



The Unseen Consequence: How Instagram Affects Teenager's Perception Of Self

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ABSTRACT :

This paper aims to analyze the effect of Instagram on teenager's self-identity, concentrating on self-admiration, body preference, and self-confidence. Surveys and interviews conducted during the study help establish a correlation between Instagram use and its negative consequences on adolescents' well-being and perception of self. Findings indicate that high-frequency Instagram use significantly impacts body image, self-esteem, and social comparison. One common issue is low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges, as the platform promotes unrealistic images of beauty, wealth, and glamor. The results imply that instructional interventions to improve younger generations' use of social networking sites are imperative. Further research should explore the relationship between these identified processes and the long-term impact of Instagram usage, as well as cultural variability in adolescent support and experiences, to develop practical programs and guidelines.

Introduction :

In the contemporary world, social media networks have become a significant part of adolescents' lives, influencing their experiences and self-perception (Boyd, 2014). Adolescents are constantly engaged with these platforms, where interactions are ongoing and comparisons unremitting (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). However, beneath this digital sheen lies a growing concern about the profound changes social networks impose on adolescents' self-view and psychological state (Primack et al., 2017).

This paradigm shift began in 2020 with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global health crisis of the young generation. A shift to a confined home setting resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19 led to the frequent use of online platforms for social, educational, and entertainment purposes (Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescents and Youth Report, 2020). This rapid transition caused a distortion of traditional types of socialization, and as a result, adolescents experienced increased levels of loneliness, anxiety, and hopelessness (Loades et al., 2020). Additionally, the inability to go outside because of COVID-19 has led to increased screen time and dependency on social media, which may have even impacted brain development and thus intensified some issues concerning teenagers in addressing virtual social interactions (Anderson et al., 2021).

The teenage years are crucial in forming one's identity, personal perception, and physical appearance. This period is particularly important for emotions, and individuals are generally vulnerable to influences from social media. Researchers have concluded that there is a correlation between self-perception and mental health because people with positive views of themselves experience fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety and have stronger social networks (Huang & Alessi, 2020; Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2020). On the other hand, negative self-image contributes to several problems, including body image dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and other related psychological disorders such as anorexia nervosa and depression (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; McLean et al., 2015). Since self-perception is highly influential in the developmental processes of adolescents, it becomes critical to establish how aspects such as Instagram affect them.

Since Instagram is focused on visuals, it often promotes unrealistic expectations of what individuals should look like and the kind of life they should lead based on the edited and selected images provided by popular accounts and influencers (Fardouly et al., 2015). Developmentally vulnerable adolescents, especially high school students, stand at a high risk of developing low self-esteem when comparing themselves with such beautiful and physically fit images. Options such as filters and photo editing tools allow users to create a remastered version of themselves, which may lead to a worse distortion of reality compared to traditional comparison. Exposure to such content can have deleterious effects on body image and self-esteem (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

It is important to outline that the consequences of maladaptive self-perception caused by social media reflect not only aspects of the well-being of teenagers; they impact different spheres of teenage life, namely achievements at school, relationships with peers, and psychological condition (Rideout et al., 2010; Twenge et al., 2017). Different investigations have indicated that overdependence on social media leads to decreased performance in class, sleep disorders, and a higher prevalence of depressive and anxious disorders in teenagers compared to their counterparts who limit the amount of time

they spend on social media (Primack et al., 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). As young people strive to manage the complex social structures of social media platforms, they experience several difficulties that significantly impact their self-esteem and psychological state. Of these difficulties, lack of motivation is one. For example, teenagers in particular need the approval of others, and they constantly strive for it, going as far as posting their content on platforms that will attract likes, comments, and shares (Vogel et al., 2014). Such reliance on the approval of others can strengthen the dependence on this approval, which, in turn, brings increased anxiety and self-doubt when expectations are not met.

Social comparison, encouraged by the positively selected images and achievements that people post on their social media sites, can lead to alterations in the perception of reality and an overestimation of inadequacy (Fardouly et al., 2015). Kids and teenagers become stuck in a loop, where they measure their existence, looks, and accomplishments against the fake images they see online, and almost always end up dissatisfied. Specific concerns related to social media include body image among teenagers as an area of concern triggered by social media. Systematic exposure to idealized media images, combined with other easily accessible media images, including those on Facebook, which feature digitally altered images and unattainable beauty standards, can subliminally induce body dissatisfaction and negative body image in teenagers (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). In turn, teenagers learn these values and work to achieve impossibilities; as a result, these ideas are influential in developing a wrong perception of their bodies, which results in unhealthy outcomes, including body dysmorphia, disordered eating patterns, and poor self-esteem.

The findings indicate that beyond the effects of social media on personal self-concept, it also affects academic self-concept and peer relations. It was observed that consuming greater amounts of media content reduces academic performance, affects sleep quality, and negatively impacts cognition and focus in children (Rideout et al., 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Additionally, the shallowness of interactions and roles created for identity and the opportunities to form strong and long-lasting relationships on social media mean that adolescents may experience feelings of loneliness even when constantly connected to everyone else (Vogel et al., 2014). One of the potentially severe impacts of analyzing oneself through the perspective of an uploaded social media post is mental health; a crucial issue derived from digital communication. The literature review also identifies the amount of time spent on the use of social media as key risk factors for increasing the rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders among adolescents. Daily exposure to fabricated, unachievable images, the preoccupation with comparing oneself to others, and the need for approval disrupt the psychological health of teenagers and make them sensitive to any form of psychological and emotional disturbance.

Rationale of the Study

Although Instagram is a popular social media platform and has users among teenagers, studies on its effect on teenagers have not been carried out comprehensively, especially regarding their self-image, body image, and self-esteem. Much prior social media research compares different platforms, while little attention is paid to the distinct characteristics of Instagram, specifying how they might alter the users. This is the reason that motivates the following research question: How does Instagram impact the self-perception of teenagers?

Methodology

This research uses a triangulation method. Both the qualitative element (interviews) and the quantitative approach (surveys) are incorporated in this study, as the aim is to gain a richer, more in-depth understanding of the topic.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to establish the role played by Instagram in the perception of self among teenagers. More precisely, the purpose of the study is to examine the quality of the experience teenagers have with Instagram and to determine the correlation, if any, between Instagram usage and adolescents' self-esteem in numerical terms. Such a study design will enable an examination of the nature of changes concerning body image, self-esteem, and social comparison behaviors among teenagers as influenced by Instagram use.

Any changes in self-image online pose risks to the emotional well-being of adolescents, and thus this knowledge of Instagram's influence is vital. The findings of the current study will help in highlighting likely interventions and strategies that may reduce the negative impact of social media use by adolescents. These analyses establish a better understanding of how social media use, self-perception constructs, and mental health outcomes interact to ensure teenagers can benefit from the positive aspects of social media while minimizing any harm that might come along the way. In data collection for this study, the research will rely on the triangulation method, where both interviews and surveys will be employed to normalize the outcome in addition to the anxiety. The results obtained from the analysis will advance the understanding of the assessed relationships and guide future research and preventive efforts targeting more conducive use of social media platforms among youth. The hypotheses guiding this research are:

1. Increased use of Instagram negatively affects teenagers' body image and self-esteem.
2. Teenagers who spend more time on Instagram are more likely to engage in social comparisons and feel influenced by idealized images.

Literature Review :

The effects of social media on teenagers have been extensively studied, with numerous scholarly articles exploring its impact on self-esteem, body image, and emotional well-being. This literature review focuses on Instagram, a platform predominantly reliant on imagery, and examines its role through the lenses of Social Comparison Theory and Self-Discrepancy Theory, while also identifying gaps in current research and suggesting future directions.

Overview of Existing Research on Social Media and Self-Perception

Social media has become integral to teens' lives, shaping their experiences and perceptions (Boyd, 2014; Moreno et al., 2016). It serves as a crucial communication channel and a platform for identity exploration, offering both freedoms and psychosocial implications. Studies indicate a positive correlation between social media use and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression among adolescents (Primack et al., 2017; Vannucci et al., 2017). Twenge and Campbell (2018) further highlight the complex relationship between frequent social media engagement and psychological well-being, underscoring the challenge of navigating online interactions during crucial developmental stages.

Studies Specific to Instagram

Among social media platforms, Instagram stands out for its focus on visually appealing content, which significantly influences body image and self-esteem. Research by Fardouly et al. (2015) reveals that frequent comparison with idealized images on Instagram correlates with body dissatisfaction, particularly affecting adolescent girls. Tiggemann and Slater (2014) corroborate this finding, demonstrating a strong link between Instagram use and increased body dissatisfaction, exacerbated by filters and photo editing tools (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016).

Moreover, Mabe et al. (2014) highlight Instagram's association with eating disorders, emphasizing the platform's role in promoting unhealthy body image ideals among female youths. Slater and Tiggemann (2016) further discuss how the interactive features of Instagram, such as likes and comments, reinforce appearance-focused comparisons and contribute to negative self-perceptions. Additionally, Kleemans et al. (2018) found that exposure to manipulated images on Instagram can significantly lower users' self-esteem and body satisfaction, indicating the pervasive impact of digital alterations.

Theories on Media Influence and Self-Perception

Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves based on comparisons with others, a process amplified on Instagram through curated and often idealized images (Festinger, 1954). Vogel et al. (2014) provide contemporary evidence linking frequent Instagram use to heightened social comparison and diminished self-esteem among adolescents, reinforcing the applicability of this theory in understanding platform dynamics.

Additionally, Self-Discrepancy Theory, developed by Higgins (1987), explores discrepancies between one's actual self, ideal self, and ought self. Instagram's portrayal of the "perfect life" and beauty standards exacerbates these discrepancies, contributing to negative self-perception (Fardouly et al., 2015). The cultivation theory (Grabe et al., 2008) further elucidates how prolonged exposure to unrealistic media content on Instagram shapes perceptions of beauty and success, influencing self-image and mental health. Furthermore, Perloff (2014) discusses the interaction between media exposure and existing vulnerabilities, suggesting that those already prone to self-esteem issues may be more adversely affected by Instagram's curated content.

Impacts on Body Image and Self-Esteem

The impact of Instagram on body image and self-esteem is profound, particularly due to its visual nature. Cohen et al. (2017) found that Instagram users often engage in upward social comparisons, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and body dissatisfaction. The emphasis on physical appearance and the prevalence of edited and filtered images create unrealistic beauty standards that many teens strive to emulate, often resulting in negative body image (Chua & Chang, 2016).

Sherlock and Wagstaff (2018) report that Instagram use is associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression, partly due to the constant comparison with idealized portrayals of peers. This constant exposure to curated images can lead to a distorted self-perception and lower self-esteem, as users perceive a significant gap between their real lives and the seemingly perfect lives displayed online. Bennett et al. (2020) emphasize that the interactive aspects of Instagram, such as likes and comments, further exacerbate these feelings by providing a quantifiable measure of social approval or disapproval.

Brooks (2015) highlights that the pressure to conform to Instagram's beauty standards can also result in risky behaviors, such as extreme dieting and the use of appearance-enhancing products, to achieve the desired look. This can lead to serious health consequences, both physically and mentally, as teens strive to meet unattainable ideals. McLean et al. (2019) found that the engagement with fitspiration content on Instagram, which promotes extreme fitness and dieting, is linked to higher levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite advancements, research on Instagram and self-perception often relies on cross-sectional studies, limiting causal inferences (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2020). Longitudinal studies are needed to better understand how Instagram use impacts body image and mental health over time. Furthermore, while negative effects dominate discussions, exploring potential positive impacts of social media, such as social support for minorities (Rickwood et al., 2012), is essential for a balanced perspective.

Cultural influences on Instagram use remain underexplored, with most studies conducted in Western contexts. Examining how cultural factors shape adolescents' responses to Instagram could provide valuable insights into mitigating negative effects across diverse populations (Koutamanis et al., 2018;

Manago et al., 2015). Additionally, exploring the role of digital literacy in moderating these effects could offer new avenues for intervention, as suggested by Livingstone (2008).

Conclusion:

Instagram's influence on teenagers, particularly its promotion of idealized images, exacerbates social comparison and body dissatisfaction, contributing to various mental health issues. While current research predominantly focuses on negative outcomes, understanding potential positive implications and cultural variations is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies. Future studies should adopt longitudinal and culturally sensitive approaches to foster healthier social media use among adolescents. This comprehensive approach will help us navigate the complexities of social media's impact, ensuring that young users can engage with these platforms in a way that supports their development and well-being.

Methodology :

This research uses a triangulation approach to achieve an inclusive understanding of the impact of Instagram on teenagers' self-esteem. Triangulation involves using three or more methods to investigate one phenomenon to obtain reliable and comprehensive results. The paper employs a mixed-methods triangulation methodology, drawing on a literature review, content analysis, questionnaires, and interviews. This study uses both interviews and questionnaires to gain a comprehensive picture of how Instagram influences teenagers' body image, self-esteem, and social comparison. The study focuses on both subjective data, which examines personal experiences, and objective data, which gathers quantitative data that can be analyzed statistically. The qualitative part of the study entails the administration of semi-structured interviews, while the quantitative part is done through structured questionnaires.

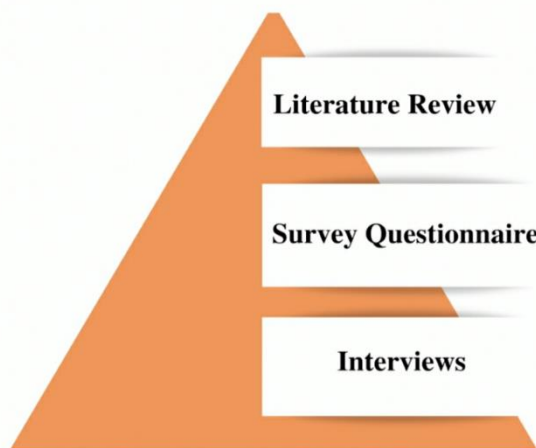


Figure 1: Triangulation Research Methodology of Mixed Methods for the study

Research Design :

The target group includes adolescents aged 13-19 who are daily active users of Instagram. A purposive sampling approach was used, ensuring the sample was evenly split according to age, income, gender, and region. The quantitative surveys included 317 participants, while 20 participants were selected for the qualitative interview. Out of the 317 survey participants, 162 were females (51%), while 150 were males (47%) with 5 participants identifying themselves as Non-Binary (2 %). The age distribution was as follows: 40 participants were 13 years old (13%) while 45 were 14 years old (14%) and 60 were 15 years old (19%) followed by 62 participants who were 16 years old (20%) 55 participants who were 17 years old 40 participants who were 18 years old and 15 participants who were 19 years old.

Some of the elements of sampling included the frequency of using the Instagram platform, which made participants use the platform frequently, one time per day, and the age of the participants, which was limited to those who were between the ages of 13-19 years. Any user who responded that they have no knowledge about the existence of the site known as Instagram was also excluded from the study as well as the users who were either lesser than the ages of 20-35 years or older than this age group.

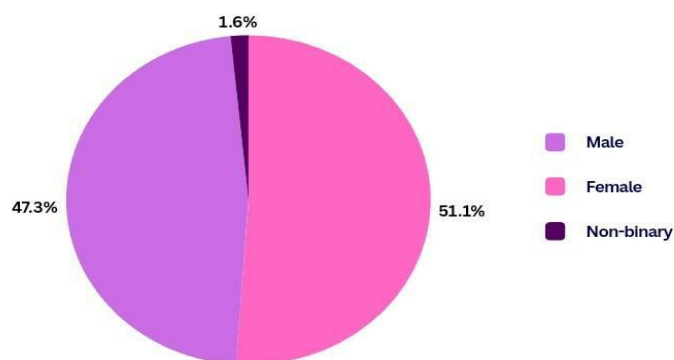


Figure 2: Image depicting the gender distribution of the survey respondents.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative Component: Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview questions were unscripted and intended to address teenagers' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of Instagram. The topics discussed included the most frequently used Instagram features, the kind of content encountered, emotions elicited by interactions on the platform, and the extent to which they felt changed or affected in terms of well-being and body image. Some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, while others were conducted via various video conferencing solutions, depending on participants' preferences and restrictions in terms of time and proximity. Most of the interviews lasted around 45-60 minutes and were conducted with participants' permission to record them. Thematic analysis was used to determine common themes and patterns in the qualitative data. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were then manually analyzed for patterns, and themes were developed through successive stages of coding and categorization.

Quantitative component: Structured Surveys

The survey contained only closed-ended questions, such as Likert scale questions where respondents could choose between agree and disagree, multiple-choice questions, and demographic questions. It collected variables like Instagram usage and its associated attributes, body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and social comparison. Online surveys were administered via a web-based secure survey tool. Respondents were invited through email or via a post on a social platform, with their feedback generated through an anonymous link. Qualitative data were analyzed and described, while quantitative data were statistically analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive measurements included sample mean, median, and standard deviation for the data collected, while inferential statistics, including t-tests, ANOVA, and regression coefficients, were used for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Some of the most important ethical concerns considered were consent, privacy, non-compulsion for participation, and participants' debriefing. The purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study were explained to the participants and their guardians if the participant was below 18 years of age. The researchers ensured that they had the participants' consent and the consent of the parents or guardians. The identity of the participants and the discussions held were kept anonymous and confidential. Individual details were excluded from the dataset, and all records were kept confidential. Participation in the study was voluntary, and every participant had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. After participation, the objectives of the research and the results obtained were explained to the participants. If necessary, resources for mental health were offered.

Limitations

Although the triangulation methodology increases the credibility of the findings, there are a few issues that should be mentioned. The reliance on self-administered interviews and surveys might lead to distortions, as some participants may underestimate or overemphasize their use of Instagram and its impacts. Additionally, there is always a possibility of not sampling an accurate representation of teenagers since there is constant variation in individuals' circumstances and experiences. The cohort analysis lacks the longitudinal placement that would allow for establishing causative relationships and changes over time. Longitudinal studies are suggested for future research to address these limitations.

Data Integration

The merging of qualitative and quantitative data was done at the analysis stage. The results obtained from the interviews complemented and deepened the statistical data elicited by the surveys. This triangulation of data sources provided a comprehensive depiction of how Instagram impacted the self-images of the teenagers.

Result :

This section presents the findings from both the quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews conducted in this study. By integrating these two methods, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Instagram affects teenagers' self-perception, body image, self-esteem, and social comparison behaviors. The quantitative data offers statistical insights, while the qualitative data provides deeper, personal perspectives on the issues explored. Together, these results highlight the multifaceted impact of Instagram on adolescent mental health and self-perception.

Quantitative data findings

The survey consisted of ten key questions designed to measure Instagram usage patterns, body image satisfaction, self-esteem levels, social comparison behaviors, and the type of content consumed. Responses were collected using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) for some questions, and direct percentages for others.

Table 1: Daily Time Spent on Instagram

S. No.	Time Spent	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Less than 1 hour	48	15%
2	1-2 hours	79	25%
3	2-3 hours	95	30%
4	3-4 hours	63	20%
5	More than 4 hours	32	10%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 2.85

Analysis: The data indicates that the majority of respondents (30%) spend 2-3 hours on Instagram daily, followed by 25% who spend 1-2 hours. This suggests that a significant amount of time is spent on the platform, which could influence their self-perception. The high usage frequency demonstrates Instagram's major role in teenagers' daily routines, potentially shaping their self-image and social interactions.

Question: How much time do you spend engaging with Instagram on a daily basis?

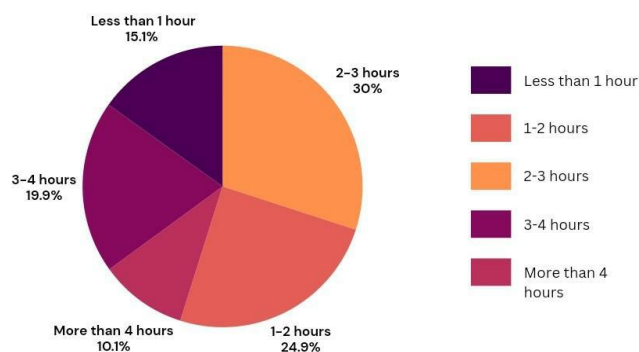


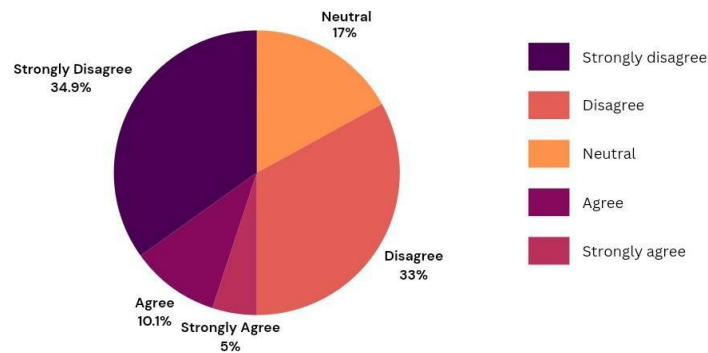
Table 2: Body Image Satisfaction

S. No.	Satisfaction Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly disagree	111	35%
2	Disagree	105	33%
3	Neutral	54	17%
4	Agree	32	10%
5	Strongly agree	16	5%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 2.07

Analysis: A significant portion of respondents (68%) are dissatisfied with their body image, indicating a potential negative impact of Instagram on body image satisfaction. The high number of respondents expressing dissatisfaction suggests that the visual-centric nature of Instagram may contribute to unrealistic beauty standards and self-comparison, leading to body image issues.

Question: To what extent do you agree with the statement, "I am content with my body image"?

**Table 3: Self-Esteem Levels**

S. No.	Self-Esteem Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly disagree	63	20%
2	Disagree	111	35%
3	Neutral	63	20%
4	Agree	48	15%
5	Strongly agree	32	10%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 2.6

Analysis: Over half of the respondents (55%) reported low self-esteem, suggesting that Instagram usage might be influencing their self-worth negatively. The correlation between low self-esteem and high Instagram use points to the platform's role in fostering an environment where adolescents feel pressured to meet certain standards of appearance and popularity.

Question: Do you think Instagram affects your self esteem positively?

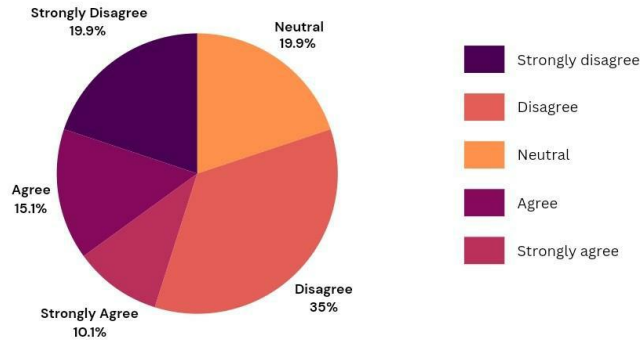


Table 4: Social Comparison on Instagram

S. No.	Comparison Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly disagree	32	10%
2	Disagree	51	16%
3	Neutral	63	20%
4	Agree	108	34%
5	Strongly agree	63	20%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 3.38

Analysis: A large percentage of respondents (54%) frequently compare themselves to others on Instagram, which may contribute to feelings of inadequacy. This behavior can lead to a cycle of negative self-assessment and diminished self-worth, particularly when teenagers compare themselves to highly curated and idealized images.

Question: Have you ever found yourself comparing yourself with others on Instagram?

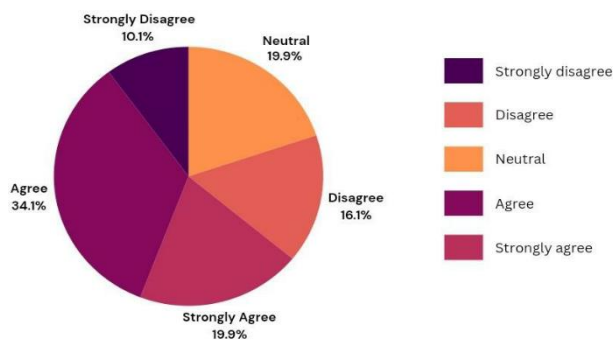


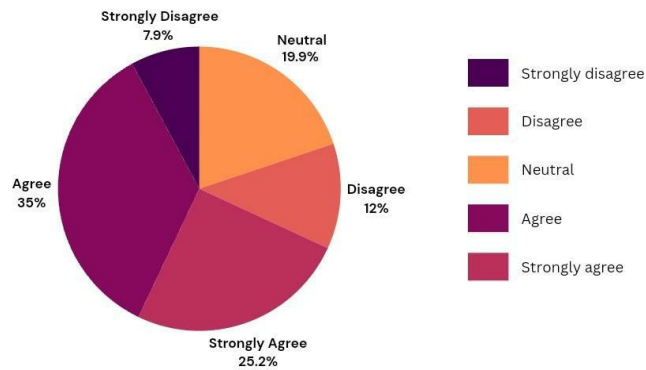
Table 5: Influence of Idealized Images

S. No .	Response Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly disagree	25	8%
2	Disagree	38	12%
3	Neutral	63	20%
4	Agree	111	35%
5	Strongly agree	80	25%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 3.57

Analysis: A significant number of respondents (60%) feel inadequate due to idealized images on Instagram, highlighting the platform's potential to negatively affect self-perception. The pressure to conform to these idealized standards can lead to increased stress and dissatisfaction with one's own appearance and lifestyle.

Question: Do idealized images on Instagram make you feel inadequate?

**Table 6: Validation Seeking**

S. No.	Validation Seeking	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly disagree	38	12%
2	Disagree	48	15%
3	Neutral	57	18%
4	Agree	95	30%
5	Strongly agree	79	25%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 3.41

Analysis: Over half of the respondents (55%) seek validation through Instagram, which could affect their self-esteem and overall mental health. This

dependence on external validation can create a fragile sense of self-worth that is contingent upon social media feedback, making adolescents vulnerable to fluctuations in their perceived social standing.

Question: To what extent do you seek validation through likes and comments on your Instagram posts?

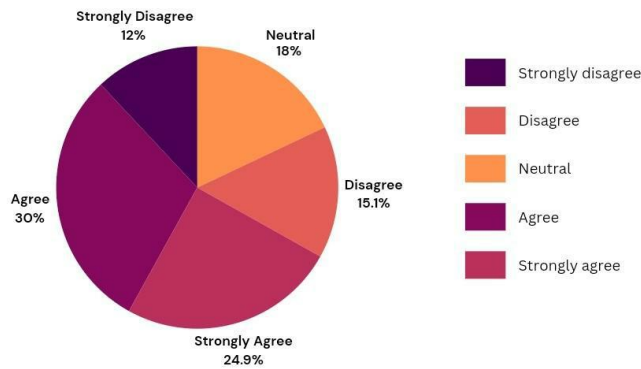


Table 7: Impact on Mental Health

S. No.	Mental Health Impact	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly disagree	32	10%
2	Disagree	48	15%
3	Neutral	95	30%
4	Agree	79	25%
5	Strongly agree	63	20%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 3.3

Analysis: A considerable percentage of respondents (45%) feel that Instagram usage negatively affects their mental health, which is concerning. This finding aligns with existing literature that associates high social media use with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

Question: Do you believe that using Instagram negatively impacts your mental health?

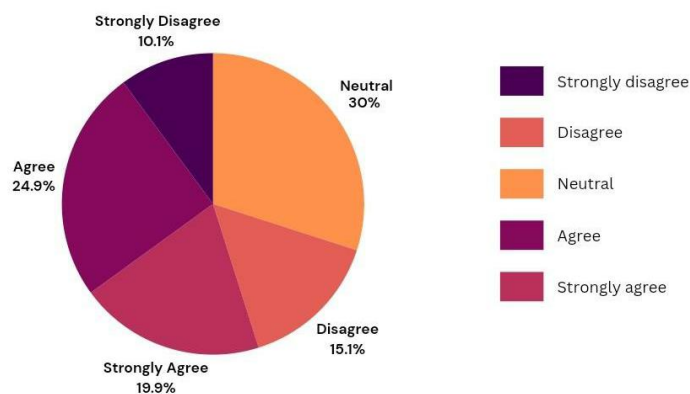


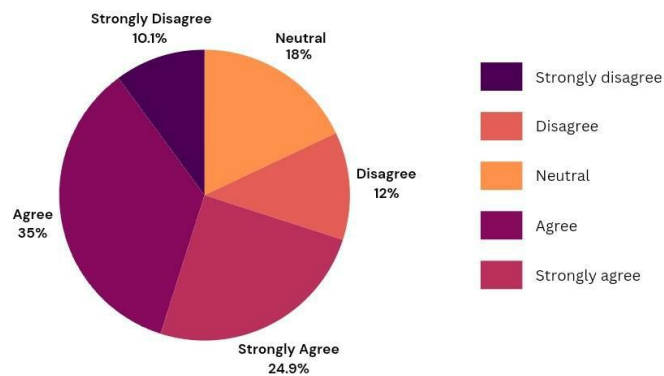
Table 8: Pressure to Conform

S. No.	Conformity Pressure	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly disagree	32	10%
2	Disagree	38	12 %
3	Neutral	57	18%
4	Agree	111	35%
5	Strongly agree	79	25%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 3.53

Analysis: A significant number of respondents (60%) feel pressured to conform to the standards seen on Instagram, impacting their self-esteem and body image. The continuous exposure to idealized representations of beauty and success can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and pressure to meet unattainable standards.

Question: Do you feel pressured to conform to the standards you see on Instagram?

**Table 9: Academic Performance**

S. No.	Academic Impact	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Strongly disagree	48	15%
2	Disagree	63	20%
3	Neutral	95	30%
4	Agree	63	20%
5	Strongly agree	48	15%
	Total	317	100%

Mean: 2.9

Analysis: Around 35% of respondents noted a decline in academic performance due to Instagram use, highlighting a potential distraction caused by the platform. This suggests that time spent on Instagram might interfere with students' focus and dedication to their academic responsibilities.

Question: Has your academic performance declined due to excessive Instagram use?

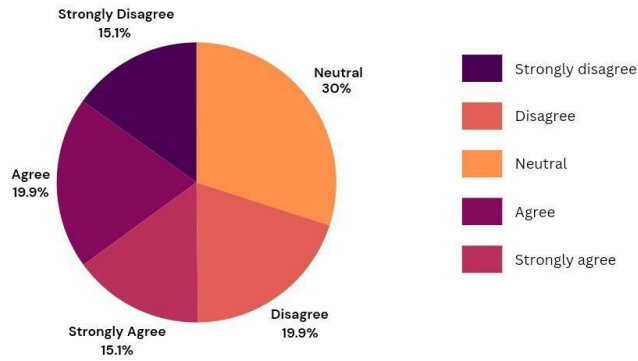
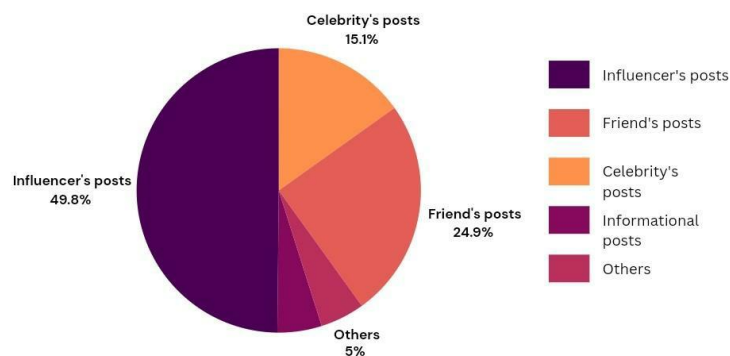


Table 10: Types of Content Consumed

S. No.	Content Type	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Influencer's posts	158	50%
2	Friend's posts	79	25%
3	Celebrity's posts	48	15%
4	Informational posts	16	5%
5	Others	16	5%
	Total	317	100%

Analysis: The majority of respondents (50%) primarily consume influencer posts, followed by 25% who focus on friends' posts. The high engagement with influencer content suggests that adolescents are frequently exposed to curated and idealized images and lifestyles, which may contribute to the pressure to conform and the negative self-perception discussed in previous findings.

Question: What type of content do you mostly consume on Instagram?



Qualitative Data Findings

Participants expressed a range of feelings regarding Instagram use. Positive effects included inspiration, enjoyment, and social belongingness. However, alongside positive emotions such as joy, satisfaction, and gratitude, many participants also reported feelings of jealousy, insignificance, and anxiety. For example, one participant said, “I feel happy when I see my friend’s post and what they are up to,” while another mentioned, “Sometimes I feel really jealous when I see influencers leading such wonderful lives.” Moreover, one participant stated, “Sometimes, I get anxious, thinking I am not good enough compared to what I see on Instagram.”

Appearance and self-esteem seemed to be the most common themes mentioned by the participants concerning Instagram's effects. Some stated that they felt pressure to adhere to the beautiful aesthetics promoted on the site. They indicated that the filters used in the photographs and the editing of the pictures played a crucial role in creating unrealistic expectations. One participant said, “Seeing all of them tall, thin, and beautiful, I feel as though I must be as well,” and another commented, “I edit my pictures so they look nice, but it feels as though I am not good enough without the filter.”

Self-comparison emerged as one of the most frequent topics identified by participants and involved comparing themselves to peers and popular Instagram accounts. These comparisons sparked feelings of low self-worth and expectations to match the level of fame and success seen in their friends’ lives. For instance, one participant stated, “I often find myself competing with other people and feeling that I am not as productive,” while another said, “There is so much pressure that comes with the need to get likes and comments on posts.”

The need to gain validation through likes, comments, and followers was also a common theme throughout the study. Some participants explained that their self-esteem depended on the number of likes they received on their posts. One participant stated, “If I post something and it receives many likes and comments, I feel happy,” while another participant stated, “Sometimes I actually delete a post if it gets little engagement; it makes me feel that nobody cares about me.”

Participants also stated that the content they consumed on the platform affected their experience and perception. The results revealed that the impact of self-schemas derived from influencers and celebrities was more negative than the positive feelings experienced when interacting with friends’ posts. For instance, one participant described their feelings by saying, “Influencers make everything seem so great and glamorous, and it feels like I should not be as unhappy as I am,” while another user noted, “I like to see my friends’ updates because it helps me to know what they are up to.”

Discussion :

The Discussion section provides an analysis of the results based on both quantitative and qualitative data in relation to prior research and their implications. It also highlights the limitations of the study and recommends areas for future research.

Interpretation of Results

The results of the present research offer important implications for understanding the effects of Instagram on teenagers’ self-image, body image, self-esteem, and behaviors related to social comparison. The data indicated that the overwhelming number of teenage participants spent considerable time on Instagram and had relatively low self-esteem, body image dissatisfaction, and higher tendencies toward social comparison. The quantitative findings support these remarks; the majority of the participants disclosed pressure to adhere to the skinny standard of beauty and the need for approval in the form of likes and comments. This suggests that due to the specificity of Instagram’s promotion format—emphasizing the visual aspect of posts and appealing to users’ desires to receive positive comments from friends and other users—the observed results show that the platform affects teenagers’ self-esteem.

The feelings described by the participants—jealousy, inadequacy, and anxiety—are similar to the quantitative data that reflect shortcomings such as low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction among the study participants. This emotional change can be linked to the constant barrage of body-positive and unrealistic images seen on Instagram, resulting in a culture of comparison and validation.

Comparison with Previous Research

This study’s findings align with those obtained by other scholars who have identified that social media has detrimental impacts on adolescent mental health. Similarly, in a study done by Primack et al. (2017), it was concluded that there is a positive association between the use of social media and loneliness and depression, which is in line with this research. In alignment with these studies, Twenge and Campbell (2018) documented a relationship between excessive social media use and reduced psychosocial well-being. Consistently, participants in the current study reported high levels of dissatisfaction and low self-esteem.

Furthermore, the results contradict the expected notion concerning the effect of idealized images on body dissatisfaction and self-esteem, with research by Fardouly et al. (2015) and Tiggemann & Slater (2014) showing that young women exposed to social media with selected and beautiful images have reduced self-esteem and increased body dissatisfaction. The current work, along with similar studies, emphasizes the role of the heightened presence of visual content on SNSs such as Instagram in adolescent self-identity.

Social Comparison Theory, proposed by Festinger in 1954, claims that people evaluate their own social and personal status by comparing with others. This theory is especially applicable when using Instagram since people spend much of their time viewing what others do, how they look, and what they enjoy. The implications of this study are in line with this theory by emphasizing that young people often use Instagram to compare themselves to their peers and celebrities, producing negative consequences such as low self-esteem.

According to Higgins' (1987) Self-Discrepancy Theory, people use one standard to look at themselves; that is, the actual self is compared to the ideal self and the ought self, leading to negative emotion as a result of the discrepancy. This theory is also revealed in the present study by the fact that through Instagram images, teenagers felt inadequate. This raises the terrible effects on individuals due to poor self-images and escalation of psychological issues.

Implications

In light of the results of this study, several conclusions can be made regarding the psychological effects of social media use among adolescents. These high levels of dissatisfaction with body image and self-esteem imply the necessity of prevention and intervention programs aimed at improving adaptive attitudes towards social media among teenagers. Young people, teachers, parents, and lawmakers should also be informed of the potential harm of Instagram, as well as other networking websites and applications, and improve media literacy and critical evaluation teaching among teenagers. By ensuring that adolescents learn that most of the images posted on social media are illusions and training them on how to analyze the media they consume, we can mitigate some of the adverse effects of social media usage.

The study also empathically acknowledges the culture of validation-seeking, which has become rife among teenagers on Instagram. Self-esteem and resilience-building activities, along with instructions to engage in real-world social interactions as opportunities arise, may prove beneficial in counteracting the influence of social media. Some interventions may include encouraging teenagers to participate in offline activities that make them feel valued, thus lessening the time spent searching for self-worth on social media and seeking real connection rather than online validation.

Furthermore, discussion about the use of social media should be encouraged among mental health practitioners when dealing with their juvenile patients. In addressing these issues as well as other pressures that come with the use of social media, therapists can assist teenagers in finding healthier ways of handling media and having a positive attitude towards themselves.

The study also indicates that social media sites themselves have a part to play in these adverse impacts. It is possible for companies behind Instagram and similar applications to introduce components that will avoid focusing on the appeal of youngsters and their numbers of followers. For instance, stepping away with likes on posts, promoting body-positive awareness, and posting content that highlights skills and achievements could go a long way towards making some improvements to the online environment.

Limitations

Although this study has offered valuable information that can help address the existing gap, it also has its own limitations. The use of self-reported data may bring a type of bias due to respondents' tendencies to downplay or overemphasize the degree of Instagram usage and its impact. One of the key limitations of the study is that the data collected is self-reported, and in this case, respondents may provide information in a manner that reflects the impression they would like to give. Future research should incorporate more objective data regarding social media usage; for example, screen time should be used alongside the current data.

The cross-sectional analysis restricts the identification of causality and changes in variables over time. Another limitation that could have been avoided is the usage of cross-sectional data, and the lack of studies with a longitudinal design would help determine the impact of Instagram on teenagers' self-esteem in the long run. More general longitudinal designs with longer time spans would be beneficial, as they would provide a stronger record of changes in self-esteem, body image, and social comparison behaviors to establish the effectiveness of causal connections between social media use and psychological results.

Furthermore, the current sample was heterogeneous, but it does not mean that it might similarly represent different teenagers from culturally or economically different backgrounds. Subsequently, these factors should be taken into consideration in future research in order to have a wider understanding of the effects of Instagram on adolescents. When comparing results in multicultural scenarios, one could seize variations in the impact of social media on self-estimation and mental state.

Although the qualitative part of the present study offered valuable information, the study's small subject population of only 20 participants was a drawback. Further research in the area needs to incorporate even larger qualitative samples, as this kind of research limits the number of participants and thus the range of experiences that can be obtained.

Future Research

Further, researchers should investigate whether the presented patterns of Instagram use and related changes in self-presentation are temporary or persistent in the context of longitudinal examination. It will also be helpful to analyze the possible positive aspects of social networking sites, which include features

like acknowledgment, affiliation, and affiliation with supporters. Information about what positive effects of social media could be helpful for formulating more accurate interventions, yet recognizing when cyber communication results in constructive consequences could also be valuable.

It is also important to look into practical inquiries, so that the influence of Instagram on self-identity should be studied with regards to cultural and socioeconomic factors. Control and comparison of the outcomes across different cultural contexts might shed light on general and differential effects of social media on adolescents. For example, investigating gender and success expectations, body image, and using social network sites intervention may aid in targeting specific groups.

Also, follow-up studies should look into the utility of different types of interventions that would help eliminate other side effects that come with social media usage. Research could assess the effectiveness of media literacy in preventing or reducing negative effects, the efficacy of specific mental health initiatives, and shifts in social media's influence on adolescents' self-esteem. Thus, the present research can help educators, parents, and policymakers make data-based decisions about the most appealing strategies to apply.

Another research area for future studies involves examining peer and parental mediation on self-presentation in teenagers when using social media. Assessing whether and how family functioning and peer relationships moderate adolescents' engagement in social media can guide interventions aimed at engaging both familial and peer networks to support more adaptive social media use.

Conclusion :

The findings of this study provide valuable information regarding the effects of Instagram on teens' self-concept, body image, self-esteem, and social comparison patterns. This is evident from the results of the quantitative data, which show that a significant number of adolescents use Instagram for several hours, leading to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and constant engagement in social comparisons. The qualitative results also confirm the emotional effects, with participants describing feelings of jealousy, ineptitude, and anxiety. These results align with previous studies that associate social networking site use with negative mental effects.

These findings support the hypotheses that increased use of Instagram negatively affects teenagers' body image and self-esteem and that teenagers who spend more time on Instagram are more likely to engage in social comparisons and feel influenced by idealized images.

Practical conclusions inferred from the presented research indicate prospective interventions, which may involve enhancing the effectiveness of media education intended for adolescents. People involved in the mental development of young people—parents, teachers, and government officials—should explain to kids how to evaluate information on social networks healthily. Further, social media platforms such as Instagram need to integrate programs that help avoid focusing on thin beauty as an ideal model and set up new features that do not measure self-esteem through likes and comments.

Further research should be performed to conduct longitudinal studies that will help in discovering the long-term impact of Instagram on teenagers and study the potential benefits of social media use. In this way, precautions can be taken in a balanced manner towards the development of strategies that would allow adolescents to gain advantages from utilizing posts and blogs on social media platforms without falling victim to its negative impacts.

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