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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of social networking sites (SNS) has amplified concerns regarding their impact on self-objectification among females. Previous research suggests that SNS usage may contribute to adverse body image outcomes, mainly through mechanisms such as internalization of societal beauty standards, appearance comparison, and exposure to appearance-related commentary. However, the specific pathways linking SNS use to self-objectification remain underexplored. This study examined the relationship and pathways between social networking site (SNS) use and self-objectification, focusing on internalizing cultural standards of beauty, engaging in social comparison, and receiving appearance commentary. A cross-sectional survey study was designed, and 350 young females, ages 18-23, residing in south Punjab participated. Participants completed validated self-report questionnaires measuring SNS use, the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale, internalization of cultural beauty standards, appearance comparison, and appearance commentary. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the proposed mediation model. Findings revealed a significant association between SNS use and self-objectification. The internalization of cultural standards, appearance comparison, and commentary significantly mediated this relationship. These results underscore the need for interventions targeting the reduction of internalization and appearance comparison behaviors in SNS users. Additionally, promoting critical media literacy may help mitigate the adverse effects of SNS use on self-objectification. These findings can inform educational and psychological interventions aimed at improving body image and reducing self-objectification among female SNS users. **Keywords:** SNS use, Objectified Body Consciousness, Physical Attributes, Appearance comparison, appearance commentary, university students

Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) have revolutionized social interaction and introduced significant challenges related to body image and self-objectification, particularly among females. Theories like objectification and social comparison suggest that engagement with SNS features, such as sharing photos, receiving appearance-based comments, and browsing idealized content, can reinforce the internalization of cultural beauty standards, leading to increased self-surveillance and dissatisfaction with one's body. Research has found that SNS activities are linked to self-objectification and associated behaviors, such as upward appearance comparisons and heightened focus on appearance in photos (Seekis et al., 2020). Furthermore, commentary on appearance has been shown to mediate the relationship between SNS usage and disordered eating patterns, emphasizing the impact of social feedback on self-perception (Niu et al., 2020). The prevalence of these issues underscores the need to critically evaluate the roles of internalization, comparison, and social commentary in shaping self-objectification through SNS use.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study demonstrated a significant relationship between social networking site (SNS) usage and self-objectification among young adult women. Specifically, higher levels of image-based SNS use were strongly associated with increased body surveillance, reflecting the tendency to view one's body from an external perspective (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Furthermore, comparison-based SNS activities were positively linked to upward appearance comparisons and the internalization of cultural beauty standards, with internalization acting as a critical mediator between SNS use and self-objectification (Heilberg et al., 1995). Negative appearance-related comments were significantly correlated with increased body dissatisfaction and self-objectification, while positive comments showed weaker but still notable links to body surveillance (O'Brien et al., 2009). These results align with prior research indicating that frequent engagement with appearance-related SNS content reinforces societal beauty norms and self-objectifying behaviors (Seekis et al., 2020). These findings suggest that SNS platforms not only provide opportunities for self-expression but also reinforce behaviors that contribute to body dissatisfaction and self-objectification. The significant mediating role of internalization highlights how exposure to idealized standards through SNS can deeply influence self-perception (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018). Interventions focusing on media literacy and promoting healthier online interactions could be essential in mitigating these effects, particularly in populations vulnerable to body image concerns. Future research should further explore protective factors, such as self-compassion or resilience, to counteract the adverse effects of SNS on body image (Seekis et al., 2020).

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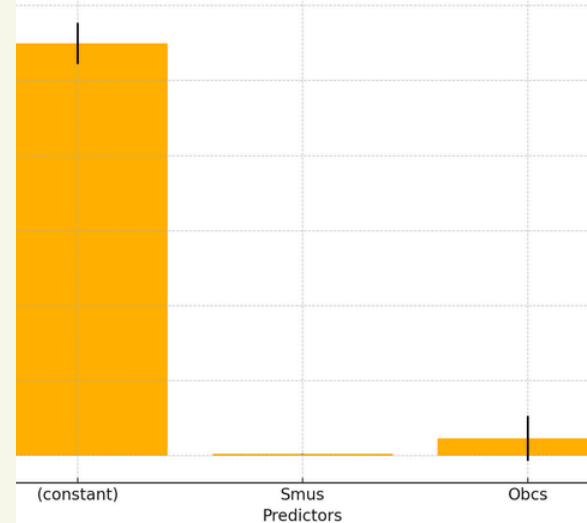
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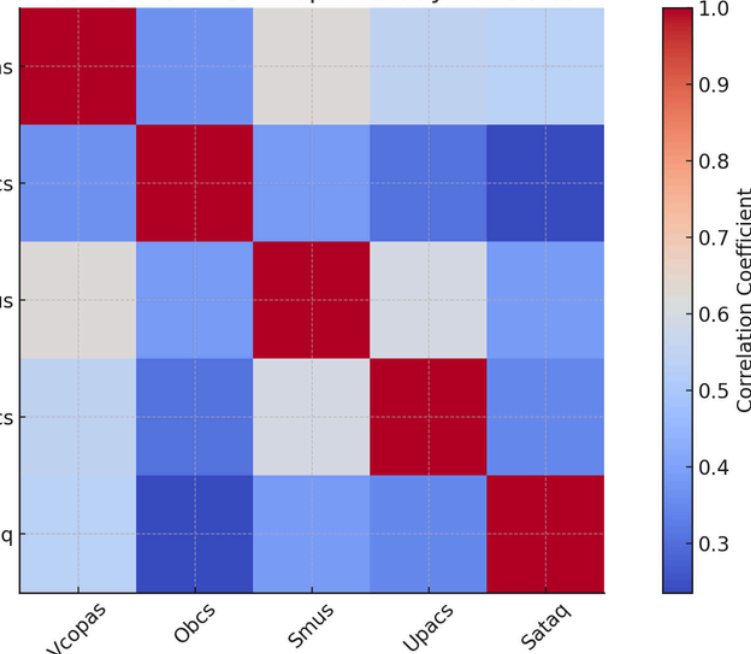
Method

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationships between social networking site (SNS) usage and self-objectification among young adult females. Data were collected from 350 undergraduate women aged 18 to 23 using standardized, self-administered questionnaires. Self-objectification was measured using the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS; McKinley & Hyde, 1996), focusing on the Body Surveillance subscale, with responses rated on a 7-point Likert scale. SNS usage was assessed using a 17-item scale, comprising four subscales: image-based use, consumption-based use, comparison-based use, and belief-oriented use, with randomized items and reverse-keyed responses to ensure accuracy. Internalization of cultural beauty standards was measured using the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Scale (SATAQ; Heilberg et al., 1995), capturing how societal norms are internalized through SNS. Appearance comparisons were evaluated using an 18-item scale by O'Brien et al. (2009), focusing on upward and downward social comparisons. Finally, appearance commentary was assessed through a 24-item Likert scale, measuring the frequency of positive and negative appearance-related comments on SNS. This multi-dimensional approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between SNS engagement and self-objectification.

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Self-Objectification



Correlation Heatmap of Study Variables



Conclusion

This study highlights the significant influence of social networking site (SNS) usage on self-objectification among young adult women, mediated by internalization of cultural beauty standards, appearance comparisons, and appearance commentary. The findings underscore the critical role of SNS activities in reinforcing body surveillance and dissatisfaction. Interventions promoting media literacy and resilience are essential to mitigate these adverse effects and foster healthier self-perceptions in vulnerable populations.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality between SNS usage and self-objectification, highlighting the need for longitudinal or experimental studies. The sample, restricted to young adult women in Pakistan, may not represent other demographic groups, particularly rural populations or men, thus limiting generalizability. Cultural factors unique to Pakistan, such as conservative norms and differing exposure to global beauty standards, may also influence the findings, suggesting a need for culturally sensitive investigations. Future research should include diverse populations, explore gender-specific differences, and integrate qualitative methods to uncover deeper cultural and social dynamics. Additionally, interventions promoting digital literacy and critical media consumption should be developed to mitigate the negative effects of SNS on body image and self-objectification in Pakistani youth.

References