

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AFFINITY ON EATING ATTITUDES AND BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS STUDYING IN FARASAN GOVERNORATE SCHOOL, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT:

Purpose: The use of the internet for social networking has become a global phenomenon, as the number of social network users worldwide increased from 2.3 billion in 2016 to around 2.6 billion in 2018. 92% of United States adolescents report daily usage of social media, and 24% of them go online “almost constantly”. This study aimed to evaluate the Impact of social media affinity on Eating Attitudes and Body Dissatisfaction among School and adolescent children.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in Farasan school from January 2022 to February 2022. A total of 75 students were selected by the non-probability purposive sampling technique. 5-point Likert scale on social media affinity (13 items), Body dissatisfaction was assessed by BSQ 8-c, and a 4-point Likert scale (26 items) was used to assess the eating attitude.

Results: The majority of participants were females (81%). Out of this 75% were using social media every day and half of the percentage (50.7%) using WhatsApp. The total mean score for social media affinity was 49.72 ± 5.61 out of 55. It concludes that higher scores indicate higher social media affinity. The mean score for eating attitude was 53.48 ± 9.74 . It interprets that a cut-off score of 20 or above indicates children had a high risk of developing an eating disorder. The participants’ Body Shape Dissatisfaction Questionnaire mean score was 23.37 ± 6.39 . It shows scores less than 25 mean mild concerns with a shape that indicates probable cases of distorted body image.

Conclusion: social media and peer pressure has greatly affected the lifestyle and eating choices of students. Emphasizing the importance of parenting style for adolescents’ sense of empowerment and underscoring the need for parental involvement in prevention programs.

Keywords: Social media Affinity, Eating Attitudes, Body Dissatisfaction, School Age Children, Adolescent Girls.

Introduction

The use of the internet for social networking has become a global phenomenon, as the number of social network users worldwide increased from 4.14 billion in 2020 to around 4.2 billion in 2021.¹ This means that nearly half (45%) of the earth’s entire population uses a social networking service (SNS).² Usage is especially high among adolescents, with 92% of United States (US)

adolescents reporting daily social media (SM) use, and 24% of those teens stating that they go online “almost constantly”.³ In the Philippines, 50% of Filipinos aged 14 to 23 reported using the internet to expand their relationships by joining SNS.⁴ SM refers to web-based and mobile technologies, usually free, that employ online tools to enable social interactions through dialogue.⁵ Well-known SM include Facebook,

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WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram. These SM gain users attracted by their “social” characteristics, such as text-audio visual appeal, openness, and connectedness.⁶ A vast amount of information is exchanged among users who may be friends or family, but are just as likely to be total strangers across the globe. In this way, SM has the power to affect individuals’ lives significantly by shaping their thoughts, values, and attitudes.⁷

A study conducted in 2015 by a Korean government research institute reported that SM had both advantages (e.g., social connectivity, social involvement, information attainment, and entertainment) and disadvantages (e.g., social risk, time consumption, psychological risks, and privacy concerns).⁸ While some studies have found empirical evidence to support an association between SM use and positive mental health outcomes, such as improved social self-concept and self-esteem,⁹ others have found associations between SM use and health problems, such as anxiety, sleep problems, and low self-esteem.¹⁰ Therefore, it is essential to engage in healthy lifestyle practices, such as consuming a nutritionally balanced diet.¹¹

Peer groups play a major role in establishing adolescents’ social norms, such as their views and values about body appearance.¹² Through dialogues with peers using SM, they assimilate social norms and attitudes, and it has been shown that peer groups can affect adolescents’ body satisfaction.¹³ Another study found that the more frequently adolescents engaged in SM activities, the more negative talk they encountered about how they and others compared to the so-called “perfect” body images posted on SM.^{14, 15}

Because of its subliminal influences, inappropriate use or overuse of SM can pose risks, especially for school-age children and adolescents, given their high usage rates. It is important that school-age children and adolescents understand the unintended consequences of SM.¹⁰ This is a particularly critical issue for children and adolescents aged 6-17 in Saudi Arabia due to their high internet usage time and concomitant exposure to various effects of SM usage.

OBJECTIVES: -

- To assess the level of knowledge of Social Media usage among School-age children and Adolescent Girls.
- To assess the impact of social media affinity on Eating Attitudes and Body Dissatisfaction Among School-age children and Adolescent Girls.

- To associate the Impact of social media affinity on Eating Attitudes and Body Dissatisfaction scores with selected demographic variables.
- To correlate the harmful media with Eating Attitudes and Body Dissatisfaction scores.

HYPOTHESIS:

- There will be a significant association between Social Media affinity on eating attitudes with selected demographic variables.
- There will be a significant association between Social Media affinity on body dissatisfaction with selected demographic variables.
- There will be a significant correlation between the impact of social media on Eating Attitudes and Body Dissatisfaction among School-age children and Adolescent Girls.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

❖ Research design:

Descriptive Cross-sectional survey design

❖ Population:

Adolescent females aged between 13 to 17 years old and School-age Children between the ages of 6-12 years in primary and secondary school, Farasan, Saudi Arabia.

❖ Sample size:

School-age Children between the age group 6-12 years and Adolescent girls aged 13 to 17 years were included in the study. The total sample size was 75 children.

❖ Sample techniques:

Non-probability Purposive Sampling technique was used.

❖ Criteria for sampling technique:

Inclusion Criteria:

- School-age Children between the age group of 6-12 years with both sexes and adolescent girls between the age group of 13-17 years.

❖ Tool for data collection:

- ✓ Semi-structured interview schedule on demographic variables of school-age children and adolescent girls.

✓ Social media affinity - This scale was formulated as a 13-item instrument developed to measure respondents' beliefs about social media using a 5-point Likert scale of which nine are stated in the positive and four in the negative. Higher scores indicate a higher social media affinity.

✓ Eating attitude - which was composed of 26 items measuring three factors: dieting, bulimia and food preoccupation, and oral control. The items are scored using a 4-point Likert scale with one reverse-coded item (item 26). A cut-off score of 20 or above out of a total of 78 indicates a high risk of developing an eating disorder.

✓ Body dissatisfaction - we used a shorter form, the BSQ 8-c. Each item was scored from 1 to 6. Scores less than 19 mean no concerns with shape, scores of 19~25 indicate mild concern, scores of 26~33 mean moderate concern, and scores over 33 indicate marked concern.

✓ Social media health hazard education was provided through video-assisted instruction.

❖ Data collection procedure

1. Permission was acquired from the Dean of Farasan University College and the Director of Farasan Governorate School.

2. Informed agreement was obtained from school children based on inclusion criteria.

3. 5-point Likert scale on social media affinity (13 items), Body dissatisfaction was assessed by BSQ 8-c, and a 4-point Likert scale (26 items) was used to assess the eating attitude.

4. Need-based education on the impact of social media affinity on body dissatisfaction was given to all the children.

❖ Plan for data analysis

➤ Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized in this study.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS:

Table 1: Frequency and percentage-wise distribution of Demographic Attributes of the school-age and adolescent students

		n=75	
S.No	Attribute/Variables	Numbers	Percentage (%)
1	Age in years	6-8	10 13.3
		9-10	11 14.7
		11-12	16 21.3
		13-15	22 29.4
		16-17	16 21.3
2	Gender	Male	14 18.7
		Female	61 81.3
3	Standards of Education	2 nd & 3 rd standard	10 13.3
		4 th & 5 th standard	11 14.7
		6 th & 7 th standard	16 21.3
		8 th & 9 th standard	13 17.3
		10 th to 12 th standard	25 33.3
4	Residence	Urban	42 56
		Rural	33 44
5	Type of family	Nuclear family	17 22.7
		Single parent	8 10.7
		Blended family	17 22.7
		Joint family	32 42.6
6	Monthly Income in Riyal	< 5000	16 21.3
		5000 – 10000	45 60
		> 10000	14 18.7
7	Total number of family members	Less than 3	0 0
		3-6	24 32
		More than 6	51 68

Continue Table-1.....

8	Body Mass Index(BMI) (kg/m ²)	Underweight: < 18.5	11	14.6
		Normal: 18.5 – 24.9	24	32
		Overweight: 25 –29.9	32	42.7
		Obese: > 30	8	10.6
9	Daily Physical Exercise	Yes	27	36
		No	48	64
10	Number of social media usage daily	0-1	12	16
		1-3	19	25.3
		3 -5	28	37.3
		5+	16	21.4
11	Which social media platforms do you use more?	WhatsApp	38	50.7
		Instagram	2	2.6
		Snapchat	32	42.7
		Twitter	3	4
		Facebook	-	
		Telegram	-	
		Zoom	-	
12	Weekly use (day)	1 day	-	
		2 days	2	2.7
		3 days	3	4
		4 days	3	4
		5 days	4	5.3
		6 days	7	9.3
		Every day	56	74.7
13	Devices used to check social media	Cell phone	49	65.3
		Computer	6	8
		Tablet/iPad	20	26.7
14	Purpose of using social media	Communication	21	28
		Watching video	28	37.3
		Posting pictures	25	33.3
		Updating yourself with the latest news	-	-
		Reading articles	-	-
		Educational purposes	1	1.3
		Other	-	-

Out of 75 school children's majority (30%) of students were in the age group of 13-15 years. 61 percent of them were female students. Maximum percentage (33.3%) of students were studying 10th to 12th grade. In addition to the monthly income maximum of them (60%) having between 5000 to 10,000 Riyal wages, the economic condition of the surveyed population was somewhat equally distributed. Nearly half of the percentage (43%) of them had a body mass index between 25 to 29.9 indicating overweight. The highest percentage of them (37.3%) were using 3-5 social media per day. Half of the percentage (50.7%) were using WhatsApp social media. Two-thirds (74.7%) of the children were using social media every day using cell phones (65.3%). Nearly 40 percent of them were using social media for the purpose of watching videos (Table. No.1).

Table No:2 –Distribution of Mean, SD, and Mean percentage of social media affinity on eating attitudes and body dissatisfaction among school and adolescent children

S. No	Descriptions	Max Score	Mean	SD
1	Social Media Affinity	11 items (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree)	49.72	5.61
2	Eating Attitude	26 items (0 = never, nearly or sometimes, 1 = often, 2 = usually, 3 = always)	53.48	9.74
3	Body dissatisfaction	8 items (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=very often, and 6=always).	23.37	6.39

The distribution of Table 2 shows that the total mean score for social media affinity was 49.72 ± 5.61 out of 55 maximum scores. It concludes that higher scores indicate children had higher social media affinity. The total mean score for eating attitudes was 53.48 ± 9.74 . It interprets that a cut-off score of 20 or above out of a total of 78 indicates a high risk of developing an eating disorder for children. The participants' mean Body Shape dissatisfaction Questionnaire score was 23.37 ± 6.39 . Hence it concludes that scores less than 19 mean no concerns with a shape that indicates probable cases of distorted body image.

Table N0: 3 – Association between social media affinity on eating attitudes and body dissatisfaction scores with demographic variables of school and adolescent children

Characteristics	Categories	Social media affinity		Eating attitudes		Body dissatisfaction	
		M±SD	X ² (p)	M±SD	X ² (p)	M±SD	X ² (p)
Gender	Male	45.89±7.83	1.674 (0.005)	48.37±15.83	0.67 (0.53)	18.34±2.34	0.96 (0.43)
	Female	53.63±6.04		58.59±13.44		28.39±1.04	
Age in years	6-8	46.80±6.27	2.22 (0.337)	49.82±8.32	2.68 (0.006)	19.40±3.27	3.30 (0.041)
	9-10	48.86±5.89		51.45±12.37		21.62±1.89	
	11-12	48.78±6.72		52.87±14.20		28.08±1.72	
	13-15	53.94±5.27		59.96±15.56		25.20±2.27	
	16-17	49.97±6.89		52.77±9.89		22.77±2.19	
Standard of Education	2 nd & 3 rd standard	47.48±5.22	0.43 (0.650)	50.28±9.23	4.35 (0.006)	20.08±4.08	0.79 (0.430)
	4 th & 5 th standard	47.55±8.29		51.54±13.78		20.76±2.99	
	6 th & 7 th standard	49.84±7.31		53.20±12.53		29.41±1.26	
	8 th & 9 th standard	52.87±9.07		57.14±14.66		23.60±3.79	
	10 th to 12 th standard	50.17±10.89		54.88±11.09		23.27±1.09	
Weekly use (day)	≤6 (n=19)	44.71±9.35	0.17 (0.867)	51.07±13.23	1.59 (0.05)	20.48±3.21	0.39 (0.698)
	Every day (n=56)	54.82±7.19		56.05±11.24		26.19±2.69	

In Table 3 shows social media affinity was significantly higher among female participants than among male participants ($t=1.674$, $p=.005$) and in participants who reported everyday social media use than among those who reported weekly use of 6 days or fewer ($t=0.17$, $p=.867$). The scores for eating attitudes in the 9~17 age groups were significantly higher than those in the 6~8 age group ($F=2.68$, $p<.006$). The scores for eating attitudes of participants in grades 7 to 12 were significantly higher than those of participants in grades 2nd to 5th standards ($F=4.35$, $p<.006$). Body dissatisfaction was significantly higher in the 11~15 age group than in the 6~8 age group ($F=3.30$, $p=0.041$). In addition, body dissatisfaction was highest among the participants in 6th & 7th grade.

Table N0: 4 – Correlation between social media affinity, eating attitudes, and body dissatisfaction among school-age and adolescent children

S.No	Variables	r- Value	p Value
1	Social Media Affinity & Eating Attitude	0.645	0.54
2	Social Media Affinity & Body Dissatisfaction	0.713	0.43
3	Eating Attitude & Body dissatisfaction	0.967	0.05

Participants' social media affinity was significantly correlated positively with their eating attitudes ($r=-.645$, $p<.54$). In addition, their eating attitudes were significantly correlated with body dissatisfaction ($r=-.967$, $p<.05$)

DISCUSSION:

This study found that the degree of social media affinity was above the moderate level; in other words, School-age children and adolescents' preferences for SM were higher than usual. This indicated that SM was a major activity and an essential part of these young people's daily social lives and interpersonal relationships.⁶

An unhealthy diet is a significant health-threatening risk factor, especially for adolescents, who are in a period of rapid physical growth. In this study, 89.5% of the participants showed a high risk of developing eating disorders. It is well known that negative eating attitudes can lead to dietary disorders.

In the study of Chang et al.,²⁴ one-fourth of students responded that they had negative eating attitudes that required professional attention, such as fasting or using diet products during the past year. Therefore, education is urgently needed to promote healthy eating attitudes in adolescents.

This present study found that social media affinity was related to negative eating attitudes and that eating attitudes also showed a negative correlation with body dissatisfaction. This finding suggests that exposure to SM, which portrays thinness as the ideal body image, is an important driver of weight loss and the motivation to diet, and that SM directs individuals' perceptions toward body dissatisfaction. In support of other studies, we found that an increased frequency of SM usage due to higher social media affinity was associated with problematic eating attitudes and greater body dissatisfaction.⁹ Repeated exposure and thin-ideal internalization through social media affinity have been found to be a strong risk factor for eating pathologies and body dissatisfaction.²⁴ Other studies have reported that the use of SM and negative eating attitudes that lead to abnormal eating behavior are interrelated and that SM use is a stronger predictor of dieting behavior than exposure to other traditional media, such as TV and magazines.²⁰ The associations between spending time using SNS and the severity of SM overreliance are highly relevant to undesirable eating attitudes.⁹

Our findings suggest that social media affinity plays a major role in body dissatisfaction, supporting previous findings that SM usage is significantly associated with comparisons of appearances.⁷ In a study by de Vries et al.,²⁰ the frequency of SM use was positively correlated with frequent comparisons of appearances and more exposure to media messages that conveyed unrealistic body images, lowering people's satisfaction with their body appearance. The idealized body image lauded by the media can be easily recalled from memory and is strongly perceived as a body standard or beauty standard against which everyone's appearance is judged.

CONCLUSION

This investigated the impact of social media affinity on eating attitudes and body dissatisfaction in Saudi school-age and adolescent children. The results confirmed the impact of social media affinity on adolescents' eating attitudes and body dissatisfaction, showing a significant positive relationship between social media affinity and eating attitudes and between eating attitudes and body dissatisfaction. In addition, the chi-square and correlation analysis results indicated that grade, body dissatisfaction, and social media affinity influenced eating attitudes in school-age children and adolescents.

INFORMED CONSENT:

Consent was obtained from all participants of this study.

CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS:

There were no conflicts of interest declared by the authors.

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