormal engagement aligns with global concerns about the addictive potential of social networking sites. Andreassen et al. (2017) observed similar patterns, linking excessive use to compulsive behaviours and lowered self-esteem (20). The current results reinforce the notion that social media

is no longer a peripheral activity but a central component of young adults’ daily routines. In this study, mobile phones were the dominant access point, echoing trends reported by We Are Social & Hootsuite (2023) (1), where India’s youth population demonstrated one of the highest levels of mobile-first internet usage worldwide.

Interestingly, engagement patterns showed that students often used social media during free time and for communication with peers. While this suggests a benign function of maintaining social ties, it also highlights the integration of digital platforms into daily life, potentially crowding out offline interactions and leisure activities. Withdrawal-like behaviours were less prominent, suggesting that while dependency is developing, it may not yet have escalated to clinical addiction for the majority. Nonetheless, the presence of abnormal engagement in more than one-third of the sample calls for preventive awareness before these behaviours intensify.

Body Image Perceptions The results showed that 73.1% of students held a neutral body image, 23.2% reported negative body image, and only 3.7% expressed positive perceptions. This distribution mirrors earlier findings in India, where adolescents and young adults commonly report ambivalence or dissatisfaction with their physical appearance (Yadav & Chakraborty, 2020) (11). The neutral category is particularly noteworthy. While it may reflect balanced perceptions, it may also represent uncertainty or vulnerability to external influences, leaving students susceptible to shifting toward dissatisfaction when exposed to appearance-focused content.

The high proportion of negative body image is concerning, as dissatisfaction is strongly associated with low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and maladaptive behaviours such as restrictive dieting or cosmetic interventions (Perloff, 2014; Sidani et al., 2016) (4,10). The cultural context intensifies this dynamic. In India, beauty ideals are shaped not only by globalized thinness and muscularity standards but also by local norms emphasizing fair skin, specific body shapes, and traditional expectations of appearance. For students in semi-urban settings such as Sangli and Miraj, this convergence of ideals may create heightened pressures, resulting in conflicted or negative body image outcomes.

Relationship Between Engagement and Body Image The most critical finding of this study was the strong positive correlation between social media engagement and poor body image. Similar relationships have been widely documented. Holland and Tiggemann (2016) found that greater use of image-based platforms was consistently associated with body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (2,6). Marengo et al. (2018) further demonstrated that internalizing appearance-related content mediates the link between visual social media use and psychological distress (9). The correlation in the present study ($r = 0.794$) underscores that engagement is not merely a correlate but a strong predictor of negative body image among Indian college students.

One explanation for this association lies in the social comparison theory, where individuals evaluate themselves by comparing with others. On platforms like Instagram and YouTube, comparisons are frequent, as users are exposed to curated, filtered, and often unrealistic depictions of beauty and success. Such comparisons erode body satisfaction and foster a persistent sense of inadequacy. Cohen et al. (2018) argued that while body-positive content may mitigate this effect, its reach remains limited compared to mainstream beauty ideals (12). The current study supports this perspective, as very few students demonstrated a clearly positive body image despite heavy social media exposure.

Theoretical Implications: Pender's Health Promotion Model The study was guided by Pender's Health Promotion Model, which emphasizes constructs such as

perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy. In this context, students with high social media engagement may perceive themselves as susceptible to negative appearance comparisons (susceptibility) and experience dissatisfaction that they interpret as harmful to self-esteem (severity).

Perceived benefits of social media use—such as entertainment, connection, and information—often outweigh perceived barriers, encouraging continued engagement despite negative consequences. Cues to action, such as influencer content, celebrity images, and peer validation, drive further interaction. Finally, self-efficacy, or confidence in resisting harmful comparisons, appears limited among many students, explaining the strong correlation between engagement and dissatisfaction. By framing results within this model, it becomes clear that interventions must enhance self-efficacy and awareness of risks while balancing the benefits of digital use.

Comparison with Existing Literature The findings resonate with several international studies. Tiggemann and Slater (2017)(2) documented prospective associations between Facebook use and body concerns in adolescent girls, while Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) emphasized the enduring influence of appearance-related comparisons across social media (5). The present results extend these findings to Indian semi-urban students, confirming that cultural context does not shield individuals from digital pressures.

At the same time, the neutral majority in body image perceptions offers a unique perspective. Unlike Western populations where polarization between positive and negative perceptions is more common, the presence of a large neutral group suggests a transitional state. With targeted interventions, this neutrality could potentially be steered toward positive body image rather than sliding into dissatisfaction.

Implications for Nursing and Mental Health practice from a nursing and mental health perspective, these findings underscore the need for proactive interventions. Nurses, particularly those in psychiatric and community health roles, are well-positioned to deliver body image education, media literacy workshops, and counselling support. Programs that foster critical evaluation of online content and promote body positivity can serve as protective factors.

Furthermore, identifying students with abnormal social media engagement provides an opportunity for early screening and preventive counselling. By collaborating with college administrations, health professionals can integrate psychoeducational modules into student wellness programs, thereby addressing both the behavioural and psychological dimensions of the issue.

Limitations: Although the study was conducted systematically, certain limitations must be acknowledged. As a cross-sectional design, it captured associations between social media engagement and body image at one point in time, without indicating changes over longer periods. Data were self-reported, raising the possibility of reporting bias in participants' accounts of their media use and body perceptions. The study was limited to selected colleges in Sangli and Miraj and included only students aged 18–24, which restricts generalizability to other age groups, regions, or institutional contexts. The focus was primarily on major platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, while other emerging platforms were not examined separately. Additionally, broader psychosocial factors such as family influence, peer pressure, and cultural beauty standards, which may also shape body image, were beyond the scope of this study.

Future Directions: Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify causal mechanisms between social media engagement and body image. Comparative studies across academic disciplines, rural versus urban settings, and different cultural groups within India would provide a more comprehensive picture. Moreover, exploring protective factors — such as resilience, parental support, and positive online communities — can inform the development of interventions. Incorporating qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, would also deepen understanding of the lived experiences of students navigating digital culture and body image pressures.

CONCLUSION:

This study contributes to the growing evidence that social media engagement significantly influences self-perceived body image among young adults. In Sangli and Miraj, where college students increasingly integrate digital platforms into daily life, excessive engagement correlates strongly with dissatisfaction and ambivalence regarding appearance. Interpreted through Pender's Health Promotion Model, the findings highlight the importance of enhancing self-efficacy and awareness while balancing the perceived benefits of online interaction. For nursing and mental health practice, the results call for targeted educational and preventive programs to foster healthier engagement and promote body positivity.

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