



IMPACT OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A STUDY OF YOUNG FEMALE STUDENTS OF OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE IFE

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of the use of social media on university students, with particular emphasis on young female students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Specifically, the study identified the social media platforms most frequently used by the respondents and examined the influence of social media content on their self-perception and body image. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised young female students of Obafemi Awolowo University who are active users of social media. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, while descriptive statistics comprising frequencies and percentages were used for data analysis based on 349 valid questionnaires retrieved. The findings revealed that Snapchat was the most frequently used social media platform among the respondents, followed by WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, whereas Twitter (X) and TikTok recorded comparatively lower patronage. The study further established that exposure to social media content moderately influences the self-perception of young female students. Many respondents reported comparing themselves with others regarding appearance, lifestyle and success, while a considerable proportion indicated that beauty- and lifestyle-related content influences how they perceive themselves. Although many respondents expressed satisfaction with their physical appearance and body image, some acknowledged that their self-worth is influenced by how they are perceived on social media. The study concluded that social media plays a significant role in shaping the self-perception and body image of young female university students. It recommended strengthening digital literacy programmes, promoting healthy social media practices, expanding mental health counselling services, and utilising popular platforms such as Snapchat and WhatsApp to disseminate positive and empowering messages that foster healthy self-esteem among students.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Engagement, Social media, Young Female Students.



1. Background to the Study

The rapid growth and evolution of social media have left a significant impact in the society, particularly on young adults. Social media is a platform for self-expression, group creation, and self-advertisement, which empowers individuals, showcases accomplishments and brings individuals with common interests together. Social media is a visually based platform that provides room for individuals to structure and document experiences of their lives in the form of pictures and videos. It has evolved into a compulsory site for self-expression, social interaction, and identity formation. Billions of human beings communicate daily using various social media sites that are used widely to communicate and exchange information.

Social media is today among the most defining technological advances of the 21st century, revolutionizing the manner in which people communicate, interact, and obtain information globally. It consists of a series of internet websites to build, distribute, and share material in real time. With the rise of Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, traditional communication boundaries have been quite realigned, with individuals able to cast their sentiments, ideas, and activities on a global sphere with minimal censor.

The roots of social media go back to the early 2000s with Friendster and MySpace, but the phenomenon took off big time with the introduction of Facebook in 2004. The digital landscape has grown exponentially since then, with billions of people engaging in daily discourse, posting multimedia content, and creating virtual communities based on common interests. The accessibility of smartphones and the expansion of internet services have continued to accelerate the integration of social media into everyday life, making it a central part of how humans interact with the world (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media plays a multifaceted role in society. At its core, it is a communication tool employed by humans, allowing friends and relatives to communicate in spite of physical distance. This has been particularly vital in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where physical distancing made digital communication imperative. Beyond interpersonal interaction, social media is also a vital platform for professional networking, brand establishment, political activism, learning, and amusement (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

The most significant role of social media is its democratization of information. Unlike mainstream media, which relies on centralized editorial discretion, social media allows anyone who has access to the internet to become a content creator. This has allowed marginalized people to be heard and heard far and wide, particularly where mainstream media could be censored or under-resourced. Movement's such as #BlackLivesMatter, #EndSARS in Nigeria, and #MeToo have demonstrated the power of social media to mobilize individuals and bring about social change (Tufekci, 2017).

Despite its many benefits, social media has its own challenges. One of the most important is the dissemination of misinformation and false news. The speed and reach of social media facilitate the simple spread of misinformation that at times has serious consequences for public health, political security, and social cohesion. Misinformation regarding the virus and vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, was a huge challenge for world health authorities (Cinelli et al., 2020). Similarly, the use of social media to spread political propaganda and shape public opinion has also raised questions about its impact on democracy and election processes.



In education, social media has also introduced promise and pitfalls. Social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn have been utilized for learning purposes, where tutorials, webinars, and professional development resources are offered. Teachers have also used sites like Twitter and Instagram to post content, connect with learners, and promote collaborative learning. The distractions of social media, academic dishonesty, and work-life boundary issues notwithstanding, social media continues to rise to importance in education (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

Politically, social media has revolutionized the engagement between citizens, governments, and politicians. It has provided space for civic action, mobilization, and political debate. Social media has enabled politicians to directly communicate with the voters, beyond mainstream media. However, the same social media has also been employed to spread hate speech, instigate violence, and silence opposition. The challenge is in finding balance between freedom of expression and necessitating regulation to prevent harm (Howard et al., 2011).

There is very little research available on the influence of social media on the self-concept among young female Nigerian university students although there has been a lot of research conducted on body image and self-esteem. In this study, it is predicted to analyze the influence of Instagram activities on the self-concept of the body image, self-esteem, and identity among young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University.

This study is relevant as it attempts to find out the ways in which social media engagement influences the perception of self among female young university students in Obafemi Awolowo University. This study proposes to contribute towards our knowledge concerning the ways social media usage shapes the attributes of self-worth, contributing to filling up lacunas in hitherto performed studies that focus on the Western cohorts. Moreover, this study will contribute to academic scholarship as well through focusing on a Nigerian context, filling a research gap in the understanding of social media influence from beyond Western nations.

2. Statement of the Problem

The advent of social media sites such as Instagram has shaped the self-concepts of young females. Social media has been used in Obafemi Awolowo University as a shared platform for self-expression, comparison with others, and socializing. Little is, however, understood regarding the impact of Instagram engagements, such as posting, likes, followings and commenting, on self-concept formation among young female students in this environment.

Female undergraduate college students are not excluded when it comes to the impact of social media on self-perception. The extent of such impact is not known. It is such knowledge that is detrimental to efforts towards healthy self-perception and wellbeing in this vulnerable group. The study aims to examine how social media impact young female Obafemi Awolowo University undergraduate students. It aims to determine how social media use is used to foster negative self-perceptions, social comparison, projection of the idealised beauty and the extent to which social media influence body image, self-esteem, and emotional health (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019; Cohen et al., 2019).

By exploring these issues, this study hopes to inform effective solutions to promote positive self-perception and well-being among young female students using social media.

3. Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the types of social media content young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University frequently engage with.



- ii. To identify the specific types of social media engagement that influence self-perception among young female students at Obafemi Awolowo University.
- iii. To examine the impact of social media content types and activities on body satisfaction, self-esteem, and identity formation among young female students.
- iv. To explore the role of social media influencers and celebrity endorsements in shaping self-perception among young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University.

4. Research Questions

This paper was guided by the following questions:

- i. What type of social media content does young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University frequently engage with?
- ii. How do specific types of social media engagement influence self-perception among young female students at Obafemi Awolowo University?
- iii. What is the impact of social media content types and activities on body satisfaction, self-esteem, and identity formation among young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University?
- iv. What roles do social media influencers and celebrity endorsements play in shaping self-perception among young female students at Obafemi Awolowo University?

5. Literature Review

5.1 Conceptual Review

Social media has existed for decades. The social network is the collection of online communication that is dedicated to input from the public, interaction, information sharing, and collaboration. Social networks initially existed to be used as a way of reconnecting or getting in touch with loved ones and close friends. Social media is now utilized as so much more than that. The world is increasingly dependent on digitalization, and social media is making the internet not only a tool of information, but of influence (Hanna et al., 2011).

5.2 Overview of Social Media

Social media has been one of the most defining technological developments of the 21st century, reshaping how humans interact, communicate, and consume information across the world. Social media is defined as the group of online platforms that allow users to publish, share, and exchange information in real-time. With the arrival of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, the traditional boundaries of communication were reshaped, allowing individuals to pass on their ideas, feelings, and actions to the world with minimal obstacles.

The history of social media came to life in the early 2000s with the launch of websites including MySpace and Friendster, but the phenomenon gained record momentum with the launch of Facebook in 2004. Since that day, the internet community has experienced unparalleled growth with billions of consumers participating in daily life, exchanging multimedia messages, and joining common-interest virtual groups. The rise in mobile phone usage and the expansion of internet services has only contributed to the expansion of social media in daily life, and now it has become integral to the culture with which one engages with the world (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

One of the most powerful impacts of social media is the democratization of information. Unlike mainstream media, which relies on centralized editorial judgment, social media allows anyone with access to the internet to be a producer of contents. This has facilitated marginalized voices to be heard



and ring out and have impacts, particularly in regions where mainstream media may be constrained by censorship or budgetary factors. #BlackLivesMatter, #EndSARS in Nigeria, and #MeToo are examples of how social media is able to shift public opinion and shape social change (Tufekci, 2017).

For all its benefits, however, social media has its flaws. Among the most significant of these is the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation. Social media's scope and pace of transmission offer rich soil to the dissemination of misinformation with frequently catastrophic impacts on public health, political stability, and social coherence. Social media, for instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, disseminated misinformation about the virus and the vaccines, and this caused gigantic challenges to health authorities worldwide (Cinelli et al., 2020). Similarly, the use of social media to disseminate political propaganda and shape public opinions has generated skepticism regarding its impact on electoral processes and democracy.

Another area in which social media has produced conflicting effects is in mental health. While creating avenues of social contact and emotional support, excessive usage has been connected with issues like worry, sadness, and low self-esteem, particularly among teenagers and young adults. Idealized online personas to uphold, fear of missing out (FOMO), and susceptibility to online abuse are some of the psychological stressors that come with social media use (Twenge et al., 2018). That is not to say, though, that the effect of social media on mental health is all negative; support groups and mental health online resources are available to assist those in need.

In education, social media has created opportunities and challenges. YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn have been used in learning, as tutorial materials and sources of webinars and professional learning. Educators have also leveraged the employment of Twitter and Instagram in disseminating knowledge, engaging learners, and fostering co-learning. Yet challenges of distraction, academic integrity, and blurring life and scholarship persist (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

In business today, social media has transformed marketing practices. Companies use social media to interact with customers directly, conduct market research, and foster brand loyalty. Endorsement by persons with many followers, or influencer marketing, has turned into a business in its own right. Social media's immediacy and interactivity allow brands to act in real time in response to customer opinions and trends that help power the marketplace in real time. Companies are also vulnerable to threats such as loss of reputation due to viral criticisms or scandals, and hence managing social media is highly important (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Politically, social media has changed the interactions between governments, politicians, and the citizenry. Social media has facilitated civic participation, political discourse, and mobilization. Politicians use the sites now to address constituents directly, bypassing the traditional media. The same sites are used, though, to disseminate hate speech, promote violence, and censor dissent. The problem is one of balancing freedom with the need to control in an effort to prevent harm (Howard et al., 2011).

With on-going technological advancement, the social media of the future is dynamic and unpredictable. New technologies like artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and the metaverse will shape what social media is and how one interacts with it online. Data privacy concerns, algorithmic transparency, and ethical use will increasingly be the issues as the world becomes further hyperconnected.

5.3 Concept of Self-Perception



Self-perception is a process by which psychological theorists describe the process whereby one acquires an awareness, interpretation, and judgment of himself on the basis of observation of his own behavior, internal states, feeling states, and interaction with the environment. It plays a crucial role in the development and maintenance of self, directing behavioral course and psychological well-being. It is from self-perception theory that individuals derive their attitudes, feelings, and beliefs from what they find themselves doing and where they find themselves doing it, particularly when internal cues are ambiguous or nonexistent (Burger, 2020). Self-perception theory suggests self-awareness not merely caused by reflective consideration but caused also by viewing one's actions from outside and thus generating an explanation of behavior over time creating identities and attitudes. Such previous research ongoing as yet substantiates and enlarges upon this idea, showing self-perception influence by numerous sorts of psychological, social, and cultural processes. The complexity of modern life, for instance, the prevalence of digital media and changing cultural norms, has brought new dimensions to self-perception studies. Social comparison between social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, for instance, has been discovered to have an effect on perception in human beings, specifically concerning physical attractiveness and satisfaction with life (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). The intermediary character of presentation on social media causes people to compare themselves to others unfavorably, and this has the effect of reshaping the self-image and reducing self-esteem.

Self-perception also comes with the ideas of self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, which collectively provide a better description of how people see and evaluate themselves. Self-concept is the internal picture of the self that consists of attributes, roles, and identities that a person believes they possess. Self-esteem is affective judgment of worth, whereas self-efficacy consists of one's belief in being able to perform some tasks or achieve goals (Bandura, 2017). The three interconnected factors are the crux of self-perception and dictate motivation, decision, and interpersonal relations. Individuals who are positive in these domains are more likely to behave purposefully, maintain good relationships, and manage stress in healthy manners.

Contemporary writing has also been putting increasing emphasis on the social character of self-conception. Individuals do not build their conception of themselves alone but within social contexts which provide feedback, expectations, and comparisons. Feedback that individuals receive from their peers, teachers, family, and colleagues is of great significance in the formation of their self-conceptions. For instance, positive compliment and intimate relationships with individuals have been associated with the formation of healthy self-concepts, and negative or critical environments have been associated with self-doubt and low self-esteem (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2016). Additionally, internalization of social expectations and cultural norms also constructs individuals' views of themselves. In collectivist societies, for example, self-concept is framed in relation to others and the group, whereas in individualist societies independence and personal success are highlighted (Yamaguchi & Suzuki, 2020).

Self-concept, in educational psychology and developmental psychology, is employed as a powerful predictor of academic success and self-development. Students' self-perception of intelligence and competence can affect students' motivation, persistence, and academic success. Dweck (2016) theory of mindset is concerned with the role of self-beliefs within educational contexts. Students with a growth mindset and an intelligence perceived as being changeable are likely to accept challenges and work on them for longer periods of time, but students with a fixed mindset will be in the habit of sidestepping challenges and quitting sooner. Teachers can influence students' self-perceptions in a



positive manner by providing positive feedback, setting realistic expectations, and creating a healthy classroom.

Self-perception is also extremely important in mental health. Cognitive theories of depression and anxiety propose that inaccurate self-perceptions such as viewing oneself as incompetent, unlovable, or worthless are to blame for emotional illness. Therapeutic interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy attempt to recognize and reconstruct such pessimistic self-concepts with the result being adaptive, better-balanced self-concepts (Beck & Dozois, 2020). In this instance, self-perception not only serves as an etiological condition of psychological distress but also as the target for intervention in change and recovery. Increased effective self-perception can lead to increased resilience, better emotional regulation, and interpersonal functioning.

The advent of digital media has brought with it new risks and possibilities for self-perception. While the internet and social networking sites provide avenues for self-expression and identity experimentation, these also pose the risk of constant social comparison, unattainable ideals, and cyberbullying. Adolescents and young adults are most vulnerable because they are in a vulnerable stage of identity formation and are highly sensitive to social evaluation. Regular social media usage has been correlated with dissatisfaction with one's body, increased self-objectification, and heightened depression and anxiety scores (Marengo et al., 2022). Positive utilized, though, social media has also been shown to enhance self-esteem, enable social support, and provide a sense of belonging, hinting at its dual-edged effect on the self.

5.4 Social Media and User Engagement

Social media body image has also become increasingly common in recent psychological and sociocultural research. As digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook influence the online persona of millions of young adults and teenagers, to what degree they impact self-esteem and body satisfaction is pertinent. Social media offers an online environment that provides impeccable-looking photographs and highly constructed forms of beauty that are not necessarily real. These forms can possibly impact individuals, especially girls and women, the way they perceive their own bodies, and hence result in body dissatisfaction, unhealthy comparison, and internalization of impossible beauty ideals. As frequent exposure to deeply filtered and photo-shopped images occurs, consumers may begin identifying beauty with being thin, muscled, or some other relatively narrowly described standards and in turn reinforce false body image perception (Fardouly et al., 2018).

One of the largest means through which social media is shaping body image is through social comparison. Social comparison theory teaches us that individuals gain their own self-esteem and ability based on their comparison with other people (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison is exaggerated on social media since one is constantly confronted with other people's best sides and moments. There is evidence that upward social comparison to others perceived as more beautiful or successful potentially damages body image and self-esteem (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). This is particularly the case for young women continuously exposed to idealizing messages regarding thinness and beauty as the determinants of success and belonging.

The use of photo-manipulation software and filters on social media also misrepresents normal appearance definitions. Filters beautify faces, soften skin, and alter body shapes, creating a false sense about the self and others. The "beautification" culture makes individuals compare themselves with their idealized digital pictures and most end up hating their natural looks (Kleemans et al., 2018). Second, the desire to present oneself ideally can lead to increased participation in self-objectification,



where a person observes their body predominantly from the outside working inwards. This is likely to compromise body autonomy and lead to anxiety, shame, and diminished self-esteem (Lundy, 2020).

Celebrities and social media influencers also play an important part in building beauty standards. The celebrities can probably maintain a specific look and promote beauty products, exercise routines, or cosmetic surgery as required to obtain similar looks. Their messages are most likely to affirm implicitly or explicitly that beauty is required for societal acceptance, thereby reifying slim body ideals. It has been shown through research that viewing appearance-focused messages is linked to greater body dissatisfaction and appearance comparison, especially in adolescent girls (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). While there are body-positive influencers and genuine proponents, these messages are typically overshadowed by the saturation of idealized beauty content.

To the surprise of many, however, social media's impact on body image is not necessarily a degraded one. Some believe that social media can be spaces of body diversity and positivity. #bodypositivity and #selflove campaigns are employed to encourage acceptance of all sizes and disregard societal beauty standards. Constant exposure to multiple body representations can reduce thin ideal internalization and increase body satisfaction if users are constantly exposed to content that appreciates diverse shapes, sizes, and skin tones (Cohen et al., 2019). The success of such movements, however, is contingent on visibility and credibility of content. When body-positive messages sell or continue to possess traditionally beautiful bodies, they end up reinforcing the same standards that they try to dismantle (Sastre, 2020).

5.5 Influence of Social Media on Identity Formation

The effects of social media on identity construction have become one of the primary themes in research into the psychological and social construction of people during the digital age. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X (previously Twitter) have changed the manner in which people communicate, self-present, and construct their identities. Such sites are places where users constantly create and assemble content to show who they are, or who they aspire to be. This self-presentation thus directly mirrors how individuals build and negotiate their identities, especially for teenagers and young adults who are in the critical phase of identity formation. As individuals interact with others, receive feedback, and self-categorize with peers or influencers, their self-concept is repeatedly constructed, enhanced, or tested (Yang & Robinson, 2018).

Erikson's psychosocial development theory identifies adolescence as the most pivotal time for identity formation, whereby individuals experiment with different roles and ideologies in order to reach an integrated sense of self. Social media brings about this process faster through the opportunity to have a virtual world of experimentation and expression. Individuals are able to venture into various facets of their identity through profile customization, photo sharing, and status posting. The interactive technology provides adolescents with instant validation or criticism, which can accelerate the formation of identity but also result in confusion and insecurity (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2016). For the majority, the online self becomes an extension of the real self, blurring the line between online and offline identity.

The selective affordance of social media encourages selective self-presentation as individuals share idealized self-presentations in order to obtain endorsement and social validation. Such a phenomenon often results in the "performative identity," one that is affected by likes, shares, and comments. Being constantly required to show a socially desirable image may lead individuals to suppress part of their authentic self for what they believe to be more acceptable or desirable. This can hinder the



development of a clear and actual identity, especially in adolescents who are still searching to find out who they really are (Gonzales & Hancock, 2016). In addition, the online-offline discrepancy can lead to psychological distress, including anxiety and low self-esteem, when people feel that they cannot live up to their online persona.

Social comparison is also an important force behind the role of social media in identity formation. Social comparison theory defines that individuals measure their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others. Social media enforces this trend by showing the user idealized representations of other individuals' lives, often filtered and photoshopped. Such exposure can have the ability to cause unrealistic expectations, feelings of inferiority and inadequacy, particularly in reference to physical beauty, lifestyle, and achievements (Fardouly et al., 2018). The comparisons can potentially disrupt the formation of identity through causing self-doubt as well as confusion regarding identity, particularly when people copy behaviors or styles that they are not since they want to fit in.

Social media is not necessarily negative in relation to identity development, though. Social media also carries significant potential for explorations of identity, especially for stigmatized or marginalized groups. For populations whose identities may be stigmatized in off-line environments such as LGBTQ+ youth, minority ethnic groups, or disabled individuals' social media may be source communities where they can gain affirmation and solidarity. These online communities permit individuals to interact with aspects of their identity in a safe and more expansive environment, enabling the construction of a stronger and healthier sense of self (Craig, Eaton, McInroy, Leung, & Krishnan, 2021). A hashtag like #BlackGirlMagic or #TransIsBeautiful, for example, are now identity-affirming and empowering spaces in which individuals can exercise a feeling of pride and belonging.

The power of influencers and online celebrities also cannot be excluded in the process of identity formation. These influencers usually serve as role models to their fans, who usually emulate their lifestyle, virtues, and appearance. This can be termed parasocial interaction, where users form idealised relationships with influencers, which can affect their self-concept and identity formation. While this can be a source of inspiring change and motivation, it can also breed unrealistic hope and dependence on external approval (de Bérail et al., 2019). Teenagers are especially susceptible to these influences since they seek role models during their teenage years.

Theoretical Framework:

5.6 Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory, first theorized by Leon Festinger in 1954, explains the process through which individuals compare their own abilities, views, and characteristics with those of others and utilize the same to evaluate themselves. The process is involuntary but succeeds in fulfilling the function of uncertainty reduction in self-judgment and enhancing self-knowledge. Social comparison theory has grown by leaps and bounds since its inception, and new studies are being carried out on its implications in virtual contexts, mental health, physical attractiveness, and identification processes. In today's globalized world, where social media is the ruler, social comparison has been growing more and more, but in many ways, and changing the way people perceive themselves and where they stand in society.



Social comparison may be of two types, upward and downward. Upward social comparison means comparison with a person who is perceived to be better on some dimension, while downward comparison means comparison with a person who is perceived to be worse off. Upward comparison may be motivational, establishing goals and role models for personal enhancement but also generate feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem if individuals perceive that they will not be able to match (Wheeler & Miyake, 2017). Downward comparison, while providing a short-term boost to self-esteem, may have the potential to generate complacency or superiority feeling that dissuades personal growth (Gerber et al., 2018).

Social comparison is powerful at the stage adolescence and early adulthood, when the individual is attempting to form identities and shape his or her sense of self. Adolescents turn to peers and celebrities for cues regarding what to do, what to believe, and how to look. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat facilitate these comparisons through repeated exposure to others' lives and forcing users to present themselves in an idealized manner. It has been linked with greater body dissatisfaction, especially among young women, as they compare themselves with celebrities and influencers promoting unrealistic beauty ideals (Perloff, 2021). Similarly, men may also feel compelled to achieve muscular ideals seen online, leading to negative self-thoughts.

5.7 Self – Discrepancy Theory

Self-discrepancy theory is a relevant theory in the explanation of the psychological impact of social media on university students, particularly female students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Self-discrepancy theory, in the view of Higgins, is a belief that individuals have different self-states: actual self (how one is), ideal self (how one should be), and ought self (how one thinks they should be in terms of obligation or how others think of them to be). Where self-discrepancies occur most especially between actual and ideal or actual and ought selves, individuals experience negative emotional states such as guilt, shame, disappointment, and anxiety (Higgins, 1987). Where these self-discrepancies are enlarged is in the context of pervasive use of social media, where ideally students, and female university students especially, are exposed constantly to other individuals' idealized photos and narratives about their lives.

Public sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok are among the arenas where this manufactured self-presentation occurs, and through these, people present the idealized version of their lives, bodies, achievements, and social lives. For women students at Obafemi Awolowo University, this offers a constant stream of information by which they can measure themselves. The overall media visibility to peers and influencers who appear to have bodily perfection, professional or academic career, and social social life may confirm feelings of inadequacy every time their respective world fails to meet such online representation. This kind of compatibility mismatch between desired self and real self, particularly in terms of looks, social life, and grades, enhances emotional distress and low self-esteem (Fardouly et al., 2017).

Additionally, pressure to conform to what society expects, the basis of the ought self, is also facilitated by social media. Female students are generally inundated with messages about how they should appear, behave, and achieve academically and socially. When they perceive that they are unable to live up to these standards, a gap between the ideal and actual self is formed which generates feelings of stress, anxiety, and guilt (Bessenoff, 2016). These are further augmented by the public nature of social media sites where one's presence is not only self-evaluated but publicly evaluated in terms of likes, comments, and shares.



Self-discrepancy experience is particularly relevant for the case of a tertiary institution like Obafemi Awolowo University, where young women are making difficult transitions to adulthood. These involve consolidating secure identities, becoming self-assured, and accomplishing academic and personal goals. Social media exposure during this precarious phase of development can have the possibility of distorting students' perception of what is within their reach and desirable. If internalized ideal self is drawn from social media pictures showing highly edited or filtered representations of reality, then the students will likely develop unrealistic expectations for themselves. Inability to fulfill such expectations further creates the gap between the actual self and ideal self, and this generates dissatisfaction and lower motivation (Michikyan et al., 2019).

5.8 Empirical Review

The growing popularity of social media among university students has attracted considerable empirical attention because of its implications for students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and social interactions. Studies conducted between 2015 and 2024 consistently demonstrate that social media exerts both positive and negative influences on university students depending on the frequency of use, the nature of engagement, and individual psychosocial characteristics. Young female university students have received particular attention because they are more likely to engage with visually oriented social media platforms and are more susceptible to appearance-related social comparisons.

In one of the earliest studies, Junco (2015) investigated the relationship between social media usage and academic performance among university students in the United States. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from undergraduate students to examine the influence of social media multitasking on learning outcomes. The findings revealed that excessive social media use during study periods negatively affected students' concentration, retention, and academic performance. The study concluded that although social media facilitates communication and information sharing, uncontrolled usage may interfere with effective learning.

Similarly, Fardouly et al. (2017) examined the relationship between appearance-focused social media use and body image among female university students. The researchers employed a cross-sectional survey design involving young female participants and found that increased exposure to beauty- and appearance-related content significantly predicted body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. The study attributed these outcomes to upward social comparison, whereby users compare themselves with idealised images presented on social media. The findings further established that visually oriented platforms encourage the internalisation of unrealistic beauty standards, thereby increasing psychological vulnerability among young women.

Within the Nigerian context, Musa and Oladele (2020) investigated the influence of social media use on the academic performance of undergraduate students. Adopting a descriptive survey design, the researchers collected data from students in selected Nigerian universities using structured questionnaires. The study found that while social media facilitates academic collaboration, information exchange, and communication, excessive usage—particularly beyond four hours daily—was significantly associated with procrastination, poor study habits, and lower academic achievement. The study therefore recommended that students regulate the amount of time spent on social networking platforms in order to enhance academic productivity.

Conversely, Yang (2020) explored the positive psychological outcomes associated with social media use among university students. Using a quantitative research approach, the study revealed that social



media serves as an important source of emotional support, social connectedness, and psychological well-being, especially for students experiencing loneliness or social isolation. The findings further indicated that participation in educational communities, motivational groups, and mental health awareness platforms enhances students' confidence, resilience, and motivation towards academic activities. The study concluded that the impact of social media depends largely on the purpose for which it is used rather than the platforms themselves.

More recently, Gerson et al. (2021) examined the relationship between social media engagement, identity development, and psychological well-being among adolescents and young adults. The findings revealed that social media plays a significant role in identity formation by providing opportunities for self-expression, peer interaction, and social validation. However, the study also reported that excessive dependence on online approval may increase vulnerability to anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional distress.

Likewise, Valkenburg et al. (2022) investigated the differential effects of social media on adolescent mental health. Employing a longitudinal research design, the study demonstrated that social media affects users differently depending on personality traits, existing self-esteem, and patterns of platform engagement. While some participants experienced increased social support and improved well-being, others reported heightened social comparison, body dissatisfaction, and reduced self-worth resulting from frequent exposure to idealised online lifestyles.

In another Nigerian study, Adeyanju et al. (2023) examined the influence of social media on body image perception among female undergraduate students. The study found that frequent exposure to beauty influencers, celebrity lifestyles, and fashion-related content significantly increased appearance-related comparisons and body dissatisfaction among respondents. The researchers concluded that continuous exposure to idealised online images encourages unrealistic expectations regarding physical appearance and personal success.

6. Research Methods

6.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain quantitative data directly from the respondents using a structured questionnaire. The descriptive survey design facilitates the collection of information on the opinions, attitudes, and experiences of respondents without manipulating any of the study variables. It was therefore suitable for examining social media use and its influence among female undergraduate students residing in the selected on-campus hostels of Obafemi Awolowo University.

6.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all female undergraduate students residing in the four female on-campus hostels of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, who were active users of social media. The study focused on female students because they constituted the target population for the research. The population distribution obtained from the University's Hall Management Office is presented below in Table 1:

S/N	FEMALE ON-CAMPUS HOSTEL	NO. OF FEMALE OCCUPANTS
1.	Mozambique	1120



2.	Moremi	1320
3.	Alumni	395
4.	Akintola	512
		TOTAL: 3,347

Source: Hall Management Office, Obafemi Awolowo University (2025).

Therefore, the population of this study were 3347. The population of female occupants residing in the hotels on-campus hostels at Obafemi Awolowo University was obtained from the portal office of the hostels.

6.3 Sample Size Determination

The sample size of this study was determined using Taro Yamane sample size determination formula as calculated as follows:

$$\frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Total population (N) = 3,347 female students

Margin of error (e) = 0.05 (5%)

N = 3,347

$$\frac{3347}{1+3347(0.05)^2}$$

$$\frac{3347}{1+3347(0.0025)}$$

$$\frac{3347}{1+8.3675}$$

$$\frac{3347}{9.3675}$$

357.299 ≈ 357

Therefore, a sample size of 357 respondents was considered adequate for the study.

The table shows that the total study population comprised 3,347 female students residing in the selected on-campus hostels.

6.4 Sampling Technique

A proportionate sampling technique was first employed to allocate the sample size proportionately among the four female hostels based on their respective population sizes. This ensured that each hostel was fairly represented according to its contribution to the total population. Thereafter, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the required number of respondents from each hostel, thereby giving every eligible female student an equal chance of being selected.

The proportional allocation was determined using the formula:

Formula: $n_h = (N_h / N) \times n$

Where:

n_h = Sample allocated to each hostel



N_h = Population of each hostel

N = Total population (3,347)

n = Total sample size (357)

The proportional allocation is presented below in Table 2:

Female Hostel	Population (N_h)	Calculation	Sample Allocated
Mozambique Hall	1,120	$(1120 \times 357) \div 3347$	119
Moremi Hall	1,320	$(1320 \times 357) \div 3347$	141
Alumni Hall	395	$(395 \times 357) \div 3347$	42
Akintola Hall	512	$(512 \times 357) \div 3347$	55
Total	3,347		357

The allocated samples (119, 141, 42, and 55) sum to the required sample size of 357 respondents. After the proportional allocation, respondents were selected from each hostel using the simple random sampling technique, thereby ensuring representativeness and reducing selection bias.

6.5 Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire to young female students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. To facilitate effective data collection and ensure a high response rate, the researcher engaged trained and remunerated research assistants, comprising selected students and staff of the university who were familiar with the institution's environment and the respondents. Prior to the field exercise, the research assistants were adequately trained on the objectives of the study, ethical considerations, and the proper procedures for administering and retrieving the questionnaires. Their familiarity with the university community enhanced access to respondents, encouraged cooperation, minimized non-response, and ensured that the questionnaires were completed correctly. The research assistants also maintained confidentiality and anonymity throughout the data collection process, thereby enhancing the credibility, reliability, and validity of the data collected. Out of the questionnaires administered, 349 were properly completed, retrieved, and found suitable for data analysis.

6.6 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency counts, percentages. The data obtained from the administered questionnaires were coded, entered, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 26.0. Frequency counts and percentages were employed to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents, and respondents' opinions on the impact of social media use on their self-concept, self-perception, and body image.

The use of descriptive statistics was considered appropriate because the study sought to describe and summarize the opinions, perceptions, and experiences of young female students regarding the impact of social media use, rather than to establish causal relationships or test hypotheses. Descriptive statistical techniques provided a clear and objective basis for interpreting the responses and addressing the study's research objectives.

6.7 Instruments of Data Collection



The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire designed to assess the use of social media and its perceived impact on the self-perception of young female students. The questionnaire comprised close-ended, Likert-scale, and multiple-choice questions to measure respondents' patterns of social media use, level of engagement, and perceptions of its influence on their self-concept.

The instrument was designed to generate quantitative data suitable for statistical analysis while allowing respondents to provide additional comments where necessary. It was divided into five sections (A–E). Section A elicited respondents' demographic information. Section B assessed the social media platforms most frequently used by the respondents. Section C examined the types of content respondents engaged with and the perceived influence of such content on their self-perception. Section D assessed the impact of social media use on respondents' self-esteem, body image, and overall self-perception, while Section E examined the strategies adopted by respondents to manage the effects of social media use on their self-perception and general well-being. The questionnaire was administered electronically and, where feasible, through face-to-face distribution to ensure a high response rate.

6.8 Validity of the Research Instrument

The validity of the research instrument was established through face and content validity. The questionnaire was carefully developed based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature. It was subsequently reviewed by the project supervisor and experts in the field of Mass Communication and research methodology to assess the clarity, relevance, adequacy, and appropriateness of the items. Their observations and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire to ensure that it adequately measured the variables under investigation.

6.9 Reliability of the Research Instrument

The reliability of the research instrument was established through a pilot study involving 30 female undergraduate students who possessed similar characteristics to the target population but were not included in the main study. Data obtained from the pilot study were analysed using the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a reliability index of 0.70. This coefficient indicates that the instrument possessed an acceptable level of internal consistency and was therefore considered reliable for data collection.

6.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of this study to ensure the protection of the respondents' rights and dignity. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the appropriate authorities of Obafemi Awolowo University, while informed consent was obtained from all participants after the purpose and objectives of the study had been clearly explained to them. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. The anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were guaranteed by ensuring that no identifying information was collected, and all data obtained were used strictly for academic purposes. Furthermore, respondents' privacy was respected throughout the study, and every effort was made to ensure that participation posed no physical, psychological, emotional, or social harm to any participant.

7. Results and Discussion



This presents the findings of the study on the Impact of the use of social media on university students: a case study of young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife.

Table 3. The Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

The demographic characteristics of the 349 respondents reveal a fairly balanced distribution across the selected variables.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
16-18	81	23.2
19-22	107	30.7
23-25	95	27.2
26+	66	18.9
Total	349	100.0

Source: Researcher, 2025

The age distribution shows that respondents aged 19–22 years constituted the highest proportion with approximately 107 (30.7%), followed by those aged 23–25 years with about 95 (27.2%). Respondents aged 16–18 years accounted for about 81 (23.2%), while those aged 26 years and above were the least represented with approximately 66 (18.9%). This indicates that the study largely involved undergraduate students within the youthful age bracket that actively uses social media.

Level of Study	Frequency	Percentage
100	83	23.8
200	89	25.5
300	93	26.6
400	84	24.1
Total	349	100.0

Source: Researcher, 2025

Regarding the level of study, 300-level students constituted the highest proportion with about 94 (26.9%), followed by 200-level students with 89 (25.5%), 400-level students with 84 (24.1%), while 100-level students accounted for approximately 82 (23.5%). This suggests that respondents were fairly distributed across the various academic levels.

Department	Frequency	Percentage
Science	114	32.7
Arts	103	29.5
Social Science	132	37.8
Total	349	100.0

Source: Researcher, 2025

With respect to posting frequency, approximately 94 (26.9%) respondents indicated that they never post content, while about 92 (26.4%) posted weekly. Meanwhile, 82 (23.5%) posted daily, and another 82 (23.5%) posted several times a week. This implies that although many respondents actively use social media, not all are active content creators.

Time spends on social media (hours)	Frequency	Percentage
<1	76	21.8



1-2	76	21.8
3-4	94	26.9
>4	103	29.5
Total	349	100.0

Source: Researcher, 2025

The findings further reveal that 103 (29.5%) respondents spent more than four hours daily on social media, making this the largest category. About 94 (26.9%) spent between three and four hours, while approximately 76 (21.8%) each spent less than one hour and between one and two hours respectively. This suggests that a substantial proportion of the respondents devote considerable time to social media usage.

Posting Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	82	23.5
Several/week	82	23.5
Weekly	92	26.4
Never	93	26.6
Total	349	100.0

Source: Researcher, 2025

With respect to posting frequency, approximately 94 (26.9%) respondents indicated that they never post content, while about 92 (26.4%) posted weekly. Meanwhile, 82 (23.5%) posted daily, and another 82 (23.5%) posted several times a week. This implies that although many respondents actively use social media, not all are active content creators

Table 4. Types of social media frequently engaged by young female students in OAU (N=349)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral
Instagram	72 (20.6%)	89 (25.5%)	58 (16.6%)	63 (18.1%)	67 (19.2%)
WhatsApp	69 (19.8%)	74 (21.2%)	57 (16.3%)	74 (21.2%)	75 (21.5%)
Twitter	83 (23.8%)	72 (20.6%)	66 (18.9%)	47 (13.5%)	81 (23.2%)
Snapchat	60 (17.2%)	73 (20.9%)	82 (23.5%)	58 (16.6%)	76 (21.8%)
Facebook	91 (26.1%)	75 (21.5%)	59 (16.9%)	67 (19.2%)	57 (16.3%)
TikTok	90 (25.8%)	82 (23.5%)	64 (18.3%)	55 (15.8%)	58 (16.6%)

Source: Researcher, 2025

Table 4. results show that for Instagram, approximately 72 (20.6%) strongly disagreed, 89 (25.5%) disagreed, 58 (16.6%) agreed, 63 (18.1%) strongly agreed, while 67 (19.2%) were neutral. For WhatsApp, about 69 (19.8%) strongly disagreed, 75 (21.5%) disagreed, 57 (16.3%) agreed, 74 (21.2%) strongly agreed, while 74 (21.2%) remained neutral. Regarding Twitter, approximately 84 (24.1%) strongly disagreed, 72 (20.6%) disagreed, 67 (19.2%) agreed, 47 (13.5%) strongly agreed, whereas 79 (22.6%) were neutral. For Snapchat, about 60 (17.2%) strongly disagreed, 73 (20.9%) disagreed, 82 (23.5%) agreed, 58 (16.6%) strongly agreed, while 76 (21.8%) were neutral.

Concerning Facebook, 91 (26.1%) strongly disagreed, 75 (21.5%) disagreed, 59 (16.9%) agreed, 67 (19.2%) strongly agreed, whereas 57 (16.3%) were neutral. For TikTok, approximately 90 (25.8%)



strongly disagreed, 83 (23.8%) disagreed, 64 (18.3%) agreed, 55 (15.8%) strongly agreed, while 57 (16.3%) were neutral.

The responses indicate that all six social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), Snapchat, Facebook, and TikTok, recorded responses across all response categories, suggesting varying levels of engagement among the respondents. WhatsApp and Snapchat recorded relatively higher levels of positive responses (Agree and Strongly Agree), indicating that these platforms are among the most frequently used by the respondents. This may be attributed to their convenience for instant messaging, academic communication, entertainment, and social interaction.

Instagram also attracted considerable engagement, reflecting its popularity among young female students for sharing pictures, videos, and lifestyle-related content. Conversely, Facebook and TikTok recorded relatively higher levels of disagreement, suggesting that although these platforms remain relevant, they are comparatively less preferred by the respondents than WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram. In sum, the findings imply that young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University actively engage with multiple social media platforms, with WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram emerging as the dominant platforms. This widespread engagement provides the basis for examining how exposure to social media content may influence students' self-perception and body image.

Table 5. Impact of certain contents on Self-Perception

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral
After spending time on social media, how often do you feel dissatisfied with your appearance?	90 (25.8%)	82 (23.5%)	64 (18.3%)	55 (15.8%)	58 (16.6%)
How often do you compare yourself to others on social media in terms of appearance, lifestyle, or success?	82 (23.5%)	72 (20.6%)	54 (15.5%)	65 (18.6%)	76 (21.8%)
How often do you feel that you need to improve your appearance after viewing beauty-related content on social media?	77 (22.1%)	69 (19.8%)	66 (18.9%)	71 (20.3%)	66 (18.9%)
Do you feel that seeing success or luxury-related content on social media makes you feel less successful or accomplished?	91 (26.1%)	75 (21.5%)	59 (16.9%)	67 (19.2%)	57 (16.3%)
I feel more confident or happier after receiving positive feedback (likes/comments) on social media.	66 (18.9%)	72 (20.6%)	68 (19.5%)	68 (19.5%)	75 (21.5%)

Source: Researcher, 2025

Table 5 examined the extent to which exposure to social media content influences the self-perception of young female students. The responses revealed mixed opinions across all the statements, indicating that respondents experience varying degrees of influence from social media content.

Many respondents acknowledged that they sometimes feel dissatisfied with their physical appearance after spending time on social media. Similarly, a considerable proportion reported comparing themselves with others regarding appearance, lifestyle, and success. These findings suggest that exposure to idealised images and lifestyles on social media contributes to social comparison among young female students.



Furthermore, a substantial number of respondents indicated that beauty-related content motivates them to improve their appearance, while others reported feeling less successful after viewing luxury and success-related posts. In addition, positive feedback such as likes and comments was perceived by many respondents as enhancing their confidence and happiness.

The findings suggest that although the influence of social media on self-perception is not overwhelmingly negative, it contributes to moderate levels of comparison, appearance consciousness, and emotional reactions among young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University.

Table 7. Self-Esteem and Body Image

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral
I am satisfied with my physical appearance.	69 (19.8%)	56 (16.0%)	75 (21.5%)	84 (24.1%)	65 (18.6%)
I feel good about my body image.	67 (19.2%)	54 (15.5%)	65 (18.6%)	83 (23.8%)	80 (22.9%)
I often feel insecure about my appearance after looking at social media.	75 (21.5%)	79 (22.6%)	65 (18.6%)	65 (18.6%)	65 (18.6%)
I feel that my self-worth is sometimes influenced by how I am perceived on social media.	78 (22.3%)	70 (20.1%)	66 (18.9%)	73 (20.9%)	62 (17.8%)

Source: Researcher, 2025

Table 7 presents respondents' views regarding self-esteem and body image. The responses indicate that many respondents expressed satisfaction with their physical appearance and reported feeling positive about their body image. This suggests that a considerable proportion of the respondents possess relatively healthy self-esteem despite their frequent use of social media.

However, the findings also reveal that a notable proportion admitted feeling insecure about their appearance after using social media. Likewise, many respondents agreed that their self-worth is sometimes influenced by how they are perceived on social media platforms. These responses indicate that although many students maintain positive self-esteem, social media still exerts psychological pressure on a substantial number of them.

Overall, the findings suggest that social media usage among young female students has a moderate influence on self-esteem and body image. While many respondents demonstrate confidence in their physical appearance, continuous exposure to online content and feedback appears to shape

8. Discussion of Findings

This study on the impact of the use of social media on university students: A case study of young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife provides valuable insights into the social media platforms predominantly used by young female students and how exposure to social media content influences their self-perception and body image. The findings reveal that Snapchat recorded the highest level of engagement among the respondents, followed closely by WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, while Twitter (X) and TikTok recorded comparatively lower levels of engagement. This suggests that although the respondents actively use a variety of social media platforms, their preferences are more inclined towards platforms that facilitate instant communication, visual content sharing, and interpersonal interactions.



The finding corroborates the studies of Cohen et al. (2020) and Tiggemann and Anderberg (2020), who observed that young women are particularly attracted to visually oriented social media platforms where beauty, fashion, fitness, and lifestyle-related content are predominantly displayed. Such platforms encourage continuous interaction with carefully curated and idealised images, thereby increasing users' exposure to appearance-related content. The popularity of Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp among the respondents may therefore be attributed to their ability to provide visual communication, instant social interaction and continuous peer engagement, which are highly valued among university students.

The study further revealed that young female students engage with several categories of social media content, particularly those portraying beauty, lifestyle, success and peer activities. The respondents' relatively high engagement with these platforms indicates that social media has become an integral part of their daily lives and serves as a major avenue for communication, entertainment, information sharing and identity expression. This finding aligns with the argument of Valkenburg et al. (2022) and Gerson et al. (2021) that social media platforms have become important environments where adolescents and young adults construct and negotiate their identities through interactions with peers and exposure to idealised online representations.

The findings relating to self-perception indicate that exposure to social media content moderately influences how young female students perceive themselves. Many respondents acknowledged that they sometimes experience dissatisfaction with their physical appearance after spending time on social media and often compare themselves with others regarding appearance, lifestyle and success. Likewise, a considerable proportion reported feeling the need to improve their appearance after viewing beauty-related content, while others admitted that success- and luxury-related posts sometimes make them feel less accomplished. These findings suggest that although social media does not exert an overwhelmingly negative influence on all users, it contributes to appearance consciousness, upward social comparison and self-evaluation among many young female students.

This finding supports the Social Comparison Theory proposed by Festinger (1954) and is consistent with the empirical findings of Brown and Tiggemann (2020) and Adeyanju et al. (2023), who reported that young women frequently compare themselves with peers, celebrities and influencers on social media. Such upward comparisons often expose users to unrealistic beauty ideals and luxurious lifestyles, thereby increasing body dissatisfaction and lowering self-esteem. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2020) observed that repeated exposure to idealised online images encourages body surveillance and internalisation of unrealistic appearance standards, particularly among female social media users.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that positive social media feedback, such as likes, comments and other forms of online validation, contributes positively to the confidence of many respondents. At the same time, a substantial proportion indicated that their self-worth is influenced by how they are perceived by others on social media. This implies that online validation plays a significant role in shaping the psychological well-being of young female students. The result corroborates the findings of Valkenburg et al. (2022), who argued that adolescents increasingly rely on social media feedback as a basis for evaluating their social acceptance and personal worth. The interactive nature of social media therefore creates a feedback mechanism through which users continuously assess themselves based on the reactions they receive from others.

The study also found that despite these influences, many respondents expressed satisfaction with their physical appearance and reported feeling good about their body image. This suggests that although



social media contributes to self-comparison and appearance-related concerns, many young female students maintain relatively positive self-esteem and healthy perceptions of their physical appearance. This finding agrees with Gerson et al. (2021), who noted that the psychological effects of social media are not universally negative but vary depending on individual resilience, personality traits, social support systems and patterns of platform usage.

In the Nigerian context, the findings support those of Nwafor and Aluko (2021), who argued that social media promotes an emerging culture of achievement, success and lifestyle display among young people. University students are increasingly exposed to content highlighting academic excellence, entrepreneurial success, luxurious lifestyles and campus social activities. Such exposure often motivates students to strive for personal success and social recognition but may also generate pressure to meet unrealistic expectations. This may explain why some respondents admitted feeling less successful after viewing luxury- and achievement-related content, while others reported frequent comparisons with their peers.

In all, the findings of this study indicate that social media exerts a moderate influence on the self-perception, body image and self-esteem of young female students in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. While the respondents generally maintain positive perceptions of themselves, continuous exposure to beauty ideals, aspirational lifestyles and online social feedback encourages appearance consciousness, social comparison and the desire for social validation. These findings reinforce existing literature that social media represents both an important medium for communication and self-expression and a significant psychosocial environment capable of shaping the attitudes, emotions and self-concepts of young female university students.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of Instagram use on the self-concept of young female students at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The findings revealed that respondents interacted more frequently with peer-related content than with other forms of content on the platform. Nevertheless, beauty, lifestyle, and celebrity-related posts were found to exert a noticeable influence on students' self-perception. Many respondents reported engaging in social comparison, particularly with regard to physical appearance and lifestyle, which often created a perceived need for self-improvement. Although Instagram serves as a valuable platform for communication, self-expression, and social interaction, it also promotes idealised standards of beauty and success that may contribute to feelings of insecurity and reduced self-esteem among some users. Conversely, positive feedback, such as likes and encouraging comments, was found to enhance confidence and self-worth. Overall, the study concludes that Instagram's influence on the self-concept of young female students is neither entirely beneficial nor entirely harmful; rather, its effects vary according to individual experiences, patterns of use, and personal resilience.

10. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Female students of Obafemi Awolowo University should be encouraged to engage more with positive, educational, motivational, and peer-supportive content on Instagram, as such content promotes healthy interactions and personal development.
2. Since beauty and lifestyle-related content significantly influences self-perception, the university should organise awareness programmes that equip students with the skills to



critically evaluate and interpret social media content, thereby reducing unhealthy social comparison and its negative effects.

3. The university should promote media literacy and self-esteem enhancement programmes through workshops, seminars, and counselling services to help students recognise unrealistic beauty standards portrayed on social media and develop a healthy sense of self-worth and body image.
4. Students should be encouraged to follow celebrities and social media influencers who promote authenticity, body positivity, mental well-being, and realistic lifestyles, while exercising caution toward content that promotes unrealistic beauty ideals, excessive materialism, or unhealthy standards of success.

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Authors' contributions

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data availability

Datasets generated are available on reasonable and convincing request

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant authority. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and their participation was entirely voluntary.



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