Social Media's Impact on Young Women's Self-esteem and Body Image Satisfaction in the City of Kadoma, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study sheds light on social media usage. The aim was to assess the effects of social media on young women's self-esteem and body image satisfaction in the City of Kadoma. The study`s objectives were to explore the relationship between social media usage time and body satisfaction, to find out if any relationship exists between appearance comparisons and social media usage, and to examine how age and ethnicity contribute to young women`s social media usage. The research adopted a quantitative approach and a descriptive research design. The social media appearance preoccupation scale (SMAPS) was used as a data collection tool. Descriptive statistics and Spearman`s rho correlation was used to analyse data with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 27.0.1 (SPSS). A sample of 274 was conveniently selected for the study. The findings showed that age and ethnicity are important predictors of social media usage where users aged 26 to 27 and the Ndebele tend to be more active than others. There was a moderate positive correlation between social media usage and body dissatisfaction of $\rho = 0.53$ ($p < 0.001$). *There was no correlation found between appearance comparison and social media usage i.e.,* $\rho = -0.06$ ($p < 0.301$). *The researcher recommends a mixed approach research and encourages digital literacy to users of social media. A mixed approach would provide a holistic assessment of the impact of social media while providing explanations where a quantitative approach fails. Digital literacy would equip users with necessary knowledge and foundation to navigate the digital world positively.*

Keywords: social media, self-esteem, body satisfaction, young women

Introduction

In this era, where technology is now arguably seen as the backbone of modernisation, it may be viewed as socially unacceptable for one not to occasionally spend one's time one social media. It has become common behaviour for people to glare at their phones and laptops all day communicating with friends, relatives, workmates, business clients or even just entertaining themselves. This study sought to explore the relationship between social media usage time and body satisfaction, to find out if any relationship exists between appearance comparisons and social media usage, and to examine how age and ethnicity contribute to young women`s social media usage. According to a study carried out by Bergagna and Tartaglia (2018) on Italian

undergraduate and graduate students, spending considerable time on social media may result in low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction due to constant comparisons of oneself with others or to unrealistic images on the internet. According to Henriques and Patnaik (2020), social media comprises social networking sites, image-sharing sites, video hosting sites, community blogs, bookmarking sites, and gaming sites. Mellor et al. (2013) posit that body image dissatisfaction can be associated with different body shapes and parts such as breast size, curves or skin colour, and eye shape. These developments have attracted many researchers who felt the need to analyse the impact of social media on people.

Background

Gorman (2015) notes that previous research on body satisfaction and self-esteem often focused on traditional media like magazines, television and advertisements. Studies before 2000 highlighted the influence of idealised beauty standards portrayed in media on individuals' body image, perceptions and self-esteem (Yu & Jung, 2018). With the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, research began to explore the impact of these platforms on self-esteem and body satisfaction (Chang, 2019). According to Perloff (2014), studies from around 2000 to 2010 began examining how constant exposure to edited or idealised images, the culture of comparison, and the reinforcement of societal beauty standards on social media affected individuals' perceptions of themselves.

In addition, Grogan (2021) notes that research from 2010 till date continues to explore a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media use and its effects on self-esteem and body satisfaction. He also points out that scholars began examining various factors like frequency of social media use, types of content consumed, engagement with others' content, and the role of peer interactions in influencing body image and self-esteem. Perloff (2014) carried out research in the United States of America which focused on young women's perspectives on the impact of social media use on body image and self-esteem. It explored how different social media platforms influenced their body satisfaction. Fardouly et al. (2015), on the other end, carried out research in the United Kingdom, which compared individuals' actual and idealised selves portrayed on social media profiles and investigated how differences between these images affected body dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, in Africa, Nyambura (2019) carried out a similar study investigating the relationship between social media use and body image concerns among university students in Kenya. The study also examined how social media impacted body satisfaction and self-esteem.

The research targeted 347 female students in School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Nairobi and reached a sample size of 183. Some of Nyambura`s findings identified Instagram as a source of influence of ideal body image in Kenya where 89.7% agreed and 10.3% of the respondents disagreed.

In Nigeria, Okoro et al. (2021) examined how social media usage affected body image and self-esteem among adolescents in Nasarawa State. The study further examined the impact of exposure to idealised body images on these individuals' perceptions of themselves. The study comprised 238 sampled participants across 5 departments at a university. Three hypotheses were tested and the result of Hypothesis 1 showed that there was a significant inverse relationship between body image dissatisfaction (BID) and self-esteem scale (SES) [r (230) = -.877, $p < 0.05$], indicating that the higher the BID, the lower the SES. The result of Hypothesis 2 revealed that physical appearance related comparison (PARC) had a significant negative relationship with SES among female undergraduate students [r (230) = -.303**, $p < 0.01$]. Lastly, the result of Hypothesis 3 showed that BID and PARC had a significant effect on SES [F (1,230) = 10.589; R2= .739; p<.05], [F (1,230) = 94.071; R2= .471; p<.05], and [F (2,229) = 85.895; R2= .991; P<.05], respectively.

To add more, the number of people using social media in Africa has been gradually increasing due to certain economic and technological developments. AfrikaTech (2020) revealed that in 2020, Africa had 217.5 million social media users, showing a 10% growth compared to the previous year. Statista (2022) reports that the number of African social media users has gradually risen to over 384 million. These reports may be used to understand the rise in body dissatisfaction in the region. Asakitikpi (2016) points out that behaviours such as skin surgeries and skin bleaching are traits which show that some people in African countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana are not satisfied with their complexion and perceive light-skinned women as more beautiful in comparison to natural black skinned women. Hunter (2011) notes that the existence of skin-whitening behaviours in Africa have existed for many centuries but the rapid increase of such behaviour can only be attributed to the mass marketing of images of white beauty. In some social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, the demand and usage of skin-lightening features and filters have generally increased and some users even demand more of them (Uti, 2022). Social media platforms began using advanced algorithms to personalise content, leading to increasingly immersive and addictive user experiences (Guess et al., 2023)

Furthermore, the waves of social media in Zimbabwe are also being felt where phone and laptop purchases and even internet connectivity have improved over the last decade, increasing social media usage (Mpofu, 2017). However, there is little coverage of the implications of social media on young women's self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction. Zimbabwe is a country which is greatly influenced by indigenous culture and some women have resorted to the use of traditional herbs to widen hips and enlarge breasts (Komichi et al., 2022). Men, on the other hand, are also a driving force when they flood positive comments on social networking sites to women with light skin and curvy bodies which in turn causes body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem in other young Zimbabwean women without those features.

According to a report published by Kemp (2022), there were 1.55 million social media users in Zimbabwe in January 2022 and the numbers have still been rising to date. However, not all that occurs on social media is harmless to people and little attention has been given to the impact of using social media platforms.

Therefore, to help young women in Zimbabwe overcome low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction, it is important to find out the causes of such feelings. This research intended to explore such effects and how they are related to social media use. It also attempted to help women build their self-esteem and value their natural beauty which may be affected by social media's influence.

Aim of the study

To assess the effects of social media on young women's self-esteem and body image satisfaction in the city of Kadoma.

Objectives

a) To explore the relationship between social media usage time and body satisfaction.
b) To find out if any relationship exists between appearance comparisons and social media usage.
c) To examine how age and ethnicity contribute to young women`s social media usage.

Research Questions

a) What is the relationship between social media usage time and body perception?
b) What relationship exists between appearance comparisons and social media usage?
c) How does age and ethnicity contribute to young women`s social media usage?

Methodology

The study took a quantitative approach and made use of the descriptive research design. Participants of this research were women aged between 20 and 29 years. This range allowed the researcher to collect data from women who were most likely to own devices or use social media without parental or financial restrictions. Using a population size of 39 520 acquired from ("Kadoma, Zimbabwe — Population and Demographics — City Facts," 2024) a sample of 267 (266.77) was obtained using Cochran`s sample size formula. $\frac{1.96^2 \; x \; 0.5 \; x \; 0.5}{0.06^2} = 267$

The researcher made use of the convenience sampling method in the business area of the city of Kadoma, targeting young women waiting in line for services, at bus stops and those who visit areas such as salons, restaurants and clothing shops. The researcher focused on potential participants who were readily available and willing to participate. This method allowed the researcher to collect data quickly from a convenient sample of young women and reached a sample size of 274. The sample exceeded the expected size by 7 to cover for any spoiled or skipped items. According to Nikolopoulou (2023), this sampling method uses a non-probability concept where units are selected for inclusion in the sample because they are the easiest for the researcher to access.

The researcher adopted and adapted the social media appearance preoccupation scale (SMAPS) developed by Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2020). The SMAPS is a measure designed to assess appearance preoccupation related to social media use.

Data analysis

The researcher made use of descriptive statistical elements such as descriptives and frequencies. To determine relationships between variables, the Bivariate correlation method was employed. The descriptive statistics helped the researcher in:

a) Producing demographic information such as age and ethnic group. This helped in understanding social media usage by age range or by ethnic group.
b) Categorising social media use by creating a frequency distribution to categorise and count the levels of social media use among the participants such as heavy users, moderate users, and occasional users. This helped in understanding the number of young women who fit into each category.
c) Generating body satisfaction and self-esteem scores by creating frequency distributions for body satisfaction and self-esteem scores, and showing the number of participants

who fit into different score ranges. This helped in identifying the distribution of responses and whether there were any trends or patterns.

The correlation method helped the researcher in generating correlation analysis by analysing the relationships and patterns that exist among the variables.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the Sanyati District Administrator's Office and Kadoma City Council. The researcher made a great effort to follow ethical guidelines, which were not limited to obtaining voluntary and informed consent of the participants in the research study. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the confidentiality and privacy of the participants were protected throughout the research process.

Results

Demographic information

Table 1: Demographic statistics

		Age	Ethnic Group
N	Valid	274	274
	Missing	0	0
Mean		24.26	1.49
Std. Deviation		2.703	.732

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	274	20	29	24.26	2.703
Valid N (listwise)	274				

Tables 1 and 2 show demographic statistical scores of the number of participants: 274, who provided information about their age and ethnic group. The missing score is 0 because no questionnaire was spoiled or skipped. Table 2 shows that the minimum age for this research was 20, the maximum 29 and the average age (mean score) was 24.26.

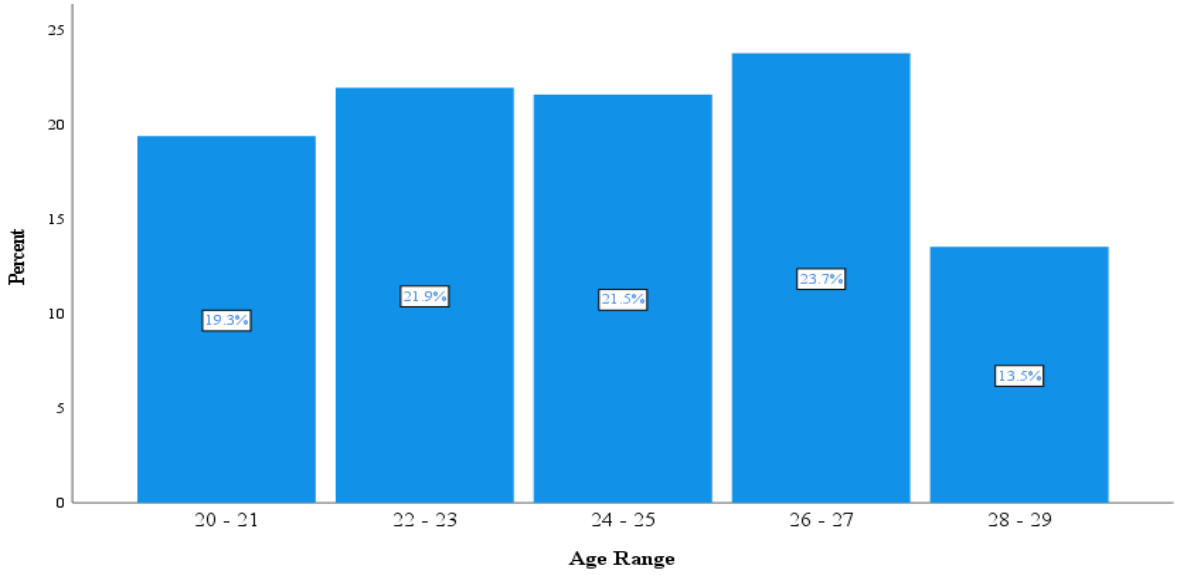

Figure 1: Age range

Figure 1 provides a comprehensive bar graph of age ranges which were discovered from data analysis. The figures show that most social media users and participants range from 26 to 27 years consisting of 23.7% of the total population of 274. The second active users range from 22 to 23 years contributing to 21.9% of the population followed closely by users aged between 24 to 25 which consist of 21.5%.

The least users range from 28 to 29 years with 13.5%. Based on the data presented, women ranging from 26 to 27 may be the most active due to financial independence and actively seeking out stable relationships as pointed out by Clark et al. (2018) that many African women marry after the age of 25. This may also be possible due to the bias of convenience sampling which may result in the sample having more people aged 26 to 27.

Young women aged between 22 to 23 and 24 to 25 were the second and third most active users respectively, possibly because they may have been exposed to social media by colleagues and have access to Wi-Fi although they are limited by academic demands. Singh and Pathak (2023) identify social media burnout as one of the possible causes of less social media participation from people aged between 28 to 29. Ehoro and Badey (2021) indicate that women aged between 28 to 29 may be focused on other responsibilities such as work, marriage or childbearing leading them to reduce their social media presence.

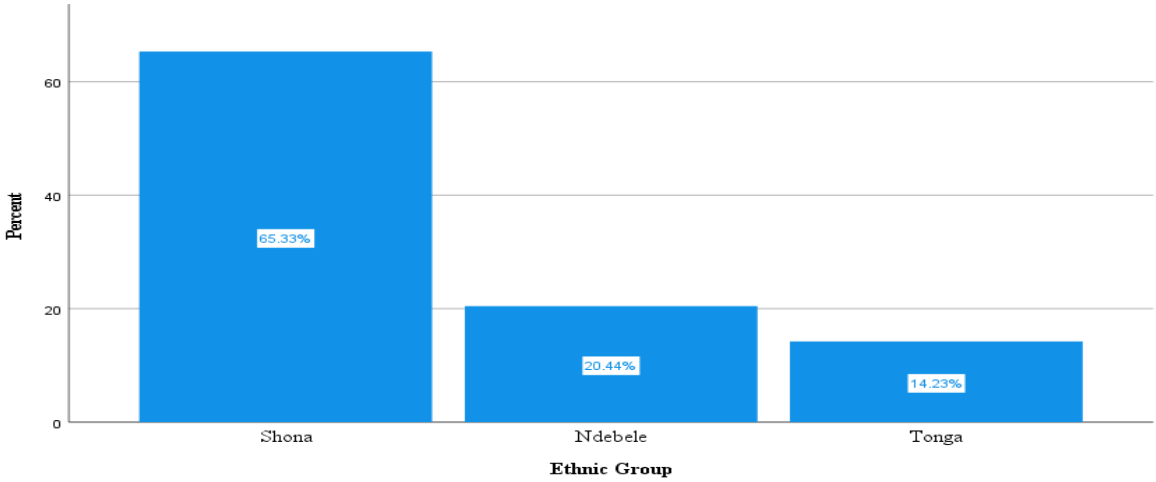

Figure 2: Ethnic groups

Figure 2 is a bar graph which was used to explain the size of the population based on the ethnic groups which exist in Kadoma. It shows that the Shona consisted of the most participants with 65.33% of 274. This may be because the research was carried out in a Mashonaland area. The other minor groups which populated the graph are the Ndebele 20.44% and Tonga 14.23%. The diversity in the population was intentionally done to find out if ethnic backgrounds contribute to social media usage. Ethnicity provides insights into social, cultural and economic differences that other demographic variables may not consider.

Relationship between social media usage and body perception

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of social media usage and body image dissatisfaction

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum (Hours)	Maximum (Hours)	Mean (Hours)	Std. Deviation
Social Media Usage Time	274	1.33	7.00	4.8187	1.32291
Body Image Dissatisfaction	274	1.50	7.00	4.0721	1.46871
Valid N (listwise)	274				

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of different scores of social media usage time and body image dissatisfaction. N represents 274, which is the number of participants in this study. Social media usage time mean score of people who tend to spend more than 6 hours per day was 4.82 (rounded off from 4.8187). Body image dissatisfaction score was 4.07 (rounded off from 4.0721). Based on the questionnaire, minimum scores for social media usage time and body image satisfaction were 1.33 hours and 1.50 hours respectively showing that some participants Strongly Disagreed. Maximum scores for both social media usage time and body image

satisfaction was 7 which shows that some participants strongly agreed to questions such as "I tend to spend more than 6 hours per day using social media".

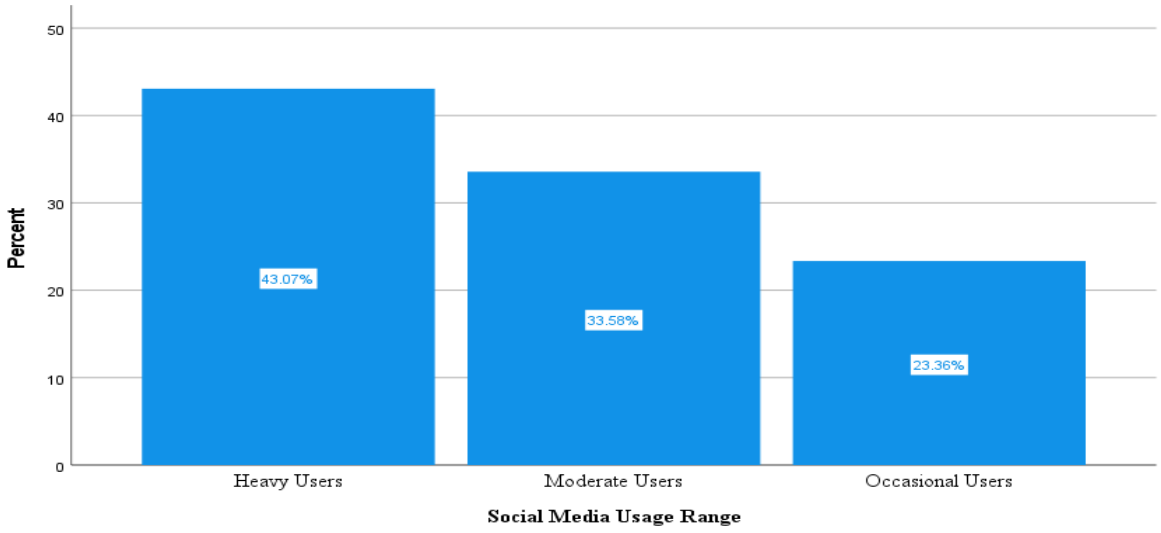

Figure 3: Social media usage range

Figure 3 is a bar graph which shows a broad analysis of social media usage range. The figure shows that 43.07% of the participants are heavy users. These were people whose scores for social media usage time items were the highest and who strongly agreed to spending more than 6 hours on social media. 33.58% are moderate social media users. Slightly less than a quarter (23.36%) were people who use social media occasionally. Moderate users were people whose social media usage time scores were average i.e., around 4 hours per day and ranging from Neutral to Agree on social media usage items. Occasional users were people who used social media but scored the lowest on the social media usage time items on the questionnaire. These people spent the least hours per day. They also ranged from Strongly Disagree to Somewhat Disagree to questions such as "I tend to lose track of time when using social media."

Participants who were categorised as heavy users could be linked to data from Figure 1 which presents people aged from 20 to 23 as the most active users. This may be due to factors such as digital literacy, peer pressure and digital curiosity which is relatively high in young people. Moderate users could be people who use social media but have other priorities such as family or work. Occasional users might be participants who dislike social media but only engage to receive urgent academic or work updates. They may also be people who are transitioning to the corporate world.

Table 4: Social media usage time and body image dissatisfaction correlation

			Social Media Usage Time	Body Image Dissatisfaction
Spearman's rho	Social Media Usage Time	Correlation Coefficient	1.00	.53**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
		N	274	274
	Body Image Dissatisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.53**	1.00
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
		N	274	274

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 demonstrates a non-parametric correlation analysis. The analysis emphasises the relationship between social media usage time and body image dissatisfaction scores. Spearman's rho is a measure of correlation used when the variables being compared are ordinal or when there is a nonlinear relationship between them. The population of the two variables is 274. Spearman's rho for the correlation between social media usage time and body image dissatisfaction is $\rho = 0.53$. The significance level is reported as p-value =.001 for both correlations, indicating that the correlation coefficients are statistically significant $p < 0.05$ i.e., the results did not occur by chance. However, the correlation coefficient $\rho = 0.53$ indicates that there is a moderate positive correlation between the variables. The findings show that, if social media usage time scores are high, body image dissatisfaction increases. This may be due to the fact that as social media usage time increases, exposure to content which promotes perfect body shapes increases.

Comparison effects scores

Table 5: Appearance comparisons descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Appearance Comparison	274	1.25	6.75	3.61	1.5
Valid N (listwise)	274				

Table 5 shows appearance comparison effects scores. Minimum and maximum scores were 1.25 and 6.75 respectively. The average score (Mean.) was 3.61 demonstrating that most participants scored from "Somewhat Disagree" to "In the middle" on how comparisons to

others affect them. This might have occurred due to the idea that some people naturally feel neutral about how comparisons affect them.

Table 6: Social media usage time and appearance comparison correlations

			Social Media Usage Time Scores	Appearance Comparison
Spearman's rho	Social Media Usage Time	Correlation Coefficient	1	-.06
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.301
		N	274	274
	Appearance Comparison	Correlation Coefficient	-.06	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.301	.
		N	274	274

Table 6 shows Spearman`s correlations between social media usage time and appearance comparison. Spearman`s rho correlation coefficient = -0.06, Significance (2 tailed) p-value = .301. There was no correlation between social media usage time and appearance comparison because the correlation coefficient is close to 0. This may be because of the type of social media content someone chooses to see; how sensitive they are to comparisons; and other influences outside of social media may impact how they perceive their appearance. This suggests that there is no statistically significant relationship between the amount of time individuals spend on social media and their tendency to compare their appearance with others. However, the results might have occurred by chance since $p > 0.05$. The relationship between social media use and comparing one's appearance to others may not be straightforward.

Contributing factors

(i) Age

Table 7: Age range

	N	%
20 - 21	53	19.3%
22 - 23	60	21.9%
24 - 25	59	21.5%
26 - 27	65	23.7%
28 - 29	37	13.5%

Table 7 presents a bar graph illustrating age distribution among social media users based on a dataset of 274 individuals. The majority of users fall within the 26–27 age range, making up

23.7% of the sample. This is followed by users aged 22–23 at 21.9%, and those aged 24–25 at 21.5%. The smallest group consists of users aged 28–29, representing 13.5%.

Women aged 26–27 may be the most active due to financial independence and a focus on forming stable relationships, aligning with findings that many African women marry after 25. Younger women aged 22–25 follow in activity, likely influenced by peer exposure and internet access, though academic responsibilities may limit their usage. Lower engagement among the 28–29 age group may be due to social media fatigue (Singh & Pathak, 2023) or shifting priorities such as careers, marriage, or parenting (Ehoro & Badey, 2021).

(ii) Ethnicity

Table 8: Social media usage time and ethnic groups crosstabulation

Ethnic Group Crosstabulation

		Ethnic Group						Total	
		Shona		Ndebele		Tonga			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE TIME	Strongly Disagree	14	7.8%	1	1.8%	2	5.1%	17	6.2%
	Disagree	20	11.2%	8	14.3%	2	5.1%	30	10.9%
	Somewhat Disagree	16	8.9%	4	7.1%	5	12.8%	25	9.1%
	In the middle	14	7.8%	4	7.1%	1	2.6%	19	6.9%
	Somewhat Agree	43	24.0%	11	19.6%	12	30.8%	66	24.1%
	Agree	32	17.9%	8	14.3%	7	17.9%	47	17.2%
	Strongly Agree	40	22.3%	20	35.7%	10	25.6%	70	25.5%
Total		179	100.0%	56	100.0%	39	100.0%	274	100.0%

Table 8 shows that the Ndebele people scored highest in social media usage time items whereby 35.7% of (N) 56 strongly agreed that they spend significant time on social media. This may be because different cultures react differently to technology whereby some encourage it whilst others may discourage it. The findings above may be a result of differences in cultural social norms whereby some ethnic groups view social media as an important communication tool whilst others perceive it as a source of distraction. The results also suggest that cultural and socio-economic background may influence social media usage patterns within different ethnic

groups. The second ethnic group were Tonga where 25.6% of (N) 39 also strongly agreed. The last group were the Shona, despite having a large dominance, 22.3% of (N) 179 strongly agreed to spend time on social media.

Discussion

Relationship between social media usage time and body image dissatisfaction.

The findings from the researcher`s analysis provide insight into the relationship between social media usage time and body image dissatisfaction scores. Based on data presented in Table 7 Spearman's rho, a correlation measure suitable for ordinal variables or nonlinear relationships was used. The study included a population of 274 participants.

The Spearman`s rho analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.53$ ($p < 0.001$), which indicated a statistically significant correlation between Social Media Usage Time and Body Image Dissatisfaction. The results showed that there was a moderate positive correlation between the variables. In some way, when Social Media Usage Time increased, there was a moderate increase in Body Image Dissatisfaction as well. This suggests that exposure to content on social media platforms that glorifies certain body shapes potentially leads to increased body dissatisfaction among users.

The study reveals the important connection between using social media and how individuals perceive their bodies. It emphasises the importance of further research and potential measures to address any negative effects on people's well-being resulting from social media engagement.

These results are in line with findings by Freitas (2017) who is of the view that young people often face a lot of pressure to look perfect and happy online. The research by Freitas (2017) was based on interviews with college students in the United States of America. Fardouly et al. (2015) also researched the effect of Facebook on women`s mood and body image. Their results showed that increased time spent on Facebook correlated with higher levels of body image concerns among the participants.

Furthermore, these research findings support the objectification theory propounded by Barbara Fredrickson and Tommi-Ann Roberts in 1997. Roberts et al. (2018) note that this theory proposes that women are socialised to internalise an observer's perspective of their bodies and to treat themselves as objects to be evaluated based on their appearance. Social media can reinforce this objectification process, as young women are exposed to sexualized and objectifying images of women, and receive feedback on their appearance from others.

Relationship between appearance comparison and social media usage

This research also looked into the relationship between social media usage time and appearance comparison, as shown in Table 9. Spearman's correlations were employed for this analysis, considering the ordinal nature of the variables and the potential for nonlinear relationships.

The Spearman`s rho analysis showed that the correlation coefficient was $\rho = -0.06$ ($p < 0.301$). There was no meaningful relationship between how much time people spent on social media and how often they compared their appearance to others since correlation coefficient is close to 0. This means that the time spent on social media does not have a significant impact on whether or not a person tends to compare their appearance to others. However, it's essential to acknowledge that the lack of significance in this correlation could be attributed to chance, given the p-value exceeds 0.05. This prompts the researcher to exercise caution in interpreting these results as definitive.

The above results contradict a study by Bergagna & Tartaglia (2018) which examines how self-esteem and social comparison influence the way people use Facebook. In their study, the results show that low self-esteem and high social comparison are associated with more time on Facebook and more use of Facebook for simulation, especially for females. This contradiction may be because, self-reporting methods used in this study may not have accurately captured comparison effects as participants may not fully understand their behaviour or may not be willing to reveal their genuine emotions, potentially resulting in data inaccuracies (Burke & Carman 2017). The findings may also reveal that, according to the social comparison theory some users may be using lateral and downward comparisons. Downward social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves with people they perceive as worse than they are (Guyer & Vaughan-Johnston, 2020). Lateral social comparison also takes place when individuals compare themselves with someone they perceive as equal to them in different ways (McCarthy & Morina, 2020). Therefore, the questionnaire mainly involved questions relating to upward comparison which may be more harmful.

This highlights the need for more research using different methods to understand this complex issue fully.

Contributing factors that influence social media usage

i) *Age*

Table 3 presented a bar graph which illustrated age distribution among social media users based on a dataset of 274 individuals. The majority of users fall within the 26–27 age range, making

up 23.7% of the sample. This is followed by users aged 22–23 at 21.9%, and those aged 24–25 at 21.5%. The smallest group consists of users aged 28–29, representing 13.5%.

Women aged 26–27 may be the most active due to financial independence and a focus on forming stable relationships, aligning with findings by Clark et al. (2018) that many African women marry after the age of 25. Younger women aged 22–25 follow in activity, likely influenced by peer exposure and internet access, though academic responsibilities may limit their usage. Lower engagement among the 28–29 age group may be due to social media fatigue (Singh & Pathak, 2023) or shifting priorities such as careers, marriage, or parenting (Ehoro & Badey, 2021).

These findings support research by Perrin (2015) who discovered that age is strongly correlated with social media usage and young adults are the most likely to use social media. In short, age seems to play a big role in how much people use social media. This may be because women in their mid-20s tend to be the most active, while older ones might use it less as they get busier with other duties of life such as work or marriage.

ii) *Ethnicity*

Table 10 data reveals variations in social media engagement among different ethnic groups. Ndebele participants showcased the highest engagement, with 35.7% strongly agreeing to spend much time on social media. The Tonga group followed closely with 25.6% strongly agreeing. Notably, despite being the largest in the sample, the Shona group had only 22.3% strongly agreeing to spend time on social media.

These findings also support research by Perrin (2015) who revealed that there are notable differences by racial or ethnic groups (Whites, Hispanics and African-Americans) in terms of social media usage. This suggests that cultural or socio-economic differences between ethnic groups may affect how they use social media. Cultural beliefs or financial situations within specific communities could influence how people interact with these platforms (Elias & Shiftan 2017).

For instance, factors like access to technology, social norms around digital communication, or even the prevalence of certain types of content on social media could vary between ethnic groups and impact their usage patterns. Socio-economic disparities might play a role, influencing factors such as internet access, digital literacy, or leisure time availability, all of which can affect how much time individuals spend on social media Terras and Ramsay, (2017).

All of these affect ethnic groups differently which may explain how different people interact on social media differently with different effects.

Conclusion

The researchers discovered that young women, particularly those aged between 26 and 27 years, tend to be the most active users of social media platforms. As people get more older, they tend to use social media less (28 to 29 years). This shows that age is an important factor in how people use social media, with people 26 to 27 being more likely to use it actively.

The researchers also noted variations in social media usage across different ethnic groups. Although the sample size may have been too small to reflect on the entire ethnic groups represented, nevertheless, amongst the three ethnic groups studied, the Ndebele showed the highest involvement in social media, followed by the Tonga and lastly the Shona despite having a larger population. However, more research may be required to determine the exact causes behind these variations in social media usage.

The study also discovered that using social media for longer periods moderately increases dissatisfaction with one's body. This may be because social media often shows images of people with perceived ideal body types, which can make people feel like their own bodies don't measure up. These revelations also make it possible to suggest that an increase in body dissatisfaction may also lead to low self-esteem.

The researcher also noted that no significant correlation was found between social media usage time and appearance comparison. This indicates that the amount of time individuals spend on social media does not strongly influence their tendency to compare their appearance to others. However, the lack of significance may be influenced by the limitations of self-report measures in capturing comparison effects accurately.

Recommendations

For researchers

Interdisciplinary collaboration – researchers should form collaborations with experts from different fields such as psychology, sociology, communications, and computer sciences to get a well-informed view of social media use and its impacts

Open data sharing - researchers are encouraged to share their data openly to ensure transparency, consistency of research findings, and collaboration.

Long-term tracking studies – researchers should conduct studies over time to observe how social media habits and mental health outcomes change, helping other researchers understand how people develop and how social media affects them in the long run.

Mixed Methods Approaches – researchers should make use of mixed approaches i.e., using both quantitative and qualitative methods to thoroughly explore the complexities of social media use and its influence on people.

For users

Digital well-being practices – users are encouraged to use social media wisely by setting limits, taking breaks, and valuing real-life interactions to protect their mental health.

Media literacy skills – users are encouraged to learn to identify trustworthy and false information, recognize persuasive tactics and critically analyse online content to make informed decisions.

Community engagement – users are encouraged to build supportive online communities by showing kindness, compassion, and respect. Join efforts to prevent cyberbullying and harassment.

Privacy awareness – users are encouraged to understand the importance of protecting their personal information online. Educate themselves about privacy settings and safeguard their digital footprint.

For social media application developers

User empowerment tools – developers may also provide social media users with tools and features to customise their digital experiences, such as content filters, time management features, and privacy controls, empowering them to make informed choices about their social media usage.

Research collaboration – developers are also encouraged to collaborate with researchers and experts in psychology and mental health to conduct user-centric research, evaluate the impact of platform features on user well-being, and implement evidence-based interventions to promote healthier social media habits.

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