

From Social Media Use to Depressive Symptoms: Exploring Mediating Mechanisms of Body and Appearance Anxiety in Adolescents

Zhihui Song

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Colorado Denver, Denver, USA
zhihui.song@ucdenver.edu

Abstract. Even though mobile device ownership and algorithm-based content distribution are more common nowadays, social media is still an important part of the lives of teenagers. Social issues include lack of confidence in appearance, body anxiety, and depression. The study provides a systematic review based on the studies that consider the path from social media use to depression through the lens of body and appearance anxieties. Using literature analysis combined with review methods, it investigates a number of studies that were carried out across cultures with varying contexts, including those that were cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental, in order to depict the psychological pathways whereby social media, among others, influence upward social comparison, self-objectification, and quantitative valuation. The findings indicate that there is a strong and positive link between the amount of time spent on social media and the anxiety that many adolescents feel about their appearance and body image. These anxieties act as mediators between the relations of online idealized content and depressive symptoms, whereas sleep problems, fear of missing out, and low self-esteem play a mediating role. There are various factors that influence the impact of these systems, such as gender and technology differences, as well as cultural contexts. The conclusion is that the social aesthetic standards of online platforms exacerbate emotional hardships and depression in teenagers. A multi-level intervention approach is encouraged, highlights the need for longitudinal, multidisciplinary research to better support adolescent mental health in the digital era.

Keywords: Social media use, Adolescent mental health, Body anxiety, Appearance anxiety, Depression

1. Introduction

Along with mobile internet usage and more precise platform algorithms, social media is now snugly woven into the nature and routine of teenagers. Due to the dual nature of their innovation options, they have restructured the way people give and receive information, and they have generated the environment in which they think. Meanwhile, it has also been noted that levels of anxiety about one's appearance, worry about body image, and depression among people have gone up, so it seems that there is one more reason for adults to stay concerned about the mental health of youth. Medical

science has proved that adolescents who use social media excessively face problems pertaining to body image and emotional issues. Kumari similarly reported that heavy social media use predicted increased depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem among adolescents [1].

The literature has created an abundance of findings on social science. Firstly, the social media standards idealized by adolescents result in the tendency to make upward social comparisons, and the beauty filters as well as the quantitative indicators such as "likes", "followers" further intensify the perception that physical appearance is all-important, increasing appearance and body anxiety significantly. Nevertheless, views also differ among scholars on the way different social platform types and gender affect this process, indicating that the mechanism having a primary role in this regard may be rather complicated. Secondly, social media is related to teenage depression via not only direct effects like information overload and social pressure but also through indirect effects that are mediated by body image or sleep problems. Moreover, majority of the studies that are currently available are based on the single-subject model that is devoid of systematic studies of links between the three psychological constructs, therefore offering minimal combined analyses of interventions.

Thus, this study presents the theme of adolescent mental health in the digital age of life. The research systematically evaluates the physiological processes by which social media builds up appearance anxiety, body image anxiety, and eventually depression, followed in the progressive social pathway of "social media use → body-image anxiety → depression." The paper applies both literature analysis and integrated review modes in order to compare various research strategies dealing with the cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies on mental health among youth and social media on a national and international level, both theoretically and empirically, drawing the social and psychological attributes of content sharing, algorithmic recommendation, and social comparison of psychological distress. This article aims to explain the connecting process of adolescents' psychological issues in the digital society and provide a conceptual framework for the families, schools, and platforms to design interventions to help the healthy development of adolescents at the physical and mental level. Qualitative studies of Indonesian adolescents and their parents underscore that social media offers emotional, social and practical benefits but also introduces emotional, social and informational risks, displaces more meaningful activities and, through exposure to curated appearance-focused content, fosters social comparisons and body dissatisfaction [2]. Examination, this study detects deficiencies in existing research, propose factors like platform-specificity, gender, cultural background that need more tests, and highlight the value of cross-disciplinary cooperation and healthy long-term follow-ups in the future for theoretical frameworks and optimization of practical interventions that.

2. Introduction to core concepts

Cognizing the psychological constructs inherent in the study is key to mastering the problem of the relationship between social media utilization and adolescents' mental health. The introduction and critical review of the three main concepts perceived are body anxiety, appearance anxiety, and depression. Here this study shall focus on defining them, the difficulties people have in differentiating them from adjacent or similar ones, and then the developmental and socio-cultural contexts in which they exist.

2.1. Body anxiety

Body anxiety is defined as the aesthetic-emotional distress, which comes from imagining one's body as incongruent with the publicized body ideals, mainly in terms of size, weight, and shape. It

appears in symptoms that include fear of weight gain, excessive paranoia about certain body parts, and repetitive checking of perceived bodily flaws. As indicated in the research by Tiggemann and Slater, this is due to the fear of the gap between one's embodied self and the social standards of beauty.

However, body dissatisfaction is a more general term, covering the lack of contentment towards the whole body, the fact that one gets more anxious and vigilant is what makes it the anxiety of the body. The focus here becomes fear and hyper-awareness—it is all about anticipating the social comparison or judgment outcomes rather than to face the outcome of the unfavorable static evaluation. Contrary to this, point of view, unhappiness may only remain restless, however anxiety is fueling avoidance actions (e.g., avoiding mirrors and refusing to post photos) and safe-seeking strategies (e.g., excessive dieting and compulsive exercising).

During the course of this stage of growth, teens have to deal with increased body changes, peer problems, and evaluative stress from the external world. At this stage, the majority of individuals gain an understanding of their physical bodies, which becomes the center of their self-concept, as well as the object of their personal reflection. On the contrary, social media intensifies the magnitude of the phenomenon because it offers billions of images and filtered bodies that, eventually, deepen the chasm in between peoples and their body goals. Thus, here is how this takes place: body anxiety is numb due to the capabilities of social media to influence and predispose adolescents to some issue in their mindset.

Chronic body anxiety is integrated with disordered eating, body over-checking, compulsive gym activities, and denying social situations where appearance-based judgment is mandatory. These acts not only break down the physical being but also perpetuate the low self-esteem circles, which in many cases are a result of body anxiety, and can act as a trigger to depressive symptoms. Recent research in vulnerable communities has shown that approximately half of adolescent girls and one-third of boys are dissatisfied with their bodies; highly visual social media platforms amplify idealized body images—many of which are digitally altered—and reinforce poor body image, eating disorders, and an increased risk of anxiety and depression [3].

2.2. Appearance anxiety (look anxiety)

Look anxiety, or "appearance anxiety," involves the fear that forms negative cognitions about the face value, skin, and visible feature proportions, often displaying hypercritical judgment towards them, thus generating anxiety about how people will judge one's body [4]. Fardouly and Vartanian also described such as this is an effect that could be felt after comparisons to peer beauty standards and the media.

There are major differences despite the fact that body and look anxiety both depend on the exposure to social comparison and acceptability of a uniform standard:

Look anxiety stresses on facial features and external aesthetics. Body anxiety highlights physique, size, and weight. Major social media platforms take this forward: selfie-centric platforms (Instagram, TikTok) serve to amplify look anxiety through filters and editing tools, and fitness-focused feeds trigger body anxiety for more workouts. Differentiating them brings about a more proper intervention.

The most common look anxiety tends to be related to compulsive selfie-snapping, excessive use of beauty filters, or excessive editing before posting. Quantified peer feedback (likes, comments, etc.) further validates this form of self-surveillance. Peer groups might plant in young members of their group so-called "perfection norms", which in result make it hard for natural facial features to be appreciated and fear towards the unfiltered self rises.

Look anxiety does not spread evenly among the cultures. In the East Asian primacy, for mention, clarity of the skin as well as facial symmetry stands out while in the case of western cultures, the proportion of the smile aesthetics or face contours may be of an elite fashion. Communications on social media have the effect of involving but also hybridizing these standards, causing adolescents to be subjected to different sets of sometimes conflicted ideals.

2.3. Depression

Youth depression, understood as the clinical condition, which is characterized by permanent abnormal, low mood, lack of self-satisfaction or pleasure, and the frequent association with abnormal behavioral manifestations such as aversion of any pictorial representations, distraction, and impairment of everyday life. Multiple researchers, for instance, relate it to a syndrome, the one which can, if left uncontrolled, interfere with students' school, relationships, and other developmental tasks [5].

In contrast to the look and body anxiety, being vigilant and hypervigilant at the concerned judgment, depression manifests as pervasive fatigue, hopelessness, and emotional withdrawal, a burst of despair, and detachment. It is equally important to understand that anxiety itself can trigger depression. Adolescents who are troubled by appearance anxiety may feel they constantly fail to meet the standards that they perceive, which undermine their self-worth over time and consequently may trigger depression.

While neurodevelopmental science reveals high-level peer and social influences teenagers are exposed to in this environment and consequently their susceptibility, depression spirals as a result. It is also here that the very self-criticism of an individual gets most severely hurt when social media projects this idea that physical beauty is a deciding factor in one's self-worth. Regarding adults, youth might not be sufficient to have a reliable coping mechanism or mechanisms in place for resilience against such happenings. Peer influence and perceived social norms on social media also exacerbate this vulnerability; adolescents often adopt behaviors rewarded with popularity and peer feedback and align their self-presentation with perceived norms, reinforcing external validation as a measure of self-worth [6].

3. The impact of social media on look anxiety and body anxiety

Design and key finding. Hogue and Mills examined the relationship between a large adolescent sample ($n \approx 821$; ages 13–18) through a questionnaire measuring (a) frequency of social media use, (b) tendencies of vertical social comparison, and (c) body anxiety. The principal finding is consistent with the comparison theory: adolescents with increased exposure to content featuring high-value or good-body images are prone to higher likelihood of upward comparisons, followed by the conjoining of the body anxiety with a sense of the self [7]. More specifically, the relation was not a straightforward "social media usage $\rightarrow$ internal anxiety"; it was a processual: the idealized examples xenophobia exhibited in the social media became the fuel of social factions who fixated on mean and harmful appraisals, leading individuals to social comparison and courser anxiety.

Interpretation in a mechanism-first frame. The existing mediational evidence highlights tip-off composition (thegreater relative density of comparatives) and evaluation salience (the social rewards) as an explanatory mechanism that is more operation than the unmeasured plain-talk duration on social media. Theoretically, this matches a dual-process account: Measurable is the fact that continued contact with curated, idealized bodies forces the internalization of boundaries in the ideal standards that are frequently retracing empowered reasoning to sources with high-status

exemplars and ultimately bringing up high prevalence of ruminative aspiration; followed up by walking down the cognitive- affective continuum from empathy for a deep-rooting gap to self-reproaching reflection and actually body-checking.

Measurement considerations. Apart from the innovative approach towards mediators, which is definitely an improvement of the present mechanism, it still relies on the self-reported exposure, as well as lack of statistical tools. The extent to which self-report may further complicate these distinctions among different types (e.g. Fit Inspiration, its effectiveness in art tutorials) or groups of people (e.g. Fashion bloggers, their followers). Cross-sectional mediation lacks the possibility of ruling out reverse causality (i.e. Body size dissatisfaction among individuals prone to it may be the reason to speculate and search idealized contents). Nevertheless, the demonstration of the process is given by the variable of context (comparison) which lays a dependable base for the framework of the policy and the design: take off these conditions that trigger the repeated upward tendencies [7].

Limitation noted in the outline. A major importance item is the non- election of platform-type variety. Future studies should integrate multiple platforms to better evaluate the variance of effects: image-how/what-goals/pages and text-how/what-visibility/privacy form challenges all important. Thus, differences in effect sizes from one study to another, which is influenced by the platforms on which they are analyzed, are more likely. Study 2: Fardouly et al—Beautified selfies and acute look anxiety

Designs and key findings (in the outline, to be paraphrased). In a study by Fardouly et al., 150 college-age participants were randomized into a group browsing “beautified selfies” or a group browsing “non-beautified” photos [8]. These results are enlightening as they advocate an immediate causal effect which is due to selfies to which filters and retouching are embedded in the selfie workflow that results-directly to look anxiety. Among the virtual visitors of such Instagram groups, the “likes”, “shares”, and “comments” produced by the audience embodies primary social feedback. Besides, the subjective evaluation of such groups members can be to some extent qualitative or quantitative. For example, when appearance-related information is the major part of these groups members’ perspectives are significantly affected. Overall, the remarks uttered by the group members are supportive of the causal claim noted here. The aesthetic tools used in selfies and beautification filters trigger the process of self-objectification, where individuals compare themselves to algorithmically amplified illustrated ID models-algorithmically enhanced digital representations of beauty. Thus, adolescent audiences, in those situations, perceive themselves primarily as objects that can acquire an acceptable appearance in a pre-determined aesthetic standard [8,9]. Furthermore, features of these selfie- and beautification-grounded pipelines include narrowing the range of acceptable variance (e.g., skin texture and asymmetries), decreasing the prospects of the users feeling safe when youngsters were making selfies by press-posting (multiple retakes and tough edits) and performing monitoring operations [8,9]. These activities, although. At the same time, they were not only short-term anxiety relievers but also negatively sustained the mental imbalance through associated negative reinforcement [9].

Limitations and design implications. The limited field experimentation can detect acute impacts of older youths' anxiety, while the long-term chronification of this condition requires the evidence-based exploration of effects of redesign features (such as filter disclosures, default off minors' beautifications, and privacy-by-default measures). Nevertheless, design intersection in this specific instance should not be misled as resulting from a simple mischief of the tool (beautification) it involves but actually from adolescent's attempts to adjust the process. Beautification features should be optional, not the default, especially for minors [9].

3.1. Brief description of other studies

Time-intensity risk profiles. The schematic shows that excessive use (>2 hours/day) will lead to a 2.3 likelihood of body-image anxiety. Though the title of this article is not mentioned in your reference list, the idea of assigning body-image concerns to girls and women of the teenage age has a lot of precedent in similar studies that also involved female adolescents [10]. Evocable findings include not only minutes spent but also subject matter which is deemed appropriate (i.e. appearance-imprinted content is not ranked highly with fitness-related posts). Furthermore, they must be time-sensitive indicators which have to be based on content structure and tools rather than minutes [10].

Quantified social valuation is basically the measure of views and followers and the weightage placed on the beauty.

Teenage, self-proclaimed beauty experts, in research analysis authored by Vartanian noted that, public tiktok and Instagram pages that include individual contributions (liking, following, and posting) would reinforce the emphasis on the teenager's appearance and indirectly increase the risk of look-harm. The reference to the same literature proves the position in which digitalization, socialization, and the media elements have a negative effect on today's youth mental health [3]. The idea that sharing visible scores that derive from the popularity of likes, sharing, and peer evaluation triggers social feedback metrics such as likes and visible scores, and a mechanism for improving self-identity. Quantified features of these tools significantly intervene in the adolescent's already low-key self-esteem, make more value judgment on the looks, and is, therefore, appearing emphasized by the media. Teenagers often suffer from anxiety when they wonder which selfie will be chosen to be posted as same or similar selfies mean that the look will not outshine the others and what social judgment will make upon them.

Amplifying by appliances, comments, and 'Trans-forms' templates. Although the understanding of which article was written by which authors or in which year is lost, the literature you quote shows the social platforms often amplify trending appearance concerns through algorithmic emphasis. In those systems, the highest participation results in the appearance of the topics that are most in touch with the visitors' own affiliations, generating the "corona effect". Additionally, this information will be predominantly outward opinion (such as rating / critiquing appearance) and subjective about the group members' behavior; thus, the value the content of such groups mainly is on appearance-related information. This is not marginal clarifications, but rather, framing features aimed to pushing weak communities/custom respective towards the pattern of anxiety towards appearance/body [8,9].

3.2. Research summary

Indeed, a strong association is observed between platform usage and body image anxiety. Certainly, the social media usage has an effect through the kind of content that is shared (idealized/edited images), the exposure (chronic, globally, and largely) and what happened later (how valuable when shared it is), not by total number of minutes being on the internet [7,9,10].

Increased levels of enjoyment of social media produce and perpetuate beautiful and glamorous ideals that exist in the digital realm. Ideas about how to live, act, or present oneself can spread to others like the rapid digital dissemination of beauty ideals. The spread of these ideals via the internet, as well as social media, makes it both easy and costly for those pursuing them, but with it, success is far from a one-size-fits-all concept, as it creates a society where everyone is striving for the same conception of beauty (exaggerated eye proportions, caloric or part restriction, unmitigated workouts). Through social media platforms, such as Instagram, there is an extremely extended

collection of features, from built-in filters to reshaping that social media influencers on an individual or influencer basis uses on oneself to enhance one's looks and fit within the ideal group aesthetic.

The proof demonstrates uninterrupted tendencies. Researches have been conducted on the levels of psychological complexities, and they showed wearing masks during the pandemic produced a high percentage of youth with different age groups. This work has shown that mental health issues have established three outcomes in terms of the economic health of society. The worsening of the economic case increases the pervasiveness of mental health issues in the general population. Mental health issues must be placed on a par with revitalization of the economy. They are not at odds with each other but can be employed towards the production of a completely healthy populace.

Joining the digital environment implies obeying the social mechanisms of uploading and posting. However, sharing personal events in the online space could be seen as no longer optional but becoming a mandatory step for receiving a big audience attention and therefore social media popularity. Regular updates appear magnificently in the eyes of people whom they have in mind, and they can not stop trying to be as famous as their competitors, so they just post or text more often. It commands a carefully planned out lesson or there below many in the know who succeeds in branding.

The most striking, at that, comes from the fact that things (what to make poster among other classes of things), the effort that people put in attention on them (have anticipation with kinsmen and friends surrounding you), and the value you place on the process in view of the fact that the milliseconds of your time spent on social media come second rarified perfume [7,9,10].

Such agitation is liable to the look and body anxiety causing teenagers, which persist when teens scroll through social media accounts and videos every hour or day for instance. Transmission and post on online media sites merely aggravate the way people define looks and creates pressure for people to satisfy that vision. Resulting in adolescents getting exposed to and being influenced by the aesthetic standards that are specifically promoted by these online platforms. This may in turn lead to downplaying the importance of character traits and abilities in the validation of other people and themselves. Social media has been used to support studies demonstrating that prettiness is a key feature of such growth of views, likes, and shares. It has to be highlighted that public metrics create issues where people compare their looks against those of the people around or girls they know to determine if they are 'in' or 'out'. In this sense, the filters users select can reinforce specific aesthetic standards on themselves (more beauty-related) or which metrics (likes) they chase may be especially important.

Noteworthy findings of social media anxiety and teen angst are that (dis)similar social media format gets processed by different groups of people and children. The content on video-dominant platforms helps spread fake news more slowly than the text-heavy sites; the different functionalities of various apps influence what gets spread quickly. The source of such the differences in idea transmission emphasizes that it is not through absence of animosities but rather the asymmetries between sources.

Focusing less on appearance and more on authenticity may shift social norms (less focus people put on looks and more focus is on irrelevant areas). Authentic and diverse images may reduce self-objectification and comparison can be used as a tool of creating new social networks, new trends or styles, and in turn this will prompt to change in social identity. This not only involves the presence of youth but also their willingness to sacrificially give up for one another. One of the major aims that would lead to this outcome is the youth interdependence that is empowered by the positive impacts of the looks on the assessment of beauty. When the youth admit that their looks play a significant

role in relaxing social networking, they are likely to develop a notion that universal beauty equals universal acceptance.

It is understood that social media is a digital area where youth can become friends with one another and live throughout the ephemeral, beautifully anymore. Youth is the targeted group and social media is an extension of the technology which they are used to. Online peer support communities can offer restorative experiences for adolescents from the life stress or it can also lead to negative behavior such as cyberbullying.

4. Details of typical empirical studies

Currently, the progression of research studies connecting social media use and finding some signs of depressive symptoms has surged. The longitudinal study of considerable importance was carried out by Kross et al. [11]. The researchers utilized an experience sampling method in which researchers used 5 mobile texts per day sent out to 82 young adults for a period of 14 days for the young adults to record feelings associated with their Facebook actions. They also highlighted that the effects of using Facebook on the mood and felt life satisfaction remain stable throughout, independently of individual differences, that is, one's basic mood and one's person specification. Nonetheless, direct person-to-person communication with other people left, by and large, an opposite effect. Thus, this study found out that checking social media passively could undermine individuals' subjective well-being, later opening ways for more detailed studies of depression in social media users.

Building on these findings, constructed a model by analyzing data from the UK Millennium Cohort Study, which included a sample of 10,904 adolescents aged 14, to explore social media effects on mental health via body-related mediators, which explored social media effects on mental health via body-related mediators [12]. Also, they found that the path of social media use and depressive symptoms among adolescents was somewhat mechanically explained via the chain pathway: direct contact with ideal images increased the reporting of more appearance and body anxiety, which in turn encouraged maladaptive self-talk that diminished perceived self-worth and finally culminated into the symptoms of depression. It is worth mentioning that the aforementioned study is not widely cited in free-access content, provided that its results point how depression can result from mid-level psychological mechanisms like self-objectification and body dissatisfaction.

Subsequently, the long-term research on socio-cultural patterns correlating the growth of digital media usage and depression has been carried forward [13]. Twenge et al. reported large class community data and said that the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and self-harm among teenagers in the US initially remained constant at the beginning of the 2000s. Still, the rates began to rise sharply at the beginning of the 2010s. Increased deaths of girls and young women were particularly marked. Twenge and colleagues espoused the notion that the widespread mobilization of smartphones and social media at this time could be a reason for these changes, as expanded digital media use could be attributed to the campus of face-to-face social interaction, sleep disturbance, the cyberbullying and copycat self-harm information. Their synthesis suggests that the mental health crisis among teenagers reflected not only greater emotional disclosure but also a genuine increase in psychological distress that is correlated to media habits.

Subsequently, the researchers have established their own hypothesis of the mediating influence of sleep disruption. Van den Eijnden et al. have built Social Media Disorder Scale and given the information that social media use of adolescents at night leads to sleep quality decreases and depression increases [10]. Nevertheless, these results are not presented in the original text here; nevertheless, they were confirmed by the following studies. For instance, a cross-sectional sample study of 2856 Saudi adolescents aged 10 to 24 years showed that 71% thought that they suffered

from the damaging effects of excessive social media use on sleep patterns, and 66% accepted that they stayed awake late to use social media. About 58% of the respondents told they checked their social media accounts before going to bed, and the rates of mental health issues were significantly higher for those aged 16 to 24. The researchers concluded sleep deprivation is one of the main factors that social media can affect one's mood, and proposed interventions, such as establishing technology-free zones at bedtime and promoting face-to-face friendships during the day, which could mitigate depressive symptoms, which might help.

4.1. Brief description of other studies

Social psychology studies have discerned multiple Twitter features and their linkages to depressive psychopathology, as other studies have been presented above. Cross-sectional surveys have consistently indicated that frequent social media users are likely to report higher levels of internalizing problems, such as anxiety and depression. The self-administered National Comorbidity Survey showed evidence that adolescents who spent more than three hours per day using social media had a higher depressive symptom score. In contrast, that in another longitudinal study done in Finland involving 1,750 people. The article proclaims that teen boys among the 16-year age group are observed to be more addicted to their smartphones, and the parental support during this period and reduction of loneliness was the two main remedial methods. The interactions depicted by these studies show the risk of depression deriving from the loneliness and stress due to decreased involvement of parents when separating oneself with digital media.

Also, researchers have been conducting large datasets analysis to examine the possibility of comorbidity of internet addiction with depression. According to a survey in the U.S.

As summarised by InMyArea, around 54% of teenagers stated they feel that they are likely to spend more time on their mobile phones, and 41% of teenagers also said they spend more time on social media. It is found from a South Korean research cited in the same report that the severely addicted internet is observed among 6% of the adolescents, and this group is seen in higher depression, aggression, and compulsiveness. It is a precious finding in the sense that problematic social media use frequently co-occurs with other mental health issues, such as aggression and compulsiveness. and depends on environmental setting, such as simple internet access and low family cohesiveness.

Every so often, the researchers have also focused on the experimental studies of specifically content feature. Numerous studies have been done to exposure that the performance of beautified selfies and images of idealized lifestyles on platforms like Instagram has been related in some way with the increase in appearance anxiety and body dissatisfaction, which in turns decrease an individual's mood. As to investigations with women conducted on controlled campuses, visualization of edited-looking selfies leads to a few appearance highlight negative feelings for girls. Among other things, the "likes" and "followers" of social media have also been found to popularize understanding of physical fitness and induce social comparisons, likely worsening depression.

4.2. Summary of the study

The studies preserved are paired together to steer to the main principles. In the first place, the multiple cultural settings where social media users suffer largely from depression and mental distress are recorded. Surveys conducted in longitudinal cohorts and experience-capturing methods as well as across-sectional surveys suggested that the time users devote to social media platforms predicts a decline in self-esteem, and subsequent emotional disorder at a way of depression.

Secondly, this relationship is not purely direct, whereby intermediary factors, including appearance anxiety, body image issues, fear of missing out (FOMO), and shameful self-perception, tend to play the role of intermediaries. The third theme relates to a correlation between sleep disruption, one of the major subfactors, with expectations of a late night social media use and universities' mood disturbance. In other words, social isolation and loneliness are potent risk factors, particularly amongst teens, for them starting to communicate in online, which in the end could lead to addiction and recurrent mood status of depression. Moreover, regulable risk or protective factors can be created, and they are gender, age, and culture in the group society extending the vulnerable level for young women and girls specifically. Boys or even men may be more likely to suffer from gaming addiction or gaming itself preferred. This literature synthesis is going to state that social media use is an associating risk factor towards body and appearance anxiety that will likely contribute to develop the anxiety or depressed feelings of a person, especially with poor sleep and social isolation in addition to machine learning algorithm that mirrors this effect.

5. Discussion

5.1. Overall findings

Existing research shows a very dynamic and multi-faceted influence of social media on mental well-being of teenagers. Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have provided evidence that shows high social media users experience high depressive symptoms. Nevertheless, currently obtained real time experience data sheds light on what short-lived surfaces of social media use are, alas, leading to the instability of personal emotions and happiness. Also, the rise of adolescent depression is attributed to smartphones and social media that mostly replace the work teenagers are supposed to do for that age. The intricate scale causation to the anxiety, the feeling of being self-judged, the desire for more comfort, and the poor sleep are all closely linked to social media usage late into the night or at in the early hours of the morning, among other factors, is a root cause of decreased amount of sleep and consequently mental health issues. Following that, social isolation and loneliness, stresses being with people you interact with online, are also dysfunctions leading to the same cycle.

Demographic and contested factors can therefore help in reducing or increasing such events. For girls and young women, media may be a stronger indicator of mental health issues than it is for boys; however, boys even more than girls could be addicted to gaming-related internet addiction. Climate is another thing of significance, the research data from Saudi Arabia suggest that older adolescents (16–24 age range) are more affected by the mental health impacts, like sleep problems, depressive symptoms And sleep problems due to social media, however, studies from Finland show the influence of parental engagement and loneliness, respectively. On the whole, media studies suggest the effects of media add to negative factors of appearance-specific anxiety and decrease self-esteem; the latter, along with inadequate sleep and social problems, can contribute to depression.

5.2. Suggestions and implications

5.2.1. Platform-level recommendations

These are the ways in which online platforms have the opportunity to introduce changes in policy and regulation that would impact them. Designing for a safer environment for kids aged 2-7 in 2025, the five key areas identified for scoping in the paper were regulating responsibility, ensuring transparency, building collaboration, actioning safety, and low restrictive youth access. There is a

need for governments to change their laws governing social networking and ensure that social networking platforms take similar responsibility regarding user protection, that is, they have to face penalties for not filtering harmful content from their services. Transparency measures like recording and regular public disclosures of content moderation practices of social media are crucial for gaining user trust. Youth perspectives and mental well-being privacy are the inbuilt features of the internal design where parents, teachers, and mental health workers collaborate and participate in the product development. The safe usage principle in the initial design supports the privacy protection, tools that are favorable to the healthy usage patterns are designed, and the moderation features are offered. The society should increase exposure to age-appropriate measures—such as setting age verification, enabling default settings to hide public metrics (e.g., likes or views), and activating default filters for inappropriate content—as these steps reduce the likelihood of accessing harmful material.

5.2.2. Policy-level and societal recommendations

Policy makers should give attention to well-being of children and youth in the development of wider digital parenting strategies. Targeting mental health campaigns that are developed from public health, the campaigns will clarify the truth about the dangers of unlimited utilization of social media as they highlight the significance of offline relationships and adequate sleep. Governments should keep allotting finances for equitable mental health services and resources that are strictly private for students. Collaborating the health ministries, educational institutions, and technology regulators can be a strong provision for the utilization of evidence-based guides. For the very high social penetration contexts, however, mainly in the group where the social media usage exceeds 70 percent of the population, the importance of the community programs bearing social interactions as an inseparable part of socializing in real life is particularly stressed. Whether this be achieved through further funding of research studies (longitudinal and cross-cultural studies) responsible for clarifying the causality relations and other protective factors, is another important step.

5.2.3. Family-level recommendations

Concerning the family, since that plays a very vital role in kids' digital lifestyle, parents should be fully involved in it so as to arouse in them the interest of watching good selections of media. Media literacy discussions and explanation of how images are sometimes airbrushed are two out of many things that parents can do in order to eliminate these issues. Make technology-free areas, zoning bedrooms and dinner time out from tech gadgets, and let children know about limits and nice etiquette behaviors, which will help in helping them become less addicted to gadgets and sleep disturbance. For starters, connections offer the need for enforceable restrictions to further it. The data reports that many teens in Saudi Arabia check their social media accounts before sleeping, and most of them report social media having a negative impact; the need for restrictive legislative measures is important in ensuring social media does not have negative effects on users. Another way is for parents to promote and encourage their children with physical activities, arts, volunteer works, and social interactions, which will counteract the participation of false confidence and validation that canned feedback. It can help to wean people off the social links for dressing, among others, posting therefore may cause netizens to establish more in-depth sense of relationship online connecting, which can have adverse effects, such as feelings of down and depression.

Schools, too, should insist on teaching and implementing an inclusive media-centric syllabus curriculum. In such a scheme, one would learn about how algorithms and advertorial

systems impact the information people receive, look deeper into the psychological process of social comparison, and seek a wider view when the social setting emphasizes appearance. The "Body Positivity" movement can stem from a public counterculture, which people can term as fit over better fit. Technology instruments can be efficiently noted by teachers and allow them to figure out cyberbullying or body shame and guide the needed people. Movement, sports, clubs, volunteering, activities, and participation in clubs are helpful for gaining the skills of the good citizen and mostly outside of the digital world. The teaching of mindfulness techniques post-digital mental breakdown risks alongside sleep hygiene can further strengthen the youth with appropriate alternatives over the usage of devices.

6. Conclusion

This study presents a fully comprehensive exploration pertaining to appearance-distress, body-anxiety, and depression among adolescents, considering how social media typically constructs idealized aesthetics that pose for intense social comparison and numeric evaluation, affects both body image and mental health, and gives an account on the escalation of body anxiety and appearances anxiety that may lead to depression. According to a literary synthesis, current research suggests that social media engagement is positively and heavily associated with adolescents' body and appearance dissatisfaction. In short, some mechanisms include: social media creates an abundance of aesthetic standards that make people feel less good enough about themselves and therefore trigger the propensity to compare upward; beauty content, involving interaction features like "likes", helped recreate the belief that the physical attractiveness is the key to success; and lastly, the difference in social media potentiality depending on the platform varying and with there being implications for gender. Blogs and depression, is related to all these directly through information overload and social pressure, as well as indirectly via body anxiety and sleep issues. Social media is the pathway, which can cause body image-to-self-worth-to-depression effects.

These findings inform the paper's interventions at multi-level. At the family level, parents should equip their teenage kids as critical viewers, thereby advising them not to overdo the perfect image search, which can have a negative impact on their mental health, and they should also promote multi-skilling which help decrease the importance on physical appearance. Students should be taught media-literate and body-positive programs in schools in order to raise their awareness about having a proper body image and that of solving some media messages issues into the process of their growth. A mechanism should be reinforced at the platform level where they can minimize algorithmic recommendation tools, downplay the push of content that is over-beautified, and foster the viewing experience of science content related to mental health and diverse aesthetics. Furthermore, the main focus of work must be extended to policy-level for refocusing the process of content moderation and youth-protection norms, co-development of inter-sector cooperation, and the joint effort towards creating of a digital ecosystem.

This article highlights the major principles through which social media can aggravate anxiety and mental health conditions in adolescents. Still, those effects are commonly underestimated. The authors then offer a new sociological theory that explains the formation of psychological-related issues in the community, which could help the authorities increase the public awareness and policy interventions to prevent them. This work also explores the operational implications for family education, school, and platform treatment, which would be helpful for policy making in public policy. After that stage, it is important to resource more how societies, sexual identities, and others view the world digitally. Causal inferences could be developed through longitudinal designs. In

addition to that, mentioning all insights from AI algorithms and privacy protection would be helpful to set up robust lines of governance in the information age and health.

References

- [1] Kumari, J. (2025). The effect of social media on adolescence mental health. *International Journal of Integrated Research and Practice*, 3(1), 12–25. <https://ijirp.org/index.php/files/article/view/17>
- [2] Desyantoro, I., & Ngongo, B. P. (2025). Social media use and its psychological impact on adolescents in Indonesia: A review from the perspective of social education and public awareness. *Journal of Humanistic Social Management*, 2(1), 43–59. <https://journal-hsm.com/index.php/JHSM/article/view/2>
- [3] Sirmawati, E., Asmita, W., & Rahayu, D. F. (2025). Body image problems and insecurity in teenagers in social media posts. In *BICC Proceedings*. <https://biccproceedings.org/index.php/bicc/article/view/162>
- [4] Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.09.005>
- [5] Button, D. M., & White, R. (2013). Teen dating relationships and outcomes of well-being: Examining gender differences in nonviolent and violent dating relationships. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 23(3), 211–231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2013.806839>
- [6] Satheesan, K. K. (2025). Influence of social media on adolescents' perception of social norms: A scoping review. In *Proceedings of the World Conference on Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*. <https://proudpen.com/proceedings/index.php/wpbcconf/article/view/760>
- [7] Hogue, J. V., & Mills, J. S. (2019). The effects of active social media engagement with peers on body image in young women. *Body Image*, 28, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.11.002>
- [8] Fardouly, J., Willburger, B. K., & Vartanian, L. R. (2018). Instagram use and young women's body image concerns and self-objectification: Testing mediational pathways. *New Media & Society*, 20(4), 1380–1395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817694499>
- [9] Tiggemann, M., & Slater, A. (2013). NetGirls: The Internet, Facebook, and body image concern in adolescent girls. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 46(6), 630–633. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22141>
- [10] Van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M., Lemmens, J. S., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2016). The Social Media Disorder Scale. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 61, 478–487. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.038>
- [11] Kross, E., Verduyn, P., Demiralp, E., Park, J., Lee, D. S., Lin, N., ... & Ybarra, O. (2013). Facebook use predicts declines in subjective well-being in young adults. *PLOS ONE*, 8(8), e69841. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0069841>
- [12] Kelly, Y., Zilanawala, A., Booker, C., & Sacker, A. (2019). Social media use and adolescent mental health: Findings from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *EClinicalMedicine*, 6, 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2018.12.005>
- [13] Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among U.S. adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702617723376>