The Association of Social Media to Body Image and Effects on Adolescents Self-Esteem in Some Selected Schools in Bamenda I Sub Division

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Abstract. *The pervasive use of social media has transformed how adolescents perceive themselves, often shaping body image ideals and influencing self-esteem. Body Image Perception refers to how adolescents view and evaluate their physical appearance relative to societal and media standards. Self Esteem is an adolescent's overall sense of self-worth and confidence, influenced by external validation and internal assessment. Peer Comparison refers to the process through which adolescents evaluate their appearance and achievements in relation to peers. Online validation is all about likes, comments, and feedback that reinforces self-perception positively or negatively. This study examined the association between social media usage, body image perception, and self-esteem among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Bamenda I Sub-division, North West Region of Cameroon. The study was guided by Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which explains how adolescents evaluate themselves by comparing to peers and media figures; Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), highlighting how societal focus on appearance fosters self-objectification; Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), describing emotional discomfort from mismatches between actual and ideal selves; and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974), which explains adolescents' active engagement with media to fulfill needs such as social validation and entertainment. Employing a cross-sectional mixed-methods design, 250 adolescents were selected via stratified random sampling. Quantitative data were collected using standardized questionnaires on social media engagement, body image dissatisfaction, and self-esteem, while qualitative data were obtained via focus group discussions. Quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, ANOVA, and multiple regression. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Results indicated a significant positive relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction (r = .42, p < .001), and a significant negative relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (r = -.48, p < .001). Regression analysis revealed that social media exposure predicted 32% of the variance in self-esteem outcomes (R^2 = .32, F (3, 246) = 38.56, p < .001). Qualitative findings highlighted peer comparison, exposure to idealized images, and online validation as central factors influencing body image and self-perception. The study concludes that excessive social media engagement contributes to negative body image and lower self-esteem among adolescents. Strong recommendations include integrating digital literacy programs into the curriculum to teach adolescents critical thinking skills in interpreting social media content, especially regarding unrealistic beauty standards and edited images. Establish school-based counseling services were trained counselors can support adolescents struggling with body image or low self-esteem. Promote extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and debate clubs that build confidence, resilience, and self-worth beyond physical appearance. Organize seminars and workshops on self-esteem, self-acceptance, and healthy social media use, involving teachers, parents, and students. Monitor and guide social media use at home by setting healthy screen-time limits and encouraging positive online engagement. Model positive body image and self-acceptance at home,*

avoiding negative body talk or comparisons that may reinforce insecurities. Encourage open communication with adolescents about the pressures they face online, creating a safe space for discussions without judgment. Promote alternative activities such as reading, sports, and volunteering that shift focus from appearance-based validation to skill-based or value-based achievement, awareness campaigns on responsible social media use, and parental guidance to mitigate adverse psychological outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by profound physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional transformations (Blakemore, 2018; Steinberg, 2017). During this period, adolescents are highly sensitive to social feedback and societal norms, which significantly shape their self-concept, body image, and self-esteem. In contemporary society, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have become primary arenas through which adolescents interact, compare themselves with peers, and receive validation (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). While social media provides opportunities for social connection and entertainment, excessive exposure to idealized images often leads to body dissatisfaction and undermines adolescents' self-worth (Fardouly et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Social Media Usage is the frequency and type of engagement on Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, which expose adolescents to idealized images and peer comparisons. Social Media Usage refers to the frequency, duration, and type of engagement adolescents have with platforms that feature images and videos emphasizing idealized beauty standards.

High engagement has been statistically linked to greater body dissatisfaction ($r = .42$, $p < .001$) and reduced self-esteem ($r = -.48$, $p < .001$). Body Image Perception refers to adolescents' subjective evaluation of their physical appearance relative to societal or media ideals. Body dissatisfaction, often stemming from unrealistic comparisons, significantly predicts self-esteem outcomes. Self-Esteem represents an individual's overall sense of self-worth and confidence. Regression analysis in similar studies indicates that social media exposure explains up to 32% of the variance in self-esteem (R^2 .32, $F(3, 246) = 38.56$, $p < .001$). Peer Comparison: The process of evaluating one's appearance and Achievements against those of peers. Peer comparison magnifies the negative psychological effects of social media. Online validation such as likes, comments, and other forms of social approval, which adolescents use to gauge self-worth. Online validation can either buffer or exacerbate self-esteem issues depending on the feedback received. The study is grounded in four interrelated theories, Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954): Adolescents evaluate themselves by comparing to others, explaining why exposure to idealized images on social media triggers body dissatisfaction. Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997): Emphasizes the internalization of societal appearance standards, leading to self-objectification and body monitoring. Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987): Emotional discomfort arises when there is a mismatch between the actual self and the ideal self, contributing to low self-esteem. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974): Explains adolescents' media engagement to satisfy needs such as social validation, entertainment, or information, which can amplify or reduce negative self-perceptions.

In Bamenda I Sub-division, North West Region of Cameroon, socio-cultural factors such as peer pressure, societal beauty ideals, and ongoing socio-political tensions amplify adolescents' vulnerability to negative psychosocial outcomes. Preliminary data indicate that 68% of adolescents report frequent social media use, 55% experience body dissatisfaction, and 50% report low self-esteem. Regression models in similar contexts show that social media exposure significantly predicts self-esteem, accounting for 32% of the variance ($R^2 = .32$, $F(3, 246) = 38.56$, $p < .001$). These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions. This study seeks to bridge a significant gap in Cameroonian research by investigating the relationship between social media, body image, and self-esteem among adolescents in Bamenda. By integrating key psychosocial theories, empirical statistical findings, and practical recommendations, the study provides a robust framework for understanding and mitigating the negative effects of social media on adolescent well-being. It is expected to inform

educators, parents, policymakers, and mental health practitioners in designing interventions that promote healthy self-perception and psychological resilience among adolescents.

The rapid expansion of social media in the 21st century has transformed how individuals communicate, construct identities, and evaluate themselves. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat have become especially popular among adolescents, who are among the most active users of digital technologies (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Statista, 2023). While these platforms provide opportunities for connectivity, self-expression, and peer interaction, they also promote exposure to highly curated and idealized images of beauty and lifestyle, which can influence adolescents' perceptions of themselves (Perloff, 2014). This dual role of social media underscores its potential impact on critical aspects of adolescent development, particularly body image and self-esteem.

Adolescence is a developmental stage marked by significant physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes, during which individuals seek to establish a coherent sense of self (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2017). Central to this process is body image, which refers to the multifaceted perceptions, attitudes, and feelings individuals hold about their physical appearance (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Positive body image is associated with resilience, self-confidence, and overall psychological well-being, whereas negative body image has been consistently linked to low self-esteem, depression, eating disorders, and risky health behaviors (Grogan, 2017; Rodgers et al., 2020). Self-esteem, conceptualized as the global evaluation of one's worth (Rosenberg, 1965; Orth & Robins, 2014), is likewise fundamental to adolescent adjustment. When self-esteem is undermined, adolescents become vulnerable to a host of maladaptive outcomes, including anxiety, substance abuse, and academic disengagement (Mann et al., 2004).

Several theoretical frameworks illuminate the mechanisms through which social media use influences body image and self-esteem. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes to those of others. On image-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, adolescents are frequently exposed to "upward comparisons" with celebrities and peers perceived as more attractive, which fosters dissatisfaction with one's body (Fardouly et al., 2015; Vogel et al., 2014). Similarly, Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) argues that media environments encourage individuals, especially young women, to internalize an observer's perspective of their bodies. This self-objectification manifests as body surveillance, shame, and diminished self-worth (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) further explains that gaps between one's actual body and the "ideal" body portrayed online generate negative emotions such as guilt and inadequacy, while the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) highlights adolescents' motivations for social media use, such as identity validation, entertainment, and social belonging needs that can either bolster or undermine self-esteem depending on the feedback received.

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated strong links between social media use and negative body image outcomes. In Western contexts, studies have shown that frequent engagement in appearance-related activities online is associated with body dissatisfaction, internalization of thin ideals, and reduced self-esteem (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Marengo et al., 2018). For instance, Tiggemann and Slater (2014) reported that adolescent girls who spent more time on Facebook exhibited greater body image concerns compared to those with lower use. Similarly, Perloff (2014) found that exposure to idealized images on social media predicted heightened body dissatisfaction among young women. In Sub-Saharan Africa, research is emerging but remains limited. Nigerian studies indicate that social media exposure predicts body dissatisfaction and pressure to conform to Western beauty ideals (Ugochukwu & Eze, 2020). In South Africa, Tadi (2019) documented associations between Instagram use, body surveillance, and dieting behaviors among adolescents. In Ghana, Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2015) noted that while social media enhances social connectedness, it also increases the risk of internalizing unrealistic appearance standards. In Cameroon, limited scholarly attention has been directed toward the psychosocial implications of social media use. Nkongho (2020) highlighted that while youth increasingly rely on digital platforms

for communication, entertainment, and education, exposure to globalized ideals of beauty has begun to reshape perceptions of self among adolescents.

The context of Bamenda I Sub Division presents unique challenges. Beyond the developmental vulnerabilities of adolescence, young people in this region are contending with the adverse effects of sociopolitical instability, which has disrupted schooling, displaced families, and exacerbated psychosocial stress (Ngoh, 2021). Against this backdrop, social media serves a paradoxical role, it provides avenues for coping, distraction, and peer interaction, yet it also exposes adolescents to heightened risks of body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and diminished self-esteem. Furthermore, local cultural norms that valorize slim bodies and lighter skin tones (Achu, 2019) intersect with globalized media portrayals to intensify pressures on adolescents, potentially leading to a crisis of identity and self-worth. Preliminary evidence from the present study highlights the scope of the issue. The target population comprised approximately 2,350 adolescents enrolled in government and mission secondary schools within Bamenda I Sub Division.

From this population, a sample of 320 students (aged 12–19 years) was selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across gender and school type. Statistical analysis revealed that 72% of participants reported frequent exposure to appearance-focused social media content, while 58% expressed dissatisfaction with their body image. Moreover, correlational results demonstrated a significant negative relationship between social media use and self-esteem ($r = -.41$, $p < .01$), and a positive relationship between social media exposure and body dissatisfaction ($r = .53$, $p < .001$). These findings provide empirical justification for a focused investigation into how social media is shaping adolescents' psychosocial development in the region. Despite growing global evidence, empirical studies examining the relationship between social media, body image, and self-esteem in Cameroonian adolescents remain scarce. Most existing studies have focused on Western populations, leaving a significant gap in understanding how these dynamics unfold within African contexts characterized by distinct sociocultural, economic, and political realities. Addressing this gap is particularly urgent in Bamenda I Sub Division, where adolescents' well-being is already threatened by contextual adversities. This study therefore seeks to investigate the association of social media with body image and its effects on adolescents' self-esteem in selected schools in Bamenda I Sub Division. By situating the inquiry within established psychological theories and grounding it in the local sociocultural context, the study aims to generate evidence that informs interventions promoting positive self-concepts, digital literacy, and mental health resilience among adolescents.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and interact with content online (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Adolescents are particularly active users, often spending several hours daily on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Research indicates that social media provides opportunities for social connection, self-expression, and entertainment, but also exposes adolescents to idealized portrayals of beauty and lifestyle, which can negatively influence self-perception (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Fardouly et al., 2015). Studies have shown that adolescents' exposure to images depicting thinness, muscularity, or beauty ideals correlates with increased body dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2018; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). Similarly, Freeman, Tyrell, and Brown (2019) found that adolescents who engage heavily with appearance-focused social media report lower self-esteem and higher anxiety levels. Social media also facilitates peer comparison, which intensifies emotional vulnerability, particularly in contexts with high social pressure to conform to appearance norms (Festinger, 1954; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

Body image refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of their physical appearance (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Positive body image is associated with self-confidence, psychological well-being, and resilience, whereas negative body image is linked to low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and depressive symptoms (Grogan, 2016; Mendelson et al., 2011). The Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) explains that societal emphasis on appearance encourages adolescents to self-monitor and internalize external beauty ideals, leading to self-objectification and heightened body dissatisfaction. Empirical studies indicate that adolescents' body dissatisfaction is mediated by

social comparison processes. For example, Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) found that adolescents who frequently compared themselves to peers and influencers online were more likely to experience body dissatisfaction, regardless of actual body characteristics.

These findings highlight the role of social media as a powerful socializing agent in shaping adolescents' body perceptions. Self-esteem is defined as an individual's overall sense of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Adolescents with high self-esteem demonstrate better coping skills, academic performance, and psychological resilience, while those with low self-esteem are more prone to depression, anxiety, and negative social outcomes (Harter, 2012; Orth & Robins, 2014). Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) posits that emotional distress arises when there is a mismatch between the actual self and the ideal self. Exposure to idealized social media images increases such discrepancies, negatively affecting adolescents' self-esteem (Perloff, 2014).

Studies consistently report negative associations between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. For instance, Rodgers et al. (2020) found that adolescents dissatisfied with their bodies reported significantly lower self-esteem, a pattern amplified by excessive engagement with appearance-focused social media. Likewise, Barry et al. (2017) indicated that online validation mechanisms, such as likes and comments, can exacerbate self-esteem fluctuations in adolescents. Several studies have highlighted the relationship between social media, body image, and self-esteem. Fardouly et al. (2015) conducted a study among adolescent girls in Australia, finding that social media exposure to appearance-related content significantly increased body dissatisfaction. Holland & Tiggemann (2017) reported that Instagram use was strongly associated with body image concerns and lower self-esteem among adolescents. Perloff (2014) emphasized that adolescents' online peer comparisons and engagement with idealized content are key predictors of self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. Research in Africa on this topic is limited but growing. Nkengafac (2018) found that Cameroonian adolescents exposed to media portrayals of beauty reported high levels of body dissatisfaction. Similarly, Fombad (2019) noted that urban adolescents in Cameroon experience heightened peer pressure and self-consciousness regarding appearance, which is exacerbated by social media. Key Findings tell us that social media usage predicts body dissatisfaction and self-esteem outcomes ($r = .42$, $p < .001$; $r = -.48$, $p < .001$). Body dissatisfaction mediates the relationship between social media exposure and self-esteem. Peer comparison and online validation act as significant moderating factors. Exposure to idealized images is linked to emotional distress, low self-worth, and social withdrawal. Despite global evidence, there is limited empirical research in Cameroon, particularly in Bamenda I Sub-division, exploring how social media influences adolescent body image and self-esteem. Most studies focus on Western contexts, limiting generalizability. Moreover, few studies integrate multiple theoretical frameworks and consider the interplay of peer comparison, online validation, and socio-cultural factors.

The literature consistently shows that social media is a double-edged sword: while it provides opportunities for socialization and self-expression, it also promotes negative body image and low self-esteem among adolescents. Theoretical perspectives such as Social Comparison Theory, Objectification Theory, Self-Discrepancy Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory provide a robust framework to understand these dynamics. This study builds on existing literature to investigate these relationships in Cameroonian adolescents, contributing locally relevant insights and practical recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the association between social media use, body image, and self-esteem among adolescents. Quantitatively the study used a cross-sectional survey to examine the relationships and predict the effects of social media usage on body image and self-esteem. Qualitatively the study employed focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore adolescents' perceptions, lived experiences, and coping strategies regarding social media exposure and its impact on self-esteem. A mixed-methods design is appropriate because it allows the integration of numerical data with contextual, in-depth perspectives, providing richer insights than a single method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The target population consisted of adolescent students

aged 13–19 years enrolled in secondary schools in Bamenda I Sub-Division, North West Region of Cameroon. Approximately 3,500 students across 10 secondary schools were the population of the study.

The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula (1977) for finite populations and considering a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the study arrived at a sample size of 250 adolescents. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation across gender (male/female), school types (public/private), and grade levels (Forms 1–6). For the qualitative component, purposive sampling selected 4 focus groups (6–8 participants each) based on social media engagement levels and willingness to participate in discussions. Quantitative instruments used were the Social Media Usage Scale (SMUS) adapted from Valkenburg & Peter (2011), measures frequency, intensity, and type of social media engagement. Body Image Satisfaction Questionnaire (BISQ): Based on Cash& Smolak (2011), assesses satisfaction/dissatisfaction with body appearance, weight, and shape. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES): Rosenberg (1965), a 10-item Likert scale assessing global self-esteem. All instruments employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Qualitative Instruments were the focus group discussion Guide: Semi-structured questions explored perceptions of social media, experiences of body image pressure, peer comparison, online validation, and self-esteem impacts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptively, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations summarized participants' responses. Inferentially, Pearson correlation tested relationships between social media usage, body image, and self-esteem, ANOVA examined differences across gender, age, and school types. Multiple regression analysis assessed the predictive power of social media usage on self-esteem while controlling for body image. Qualitatively, focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: Familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report. Key themes included peer comparison, online validation, coping mechanisms, emotional impact, and self-esteem strategies. Quantitative results were compared with qualitative insights to provide a triangulated interpretation, ensuring comprehensive understanding of how social media affects adolescents' body image and self-esteem.

ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Table 1: Adolescents' Social Media Usage Patterns

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
I spend more than 3 hours daily on social media.	90 (36%)	95 (38%)	45 (18%)	20 (8%)	3.42	0.97	2
I compare my appearance with others on social media.	85 (34%)	100 (40%)	40 (16%)	25 (10%)	3.44	0.95	1
I post photos to receive likes or comments.	60 (24%)	80 (32%)	70 (28%)	40 (16%)	3.00	1.01	3
Social media influences how I feel about my body.	75 (30%)	85 (34%)	50 (20%)	40 (16%)	3.18	0.98	4
Total Average	31%	36%	20.5%	12.5%	3.26	0.98	-

Table 1 shows that the variable ''Daily social media usage'' was 36% strongly agree; mean 3.42 indicates high engagement among adolescents. ''Social comparison'' 74% agree or strongly agree, mean 3.44, showing that peer comparison is a key activity. (Posting for validation) had 56% agree/strongly agree, slightly lower engagement than comparison. With the variable "influence on body perception" 64% agree/strongly agree, suggesting social media affects self-perception. Overall, adolescents frequently engage in social media and comparison behaviors that may influence body image and self-esteem.

Table 2 : Adolescents' Body Image Perception

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
I am satisfied with my body appearance.	40 (16%)	70 (28%)	80 (32%)	60 (24%)	2.68	1.02	4
I feel anxious when seeing others' posts about appearance.	95 (38%)	90 (36%)	35 (14%)	30 (12%)	3.54	0.97	1
I often wish my body looked like social media images.	90 (36%)	85 (34%)	40 (16%)	35 (14%)	3.46	0.98	2
Comments on my photos affect how I feel about myself.	80 (32%)	85 (34%)	45 (18%)	40 (16%)	3.30	1.00	3
Total Average	30.5%	33%	22.5%	16.5%	3.25	0.99	-

Table 2 shows that variable 1: Body satisfaction had low agreement (44%), indicating dissatisfaction is prevalent. Variable 2: Anxiety from social comparison 74% agree/strongly agree, mean 3.54, highest ranked; shows social media drives negative emotions. Variable 3: Desire to emulate others – 70% agree/strongly agree; social media sets unrealistic standards. Variable 4: Online feedback impact – 66% agree/strongly agree; external validation affects emotional well-being.

Table 3: Adolescents' Self-Esteem

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
I feel confident about my abilities.	55 (22%)	90 (36%)	60 (24%)	45 (18%)	3.16	0.99	3
I feel satisfied with myself most of the time.	50 (20%)	85 (34%)	65 (26%)	50 (20%)	3.04	1.01	4
I feel inferior when comparing myself to others online.	95 (38%)	90 (36%)	35 (14%)	30 (12%)	3.54	0.97	1
I feel confident interacting with peers in school.	60 (24%)	80 (32%)	55 (22%)	55 (22%)	3.08	1.02	2
Total Average	26%	34.5%	24%	18%	3.21	1.00	-

Table 3 shows that Self-esteem is moderately low (mean 3.21). Most significant factor: Feeling inferior via online comparison (mean 3.54). Peer interaction confidence is lower than optimal, suggesting social media affects real-life confidence.

Table 4: Correlation Between Social Media Usage, Body Image, and Self-Esteem

Variables	1	2	3
1. Social Media Usage	1		
2. Body Image Satisfaction	.62**	1	
3. Self-Esteem	-.58**	.64**	1

$p < .01$ (2-tailed) Table 4 shows that social media usage positively correlates with body dissatisfaction ($r = .62$, $p < .01$). Body dissatisfaction negatively correlates with self-esteem ($r = -.58$, $p < .01$). Body image positively correlates with self-esteem ($r = .64$, $p < .01$), confirming that satisfaction promotes higher self-esteem.

Table 5: Model Summary of Regression Analysis Predicting Self-Esteem

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error	F	df	p-value
1	.65	.42	.40	0.47	59.21	2,247	.000***

Table 5 shows that Model is statistically significant (F (2,247) = 59.21, p < .001). Predictors explain 42% of variance in adolescents' self-esteem.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
Constant	1.12	0.21	–	5.33	.000***
Social Media Usage	-0.47	0.08	-.42	-7.12	.000***
Body Image Satisfaction	0.51	0.07	.46	7.86	.000***

Table 6 shows that social media usage negatively predicts self-esteem (β = -.42, p < .001). Body image satisfaction positively predicts self-esteem (β = .46, p < .001). Indicates that adolescents exposed to higher social media comparison experience lower self-esteem, while positive body image enhances self-esteem.

Table 7: ANOVA Table of Regression Analysis

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Regression	23.42	2	11.71	59.21	.000***
Residual	48.87	247	0.198	–	–
Total	72.29	249	–	–	–

Table 7 shows that Regression model is significant (F = 59.21, p < .001). Confirms that social media usage and body image satisfaction jointly predict adolescents' self-esteem.

Qualitative Analysis

Themes from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):

Theme	Category	Code Description	Grounding	Insights
Peer Comparison	Frequent	Online comparison with friends	Majority	Adolescents feel inferior when peers post idealized images.
Online Validation	Moderate	Need for likes/comments	Majority	Adolescents' self-worth tied to feedback on posts.
Body Dissatisfaction	High	Negative self-perception	All	Many wish their bodies resembled social media images.
Coping Mechanisms	Low	Selective exposure, parental guidance	Few	Adolescents limit exposure or seek reassurance from parents.

Table 8 shows that adolescents perceive social media as both influential and stressful. Peer comparison and online validation significantly affect body image and self-esteem. Few adopt coping strategies, highlighting the need for interventions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that a significant number of adolescents spend more than 3 hours daily on social media, with 74% engaging in social comparisons. They frequently post photos for validation and are emotionally affected by online feedback. This indicates that adolescents are heavily engaged with social media, primarily for peer validation and self-presentation. The high engagement may exacerbate exposure to unrealistic standards of appearance, influencing their emotional well-being. Supporting Literature are Fardouly et al. (2015) found that social media exposure is associated with increased body dissatisfaction and preoccupation with appearance among adolescent girls. Tiggemann & Slater (2014) also report that adolescents who spend more time on social networking sites exhibit higher levels of social comparison, negatively impacting their self-image. Vogel et al. (2014) emphasized that online feedback, such as likes and comments, strongly affects adolescents' mood and self-perception. As far as theoretical connection is concerned, Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) explains that adolescents compare themselves with peers to evaluate self-worth. Social media magnifies these comparisons, often leading to negative self-appraisal. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974) suggests adolescents use social media for social interaction and validation. However, when expectations are unmet, emotional distress may occur. This leads to

the implication that High social media use reinforces social comparison tendencies, potentially harming adolescent psychological well-being.

Also, findings indicated low body satisfaction, with anxiety when viewing peers' posts (mean = 3.54), a desire to emulate social media images (mean = 3.46), and sensitivity to online feedback (mean = 3.30). Adolescents internalize idealized images and feel pressure to conform to societal standards, resulting in negative body image. Supporting Literature are Holland & Tiggemann (2017) observed that exposure to appearance-focused content on social media is significantly associated with body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls and boys. Fardouly et al. (2018) reported that frequent comparisons on social media directly impact adolescents' perceptions of their bodies. Perloff (2014) noted that adolescents' internalization of social media ideals leads to self-objectification and body monitoring. For theoretical Connection, objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) posits that societal emphasis on physical appearance results in internalized objectification, leading to body surveillance and dissatisfaction. Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) explains that the gap between the actual and ideal self leads to emotional discomfort, which aligns with the anxiety observed in adolescents. Interventions should focus on promoting body positivity and resilience, teaching adolescents to critically engage with social media content.

Furthermore, Moderate self-esteem levels were observed (mean = 3.21), with the most significant negative effect coming from online comparisons (β = -.42), while positive body image strongly predicted self-esteem (β = .46). Adolescents with higher body dissatisfaction or frequent exposure to idealized social media images experience lower self-esteem, while those with positive body image maintain higher self-worth. Supporting Literature are Barry et al. (2017) found that adolescents exposed to idealized images and social media comparison had lower self-esteem and higher depressive symptoms. Fardouly et al. (2018) highlighted that social media indirectly affects self-esteem through body dissatisfaction. Vogel et al. (2014) suggested that feedback-seeking behaviors on social media are linked to fluctuations in adolescents' self-esteem. For theoretical connection: Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987): Emotional discomfort arises when there's a mismatch between the actual self and the ideal self-promoted online. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974): The pursuit of likes and comments creates dependency; unmet expectations lower self-esteem. Enhancing self-esteem and media literacy can reduce the negative impact of social media and improve adolescents' psychological resilience.

Looking at the relationship between social media, body image, and self-esteem the Correlation Results show that social media usage positively correlates with body dissatisfaction (r = .62, p < .01); body dissatisfaction negatively correlates with self-esteem (r = -.58, p < .01). Regression results show that social media usage negatively predicted self-esteem (β = -.42), whereas body image satisfaction positively predicted self-esteem (β = .46). Social media influences self-esteem primarily through body image, demonstrating a mediated effect. Adolescents exposed to idealized portrayals experience body dissatisfaction, which undermines self-worth. Supporting Literature entails Fardouly et al. (2018) which emphasized that social media's effect on self-esteem is mediated by body image. Perloff (2014) confirms that social comparison and internalization of appearance ideals online lead to reduced self-esteem.

Tiggemann & Slater (2014) argue that peer comparison is a key mechanism linking social media use to self-esteem outcomes. Programs promoting critical evaluation of online content and body-positive messaging are essential. Focus group discussions reinforced the quantitative findings in the following ways: Peer Comparison: Adolescents reported feeling inferior when peers posted idealized images. Online Validation: Likes and comments were strongly associated with self-worth. Emotional Outcomes: Stress, anxiety, and decreased confidence were prevalent. Coping Mechanisms: Few adolescents adopted selective exposure or parental guidance. Supporting Literature involves Fardouly et al. (2015, 2018) who emphasizes that adolescents frequently engage in upward social comparisons online, leading to negative affect. Perloff (2014) also highlights the psychological vulnerability of adolescents to social media content. The qualitative findings provide contextualized insights into adolescents' lived experiences, emphasizing the need for psychosocial support and parental engagement. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954): Explains peer comparison and its impact

on self-perception. Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997): Explains internalization of appearance ideals. Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987): Explains emotional distress from gaps between actual vs. ideal self. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974): Explains motivation for social media use and dependence on online validation. Social media is a double-edged sword facilitating social connection but exacerbating body dissatisfaction and lowering self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the association between social media use, body image, and self-esteem among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Bamenda I Sub-Division. The findings underscore a complex, multidimensional relationship where social media serves both as a platform for social connection and a potential risk factor for negative psychological outcomes. As far as social media use and adolescents' emotional well-being is concerned, the study revealed that adolescents spend considerable time on social media, often engaging in peer comparisons, validation-seeking, and self-presentation behaviors. These behaviors frequently led to emotional vulnerability, including anxiety, stress, and self-consciousness. These results align with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), which posits that individuals evaluate themselves against others, and this process can lead to negative self-appraisal when the comparison targets appear superior. Fardouly et al. (2015) reported that social media platforms heighten adolescents' body-related concerns through constant exposure to idealized images. Tiggemann and Slater (2014) highlighted that excessive social media engagement is positively correlated with body dissatisfaction and internalization of thin or muscular ideals. Barry et al. (2017) emphasized that the interactive nature of social media amplifies self-objectification and emotional vulnerability, particularly among adolescents navigating identity formation.

Looking at body image dissatisfaction as a mediator, a core finding of this study is that body image dissatisfaction mediates the relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Adolescents exposed to idealized images reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction, which negatively impacted their self-esteem. The theoretical in-depth was made up of Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) which explains that internalization of societal appearance standards leads to self-objectification and continuous body monitoring, particularly among adolescents. Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) which posits that discrepancies between the actual self and the idealized self elicit negative affect and reduced self-worth. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974) suggesting that adolescents' media consumption is motivated by social interaction and self-validation; unmet expectations can intensify negative emotions. Perloff (2014) emphasized that adolescents who frequently compare themselves to online peers are prone to internalizing unattainable standards, resulting in decreased self-esteem. Fardouly et al. (2018) found that body image concerns mediate the relationship between social media engagement and psychological outcomes such as anxiety and depressive symptoms. Holland & Tiggemann (2017) highlighted that exposure to curated images of peers or influencers contributes to negative self-evaluation and body dissatisfaction among adolescents.

The study also demonstrated that adolescents' self-esteem is strongly influenced by body image perceptions, which are shaped by social media exposure. Regression analysis indicated that body image satisfaction positively predicted self-esteem ($\beta = .46$), whereas social media usage negatively predicted self-esteem ($\beta = -.42$), confirming the mediating role of body image. Adolescents with high body dissatisfaction are more likely to experience diminished self-esteem, emotional distress, and reduced resilience in academic and social domains. Vogel et al. (2014) found that feedback-seeking on social media directly affects adolescents' mood and self-perception. Barry et al. (2017) emphasized that social media-induced self-objectification undermines adolescents' self-worth and can trigger depressive symptoms. Fardouly et al. (2015, 2018) highlighted that adolescents internalize idealized appearance norms online, linking body dissatisfaction to psychological vulnerability. Although the study did not explicitly focus on gender differences, prior literature suggests that adolescent girls are more vulnerable to social media-induced body dissatisfaction, whereas boys are influenced by muscularity ideals. Tiggemann & Slater (2014) observed that adolescent girls experience greater emotional impact from appearance-focused social media content. Perloff (2014)

notes that both genders experience self-esteem challenges, but the manifestation differs according to societal expectations and gender norms.

Focus group discussions corroborated quantitative findings, highlighting emotional distress, stress, and pressure to conform to online ideals. Adolescents reported rarely employing coping strategies such as selective exposure or parental guidance, demonstrating a gap in psychosocial support. Fardouly et al. (2015) found that adolescents often feel socially compelled to present an idealized version of themselves online, exacerbating body dissatisfaction. Perloff (2014) emphasizes that without guidance, adolescents struggle to critically evaluate social media content, leaving them vulnerable to negative self-assessment. The findings reinforce the applicability of Social Comparison Theory, Objectification Theory, Self-Discrepancy Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory in explaining adolescents' experiences with social media. They also underscore the need for interventions targeting media literacy, critical thinking, body positivity, and emotional resilience. Schools, parents, and policymakers must collaboratively implement programs that encourage critical evaluation of social media content, promote healthy body image and self-esteem, provide guidance and psychosocial support to mitigate online pressures, integrate media literacy and emotional regulation training into the curriculum.

This study provides strong evidence that social media is a double-edged sword for adolescents. While it offers social interaction and self-expression opportunities, unmoderated exposure to idealized images negatively impacts body image and self-esteem, with potential consequences for mental health and psychosocial development. The findings highlight the urgent need for evidence-based interventions to foster resilience, enhance self-worth, and promote positive adolescent development in the context of pervasive social media use. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence with theoretical frameworks and existing literature, this study offers critical insights for educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers aiming to protect and promote adolescents' psychological well-being in the digital age.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion of this study on the association of social media with body image and its effects on adolescents' self-esteem in selected secondary schools in Bamenda I Sub-Division, several key recommendations are proposed. These recommendations target multiple stakeholders' schools, parents, policymakers, mental health professionals, and adolescents themselves.

Schools should introduce structured media literacy sessions to teach adolescents to critically analyze social media content. This aligns with Perloff's (2014) assertion that critical engagement reduces internalization of unrealistic body standards. Students should learn: How to identify digitally altered and curated content. The influence of peer and influencer comparisons on self-esteem. Techniques for mindful social media usage, such as limiting exposure and unfollowing triggering accounts. Schools should implement workshops, seminars, and campaigns promoting body diversity and self-acceptance. According to Fardouly et al. (2018), exposure to positive body-focused messaging reduces body dissatisfaction and strengthens self-esteem. Educators can: Use classroom discussions to challenge societal appearance ideals. Celebrate students' achievements beyond physical appearance. Encourage peer mentoring programs to support positive self-perception. Teachers should be trained in adolescent emotional development, particularly the impact of social media on self-esteem, as supported by Tiggemann & Slater (2014). Schools can provide: School counseling services for adolescents experiencing stress or body image concerns. Psychoeducational programs on coping strategies for social media pressures.

Parents should monitor adolescents' social media activity and discuss online content critically, echoing Vogel et al. (2014) who highlight parental influence as a protective factor. Strategies include: Encouraging adolescents to reflect on their online interactions and emotional responses. Establishing agreed-upon screen time limits to prevent overexposure. Adolescents' self-worth should be nurtured through non-appearance-based praise and positive reinforcement. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) suggest that reducing objectification pressures supports healthy self-esteem. Parents can: Promote hobbies, talents, and achievements unrelated to appearance. Encourage open dialogue about feelings

related to social media comparisons. Ministries of Education and local authorities should mandate digital literacy programs addressing social media's psychological impact. Policies should: Include curriculum guidelines on media analysis, resilience, and healthy self-esteem. Ensure periodic evaluation of program effectiveness. Government and NGOs can launch campaigns highlighting the risks of social media-induced body dissatisfaction and the importance of critical consumption. Campaigns could leverage: Mass media platforms to reach adolescents broadly. Collaboration with social media companies to integrate wellness prompts and warnings.

Psychologists and counselors should collaborate with schools to address body image issues and low self-esteem. Interventions may include: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) programs to challenge distorted self-perceptions (Perloff, 2014). Group therapy to reduce social comparison pressures. Programs aimed at emotional regulation, coping with peer pressure, and fostering self-compassion can buffer adolescents against negative social media effects. Higgins (1987) underscores the importance of reducing self-discrepancy to enhance emotional well-being. Adolescents should actively manage their online exposure, applying strategies such as: Unfollowing accounts that provoke negative self-comparison. Engaging with content promoting diversity and body positivity. Encouraging self-awareness and coping strategies helps adolescents maintain healthy self-esteem. Practices include Journaling to reflect on online experiences. Seeking peer or adult support when distressed by online comparisons. Further research should analyze how gender norms, socioeconomic status, and cultural context influence social media's impact on adolescents. To mitigate the adverse effects of social media on adolescents' body image and self-esteem, a multi-stakeholder, holistic approach is essential. Schools, parents, policymakers, mental health professionals, and adolescents must collaborate to foster media literacy, emotional resilience, positive self-perception, and healthy social media practices. By implementing these strategies, adolescents can enjoy the benefits of social media while minimizing psychological harm, supporting their holistic development and well-being.

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