

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND FEAR OF RECEIVING A NEGATIVE APPEARANCE EVALUATION AMONG COLLEGE WOMEN IN KERALA INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Amidst an alarming increase in lifestyle diseases in India, social media (SM) use among young people has also increased in recent decades. We investigated this trend toward social media usage and responses to the Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation (FNAE) among 400 college women in Kerala state, India. We examined differences in time spent on social media and in FNAE responses by undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students. Through this cross-sectional survey, we found that participants used and preferred SM platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram as a source of fitness information. Relative to PG students, UG students spent comparatively more time on SM and were more inspired by SM to engage in fitness activities. Further UG students obtained a relatively higher score on the FNAE which was not significantly correlated with time spent on SM.

Keywords: Fear of negative appearance evaluation, Social media, Online fitness, Web-based fitness training, Women health

INTRODUCTION

Social media (SM) is defined as a set of software-based digital technologies which helps to send and receive digital content over some sort of online social network (Appel et al., 2020). SM usage among individuals of both

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the sexes, varied age groups, and varied economic classes has increased during the last decade (Perrin et al., 2015). Though the intentions and purposes for SM use differ (Kurešepi, 2021) the prevalence of usage is similar across both genders and varied age groups. SM has become a source of great deal of information in various topics, though the reliability of the information obtained is questionable (Dalmer, 2017). Owing to its vast usage social media is also a tool for marketing and advertisement (Paquette, 2013).

A negative self-image is linked with behavioral and psychiatric problems in adolescence. Impaired self-image is associated with social anxiety. Fear of negative appearance evaluation (FNAE) is the apprehension about receiving a negative appearance evaluation, and it is related to an avoidance of being physically evaluated, and an expectation of being negatively evaluated physically (Thompson & Stice, 2001).

Research findings on the impact of social media usage on body image dissatisfaction show this impact to be both positive (Cohen et al., 2019) and negative (Fardouly et al., 2017; Scully et al., 2020). Photo posts on social media leave an impression on SM users that the ideal body images are lean, curvy, and muscular. Social media causes users to develop body dissatisfaction by encouraging an internalization of these body ideals. Ideal body image internalization refers to adopting a certain body image as a self-body standard (Thompson & Stice, 2001); appearance comparison refers to evaluating one's appearance in relation to others (Lundgren et al., 2004).

Social media is often used to assess one's fitness routine and related information and the fitness industry is a primary area of social media influence (Frimming et al., 2011; Noonan, 2018). Many young people use social media as a source of fitness inspiration and acquire fitness-related information from SM both actively and passively (Lim et al., 2022). However, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the prevalence and relationship of social media usage with the fear of receiving a negative appearance evaluation from peers among college women in Kerala, India. Hence in the present study, we aimed to analyze the trends of social media usage and FNAE understanding in this population.

METHODS

Participants

We surveyed 400 female college students (age 20.97 ± 2.13) of both undergraduate ($n=200$, age 20.05 ± 1.69 years) and postgraduate ($n=200$, age 22.96 ± 1.56 years) courses in Kerala, India. The sample size was estimated as 385 using Cochran's formula and was rounded off to 400. Participants were identified using multistage random sampling. Based on the declaration of Helsinki the participants were informed of the purpose and ethical aspects of the research and their consent to be participants in the study was obtained through an online form. Further, the questionnaire in Google form was sent to them via email. This research was approved by the Departmental Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Exercise Physiology, Lakshmi Bai National College of Physical Education, Trivandrum (Approval No: DEP/EC/05/2022 dated 13.06.2022).

Questionnaires

A self-structured questionnaire was developed in English to collect the demographic details and social media usage trends among college women. In order to assess the fear of negative appearance evaluation, the Short Form of Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale (FNAES) developed by Lundgren, Anderson & Thompson (2004) was used.

Collection and Analysis of Data

The study used a cross-sectional survey design. The selected questionnaires were sent to the participants via email in the Google form format. The responses were transformed into a spreadsheet and then into IBM SPSS 21.0 version for data analysis. The chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test was used to determine the proportion of the SM usage trend among UG and PG (How to Report a Chi-Square Result (APA Style), n.d.). Further, wherever the proportions differed significantly, the Phi coefficient was calculated to understand the magnitude. Kendall's Tau was calculated to understand the relationship between time spent on SM and FNAE (APA Style Reporting of Kendall.Pdf, n.d.). α for all statistical inferences was set at 0.05.

RESULTS

Social media usage and demography of UG and PG students

Table 1 illustrates the isolated and combined social media usage trend of UG and PG students. Data is presented in frequency and percentage format. To compare the trends between the courses chi-square test is performed and wherever it is significant Phi value is calculated to understand the magnitude of the difference. Majority of the female college students perceive bodies to be normally built, whereas 12.5% of them perceive to be underweight. However, 7.3% of them perceive to be overweight or obese. The trend remains the same in both the courses. A major portion of the students follow a non-vegetarian diet and the trend remains the same in both courses. It is also found that 39.3% of the students use social media for 1-2 h daily on average. Also 35.8% use SM for 3-4 h on a daily basis. However, there is a significant difference in the usage pattern of UG and PG students ($X^2=8.00$, $p=.046$, $\Phi=.14$). Further 73.58% of women college students reported using SM as a source of fitness information and the trend is the same for both the courses. 75.8% of students reported that SM inspires them to engage in fitness workouts and shows a similar trend among both groups. 89.25% of students use WhatsApp, 73% use Instagram, and 26.55% use Facebook. Though among both the courses WhatsApp is the most used SM, among UG students Instagram is also equally popular. Out of the various information gained from SM 59% of the students are interested in inspiration videos, 51% in workouts, 48% in diet-related information, 25% in body transformation stories and 18.5% are interested to follow posts by fitness trainers and fitness centers.

Table 1. Comparison of Social Media Usage and Demography between UG and PG College Women.

Body Type	UG, n (%)	PG, n (%)	Total, n (%)	Chi Square	P	Phi
Under Weight	20 (10.0%)	30 (15.0%)	50 (12.5%)	4.24	.237	-
Normal	166 (83.0%)	155 (77.5%)	321 (80.3%)			
Over Weight	10 (5.0%)	7 (3.5%)	17 (4.3%)			
Obese	4 (2.0%)	8 (4.0%)	12 (3.0%)			
Dietary Pattern						
Vegetarian	25 (12.5%)	16 (8%)	41 (10.3%)	2.20	.138	-
Non-Vegetarian	175 (87.5%)	184 (92%)	359 (89.8%)			
Time Spent on SM						
Less than 1 h	14 (7%)	8 (4%)	22 (5.5%)	8.00	.046	0.141
1-2 h	71 (35.5%)	86 (43%)	157 (39.3%)			
3-4 h	82 (41%)	61 (30.5%)	143 (35.8%)			
More than 4 h	33 (16.5%)	45 (22.5%)	78 (19.5%)			
Uses SM as Source of Fitness Information						
Yes	147 (73.5%)	148 (74%)	295 (73.8%)	0.01	0.910	-
No	53 (26.5%)	52 (26.3%)	105 (26.3%)			

Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation

Table 2 explains that the UG students (13.64 ± 6.33) compared to the PG students (13.23 ± 5.43) demonstrated significantly high scores on FNAE ($t = 9.29$, $p = .002$).

Table 2. Comparison of FNAE between UG and PG College Women.

	UG	PG	F	P
FNAE	13.64 (6.33)	13.23 (5.43)	9.290	0.002*

Abbreviation: FNAE: Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation; PG: Postgraduate; UG: Under Graduate

**= significant at 0.05 level*

Time Spent on SM and Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation

From **Table 3** it is evident that there is no significant relationship between the time spent on social media and FNAE ($\tau_b = -0.006$, $p = .879$).

Table 3. Relationship between Times Spent on SM and FNAE of UG and PG College Women.

FNAE	τ_b	P
Time Spent on SM (UG)	.009	.872
Time Spent on SM (PG)	.03	.602
Time Spent on SM	-.006	.879

τ_b : Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient

Abbreviation: FNAE: Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation

DISCUSSION

This cross-sectional descriptive survey examined the trends of social media usage among college women in Kerala and analyzed their Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation. Further examined the relationship between the time spent on social media and FNAE. The students, irrespective of courses, showed a major trend of having normal body weight, a non-vegetarian diet, using SM as a source of fitness information, and preferring SM for information pertaining to fitness. Further, WhatsApp and Instagram are the most used SM among college women. The trend also demonstrates that most of the students are interested in watching inspiration videos, and information about workouts and diet. However, the trend is different in terms of time spent on SM and whether SM inspires to engage in fitness activities for both courses. A larger portion of UG students spent around 3-4 h in SM whereas amongst the PG students the trend is spending 1-2 h per day. Compared with PG, UG students get more inspired by SM to engage in fitness activities. In the case of FNAE, UG students possessed greater scores than PG students and demonstrated a significant difference. There was no significant relationship between the time spent on SM and FNAE in isolation or in total.

Students consider social media as a source of information pertaining to many areas and among which sports, health and fitness are also important. Though the youth depends on social media information a lot, they have their own serious strategies to check the validity of the information gained (Booth, 2021). Achieving physical health, physical appearance, social acceptability, self-confidence, and family and friends' pressure are some motives for fitness information seeking by female university students (Jalali et al., 2020). Instagram was used for the presentation of true self and life satisfaction (Apodaca, 2017). This may be one reason for college women to use Instagram more than other platforms. Social media usage for searching fitness-related information doesn't ensure the users are physically active (Amanda Folk & Sara Kovacs, 2021). Compared with undergraduates, post-graduate students possessed greater academic and general stress (Shefabhai, 2019) which could be one reason for the undergraduates getting more time to spend on social media. The increased SM usage by UGs may be due to the greater inspiration they obtained from social media postings hence which may be the cause of the difference between UG and PG. Research shows that excess use of SM will decrease body esteem by intensifying cognitive internalization (Yang et al., 2020). In the case of the UG students increased usage might have resulted in a high level of FNAE scores compared to the PG students.

In the present scenario of increasing lifestyle disease incidences in India, students' affinity to SM could be explored and used as a tool to promote the health and fitness knowledge of college women. However, the usage time should be controlled, and the students have to be educated about the skills to validate the authenticity of the information. Efforts are to be taken to control social media usage by college students since the usage rate partly affects the academic performance of students (Nti et al., 2022; Bedua et al., 2021). The solitude and interpersonal support affect social media use among college students; hence

parents and teachers should confirm that the students who use SM for more time don't suffer from those issues (Wang et al., 2012). Social media usage frequency is positively correlated with the need for relationship maintenance and amusement among college students. Also, social related factors are related to time spent on social media (Pang, 2018). Hence social support in varied aspects of the students' needs to be examined.

CONCLUSION

This cross-sectional descriptive survey found that college women use SM platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram as a source of fitness information and prefer SM for information pertaining to fitness. UG students spend comparatively more time on SM and are inspired more by SM to engage in fitness activities than PG students. Further UG students have a high score on FNAE which is not significantly correlated with time spent on SM.

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