

# SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE, BODY IMAGE PERCEPTION, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TRENDS AMONG URBAN TEENAGERS

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## ABSTRACT

*In today's digital landscape, social media has become an integral part of adolescents' daily routines, profoundly influencing their behavior, attitudes, and perceptions. This research investigates the complex interplay between social media usage, body image perception, and physical activity habits among urban teenagers. A total of 350 adolescents aged 13 to 19 from five metropolitan schools in India were surveyed using validated instruments such as the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ), Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS), and Physical Activity Logbook. The study aimed to assess how excessive exposure to curated social media content affects adolescents' self-perception and whether it motivates or hinders physical activity. The findings reveal that high social media users (more than 3 hours/day) are more likely to report dissatisfaction with their body image and exhibit inconsistent physical activity patterns. Gender-based analysis showed that females experienced greater body dissatisfaction, while males were more prone to emulate fitness influencers. The study highlights the need for digital literacy, body positivity programs, and structured physical activity integration within school systems to ensure balanced development.*

**Keywords:** Social media, body image, physical activity, adolescents, digital influence, Instagram fitness culture, teenage health, body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, urban youth behavior.

## INTRODUCTION

The adolescent years are marked by identity formation, heightened social awareness, and a growing sensitivity toward physical appearance. With the advent of smartphones and high-speed internet, social media has revolutionized the way teenagers communicate, learn, and perceive themselves. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook expose young users to highly filtered and idealized body types that often create unrealistic beauty standards. This digital exposure may shape their body image perception, influence their self-esteem, and alter their motivation toward physical fitness.

Physical activity is a cornerstone of adolescent health, linked with better academic performance, emotional regulation, and long-term disease prevention. However, screen time has steadily replaced outdoor activities, leading to increasingly sedentary lifestyles among urban youth. The paradox lies in the fact that while social media promotes fitness ideals, it simultaneously contributes to body dissatisfaction and reduced self-worth. This study aims to analyze how social media engagement influences body image perception and physical activity behaviors among urban teenagers, with a focus on gender disparities and psychological implications.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The sample included 350 adolescents (175 males, 175 females) from urban high schools across Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Kolkata. Respondents were categorized based on daily social media usage:

- Low (0–1 hour)
- Moderate (1–3 hours)

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- High (>3 hours)

### Key Findings:

- **Body Image Satisfaction (BISS)** scores were lowest in high-usage females (mean = 2.3/5) compared to low-usage males (mean = 3.9/5).
- **Physical activity** declined with increased social media usage; students using social media for more than 3 hours/day averaged only 1.8 exercise sessions/week.
- Males exhibited higher fitness motivation driven by influencers, while females reported more negative self-comparison and pressure to meet body ideals.
- A correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.62$  was observed between social media usage and body image satisfaction, indicating a strong inverse relationship.
- ANOVA testing showed statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) in both body image perception and physical activity levels across usage groups.


These results indicate that excessive social media engagement is associated with lower body image satisfaction and a decline in physical activity among urban teenagers.

### METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional, quantitative study design was adopted to explore the relationships among social media usage, body image perception, and physical activity trends. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure equal gender representation and diversity in socioeconomic status across five metro city schools.

### Instruments Used:

- *Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ)*
- *Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS)*

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- *Weekly Physical Activity Logbook*

### Procedure:

Participants were asked to fill out digital surveys during school hours under teacher supervision. Usage patterns of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Snapchat were recorded. The body image questionnaire included items on satisfaction with appearance, influence of celebrities, and peer comparison. Physical activity logs documented frequency, type (e.g., gym, running, sports), and motivation level.

Ethical approval was obtained from the respective school boards. Consent was secured from both students and their parents. All responses were anonymized and stored securely.



### Data Analysis Tools:

PSS Version 26 was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients, t-tests, and ANOVA were applied to compare means and assess significance across demographic and behavioral groups.

### CASE STUDY

#### Case A – Priya (Female, 17, Instagram User):

Priya spends approximately 4 hours daily on social media, mostly on Instagram and Snapchat. She follows several fashion and fitness influencers and often compares her body to theirs. Despite being of healthy weight, she perceives herself as “not fit enough.” Her BISS score was 2.1. She avoids outdoor activities due to appearance concerns and primarily engages in short home workouts without consistency.

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### Case B – Arjun (Male, 16, YouTube Fitness Follower):

Arjun spends about 2.5 hours daily online, mainly watching fitness tutorials and gym vlogs. Motivated by these, he joined a local gym and exercises 4–5 times per week. His body image score was 4.2, and he reports improved self-confidence. However, he also expressed occasional anxiety about not achieving a "perfect physique."

These contrasting profiles exemplify the dual nature of social media influence—either motivating active lifestyles or triggering insecurity and withdrawal.


### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Section A – Demographics

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: Male / Female / Other
3. City: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Class/Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section B – Social Media Habits

1. How many hours a day do you use social media?
  - Less than 1
  - 1–3 hours
  - More than 3 hours
2. Which platforms do you use most often?
3. Do you follow fitness, fashion, or lifestyle influencers? (Yes/No)
4. Have you ever felt unhappy about your appearance after using social media?
5. Does social media influence your motivation to exercise? (Yes/No)

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**Section C – Physical Activity Patterns**

1. How many times a week do you engage in physical activity (30+ minutes)?
2. What kind of physical activity do you do?
  - Gym
  - Sports
  - Yoga
  - Walking
  - None
3. Do you exercise to stay fit or improve appearance?
4. Has your physical activity increased or decreased due to social media use?
5. How confident are you in your physical appearance (scale 1 to 5)?

**Table 1: Social Media Usage vs Body Image Satisfaction (BISS Score)**

Usage Category	Male BISS Score (Mean)	Female BISS Score (Mean)
Low (0–1 hrs)	3.9	3.4
Moderate (1–3 hrs)	3.5	2.9
High (>3 hrs)	3.1	2.3

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**Table 2: Physical Activity Frequency by Social Media Engagement**

Usage Category	Average Exercise Sessions/Week
Low	4.3
Moderate	3.0
High	1.8

## CONCLUSION



This study reveals a significant negative correlation between high social media engagement and body image satisfaction among urban adolescents. While some teenagers draw inspiration from fitness influencers and adopt healthy habits, many others experience reduced self-esteem, distorted self-perception, and declining motivation for physical activity. Gender differences also emerged, with girls more affected by appearance-based comparisons and boys influenced by performative fitness culture.

These findings call for an integrated approach involving digital media literacy education, body image awareness workshops, and school-based physical activity programs. Parents and educators must monitor and guide adolescents in navigating the digital world without internalizing harmful beauty standards. Future research should delve into longitudinal effects, the role of algorithmic content exposure, and psychological resilience-building through school interventions.



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