

## SOCIAL MEDIA DEPENDENCY, BODY IMAGE SATISFACTION, AND MENTAL WELLBEING AMONG PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

*The blistering adoption of the social media in daily life has transformed the identity, self-presentation as well as peer interaction of the young adults. The paper explored the interactions between social media addiction, satisfaction with body images, and mental health among Pakistani university students in a theory-oriented approach of multidimension. The quantitative correlational design was used and a purposive sample of 180 students (aged 18-25 years) in a private university at Lahore was used. The participants took the Social Media Addiction Scale Student Form (SMAS-SF), the Body Self Image Questionnaire (BSIQ) and the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). It was found that there were considerable positive relationships between social media dependency and body image satisfaction ( $r = .24, p < .01$ ), along with social media dependency and mental wellbeing ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ). Nevertheless, the relationship between overall satisfaction with body image and mental wellbeing was not significant. Regression analyses indicated that social media dependency was a significant predictor of both body image satisfaction ( $R^2 = .05$ ) and mental wellbeing ( $R^2 = .03$ ), but the effect sizes were low. There were gender variations in social media dependency among the females and health fitness impact among the males. In sharp contrast to largely deficit oriented narratives, evidence indicates that social media use can be a situational accomplishment of personal expression, social identification as well as identity affirmation. The article adds culturally-based data to Pakistan, and results in the necessity to develop reciprocated views that distinguish between adaptive dependency and a valuable online experience.*

**Keywords:** Digital Technologies, Social Media Dependency, Body Image Satisfaction, and Mental Wellbeing

### Introduction

The quick growth of digital technologies has altered the social interaction, self-presentation and identity formation, especially among young adults (Muyidi, 2025). The social media platforms (Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat, and Facebook) have become an indivisible part of life and they provide their users with unstopping possibilities to communicate, express themselves, entertain, and get social confirmation (Lwin, 2025). Students of the university, one of the most active groups on the platforms, are in an especially digitally mediated environment. Although social media has many useful properties, such as social connectivity and availability of information, its psychological impact is increasingly the issue of scholarly interest, especially regarding body image perceptions and mental health.

Among other issues that have been raised about the use of social media is the growing focus on the presentation of self through visual media. Image-based applications promote the creation of idealized self-images by users by using filters, image editing, and filtering who choose what to share (Barbera, 2025). Such a climate often encourages limited beauty ideals, favoring the specific type of body, lifestyle and aesthetics. Repeated exposure to this material may shape

the perception of how people view themselves, and in most cases, it causes appearance-based social comparisons (Eshiet, 2025). In the case of university students whose identity formation, social belonging and self-assessment are already underway, these pressures can have significant consequences on body image satisfaction and mental well-being.

The body image is a multidimensional concept that involves the perception, attitude, thoughts, and emotional concerns of individuals towards their physical image (Jiménez-Morcillo et al., 2024). Studies have always indicated that body dissatisfaction correlates with the negative psychological consequences, such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and disordered eating. Social media risks are amplified by the fact that they enhance appearance-based assessment and status quo comparison. Compared to traditional media, social media allows interactivity and peer-to-peer comparison and live feedback in the form of likes, comments, and distribution, thus enhancing the role of appearance as a signal of social worth.

Parallel to the problem of the body image, the social media dependency has become a serious psychological problem. The social media addiction is defined by the use of social networking sites in excess and compulsory use, emotional dependency on the internet communication, and inability to control the use despite its adverse effects (Sarkar et al., 2025). This dependency is conceptualized by behavioral addiction frameworks as being characterized by symptoms of salience, tolerance, withdrawal, mood change and conflict with normal functioning. The social media serves as a major source of emotional regulation and validation as well as social approval, which replaces real relationships and coping strategies with others.

The empirical data has attributed harmful social media use to various mental well-being issues, such as depression, anxiety, emotional burnout, and decreased life satisfaction. Fear of missing out (FoMO), cyber comparison, validation-seeking, and exposure to idealized lifestyles are the mechanisms that have been found to contribute to psychological distress. Nevertheless, a new body of literature indicates that the connection between social media use and mental wellbeing might have a more sophisticated nature than it has been presumed. Other studies suggest that even social support, community identification, identity affirmation, and exposure to body-positive or health-oriented information can be found in social media as long as its use is not seen as compulsive.

This has complicated the idea of the need to differentiate between social media dependency and general use of social media. The number of hours spent online in itself is not always the most accurate predictors of adverse psychological consequences; instead, it seems that the determinants of harm are emotional dependence, compulsive consumption, and maladaptive thinking styles (Alshamsi, 2025). Moreover, the psychological impact of social media can be different based on the differences of people, culture, sex, and type of content being used. Therefore, the simplistic stories about social media as being harmful per se do not reflect the complexity of how digital interaction contributes to self-image and wellbeing.

The theoretical approaches offer a great insight on the processes that connect the elements of social media dependency, body image, and mental wellbeing (Popat & Tarrant, 2023). Sociocultural theory focuses on how media propagates appearance ideals which people internalize, which in many cases results in disappointment when the appearance is not in line with the appearance ideals promoted by society. The Social Comparison Theory describes how human beings compare themselves in terms of how they look and the kind of lifestyle they have with that of other people, which has been heightened by the curated and perfect online images. When applied to objectification theory, this indicates that repeated exposure to appearance based evaluation promotes self-objectification whereby we monitor the body in an external view which leads to anxiety and shame.

In addition to these ecologies, Uses and Gratifications Theory assumes that people actively use the media to meet psychological and social needs, including the need to belong, to express

themselves, to manage their moods (Almakaty, 2025). Dependency could result when social media comes to the fore in the fulfillment of these needs. The Cognitive-Behavioral Model of problematic internet use and I-PACE model also expound on how the interaction of emotional vulnerabilities, maladaptive cognitions, and deficit of self-regulation is reinforcing compulsive digital behaviors. Self-Discrepancy Theory introduces a further dimension that discrepancy between real and ideal selves, which is intensified by viewing idealized images online, may lead to emotional distress and motivate compensatory social media consumption.

Although much literature exists covering the topic of social media, body image, and mental health, certain gaps still exist. First, the current research is largely based on the Western populations which makes it hard to generalize cultures. Second, a lot of research allows highlighting negative consequences without adequately investigating situations where social media use can be related to positive psychological experiences. Third, a limited number of studies conceptualize social media dependency as a multidimensional construct that is independent of frequency of use. Last but not least, there is scanty study on the interaction of various dimensions of body image with social media dependency and mental wellbeing in one study.

To fill these gaps, the current research will examine the association between social media dependency, body image satisfaction, and mental wellbeing in university students. This study aims to deepen the analysis of the interaction between dependency on social media platforms and psychological wellbeing, as it will use validated psychometric tools and cover several subdimensions of the body image. The paper further discusses gender variations to understand more how the males and females can have different impacts of using social media concerning how they appear and their mental well-being.

Notably, this research helps to expand the existing body of literature which questions the exclusively deficit-centered views on social media usage. Through empirical study of positive and negative associations, the study hopes to leave behind the moral panic accounts and be more balanced regarding digital life. The knowledge of these dynamics is critical to the development of evidence-based interventions, to the development of digital literacy, and to the establishment of healthier relationships with social media among the young adults.

In a world where online activities cannot be avoided, studying the psychological consequences of being addicted to social media is not just an academic issue but a social health issue. Placing the use of social media in the context of already developed theoretical frameworks and empirical data, this paper has provided valuable insights into how the perception of the body image and mental health can be molded in modern digital environments.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Body Image as a Psychological and Sociocultural Construct**

The concept of body image is quite old but it is understood as a multidimensional psychological construct, which involves the perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of individuals with regard to their physical appearance. The recent studies have placed body image not as an individual appraisal of the body but an interaction between sociocultural elements and mediated by the media, peer expectations, gender expectations and a wider cultural ideal of the body. Body image in adolescents and young adults is very critical in the process of influencing self esteem, emotional stability, identity, and life contentment. Students at the university, especially, are at a sensitive stage of development where self-awareness, comparison to other people, and identity negotiation, which puts them in a very vulnerable position against issues to do with appearance.

The trend in Pakistan is also placed evidence of how the world is becoming more similar, meaning that the psychological wellbeing of persons has a close relationship with body image satisfaction. The survey-based research by Butt (2025) among undergraduate students in

Lahore is a valuable contribution to the literature on the topic in the area because it showed that body image is a major positive predictor of life satisfaction. This result supports the hypothesis that positive body image is a protective factor of psychology and not just the lack of dissatisfaction. Interestingly, the correlation between body image and self esteem is also negative, which is contrary to much of the literature available. This fact of inconsistency indicates the multifacetedness of body image processes in certain cultural and institutional settings and indicates the importance of more sophisticated, multidimensional strategies to measure it.

Nonetheless, the pattern that may be found in all studies is as follows: those who are more satisfied with their bodies are more likely to have better emotional adaptation, higher lifetime satisfaction, and greater psychological stability. These results are consistent with sociocultural and cognitive-behavioral theories which place body image as a key element of self-concept and emotional regulation.

### **2.2 Body Image and Psychological Wellbeing among University Students**

The increased amount of research on the topic in Pakistan has investigated the association between body image satisfaction and psychological wellbeing by applying sound psychometric scales. Khan, Gul, and Gulab (2024) examined the connection by incorporating the self-compassion as a mediating psychological resource. Their results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between body image satisfaction and psychological wellbeing, which was determined by the WarwickEdinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). Of significance, it was found that self-compassion positively correlated with both body image satisfaction and wellbeing indicating that people who are more kind and less judgmental toward themselves are better able to withstand appearance-related pressures.

These results are reminiscent of the previous research conducted by Abbasi and Zubair (2015), whose study is still a seminal source of studies in the Pakistani context. The findings they provide defined that body image, self-compassion and psychological wellbeing have a strong correlation with each other, and self-compassion mediates the connection between body image and wellbeing. This mediation effect implies that the body image has both direct and indirect effects on wellbeing via the emotional coping strategies and self-regulatory abilities of individuals. In both studies, the issues of protective psychological processes, which mitigate the negative consequences of appearance-related dissatisfaction, are emphasized.

These relationships are also complicated because of gender differences. Although Khan et al. (2024) managed to establish a higher score in mental wellbeing in male students compared to female students, Abbasi and Zubair (2015) revealed a large gender difference in body image but not a large difference in psychological wellbeing. Such ambivalent results indicate that there is potential that gendered beauty ideals, cultural norms and social expectations can influence the ways in which men and women are affected by and internalize body image concerns in different ways. These discrepancies underscore the importance of further gender-sensitive studies in the body image research.

### **2.3 Social Media Use, Dependency, and Body Image Satisfaction**

With the emergence of the image-based social networking sites, the social media has become a key player in creating body image perceptions. With social media versus the traditional media, there is the ability to be continuously exposed, compare to peers and receive feedback on appearance which exacerbates appearance based assessment. Studies are becoming more selective between non-problematic and problematic or addictive behavioral patterns of social media use, with the psychological outcomes relating to the mode and purpose of use.

The research presented by Arshad and Akhtar (2024) among adolescents in Faisalabad offers important critical insight into this difference. Their results showed that there was a significant negative correlation between social media addiction and body satisfaction; thus, compulsive

use of social networking platforms is negative to the body perceptions. Conversely, the body satisfaction had a positive connection with subjective wellbeing that supports the protective nature of a positive body image. The paper also revealed no direct association between subjective wellbeing and body satisfaction in some of the analyses meaning that there are some other psychological or contextual factors that could mediate this relationship.

The findings are consistent with the global literature relating the problem of excessive use of social media to increased appearance comparison, internalization of unrealistic beauty standards, and emotional distress. Nevertheless, the youthful nature of the sample of the present research restricts its extrapolation to college samples, where developmental maturity, autonomy, and media literacy can change the relationship between social media use and behavior. Additionally, the convenience sampling and cross-sectional design limit the possibility of causal interpretation, making it necessary to have more sophisticated methodological designs.

#### **2.4 Media Pressure, Self-Objectification, and Identity Formation**

In addition to body satisfaction, current research has started to investigate the inquiry into the ways in which the media-constructed body ideals influence more extensive self-concept and self-identity questions. Arshad et al. (2025) integrate in this discussion by exploring the mediacy between media pressure and self-concept with self-objectification and body dissatisfaction in the relationship between media pressure and self-concept in emerging adult women. Through structural equation modeling, the research found out that the effects of media pressure on such areas as vulnerability, task mastery, and perceived power were entirely mediated by body dissatisfaction and self-objectification.

Such results are theoretically important because they show that effects of being exposed to media go beyond the surface level discontent to include other levels of identity and self-esteem. The self-objectification theory is helpful in this context, as it implies that with constant exposure to idealized media objects, a person is more likely to believe that their body can be viewed by the eye of an observer, which results in the emergence of chronic self-observation and psychological pressures. Notably, the researchers have discovered that media influence is selective and not universal as not all self-concept domains were affected.

Although this research is conducted only on women, its results apply on wider populations. Both men and women can share certain pressures, but in gender-specific ways in cultures where beauty ratios are becoming more globalized due to the digital media. The study states that there is need to consider psychological processes that mediate between media exposure and wellbeing including the assumption that there are direct, linear relationships.

#### **2.5 Cultural Context and the Pakistani Research Landscape**

All these studies show that the concept of body image and psychological wellbeing is strongly rooted in culture, social and media contexts. Pakistani studies are also useful to provide contextual information, disproving the Western dominated assumptions. To illustrate, positive correlation between the body image and life satisfaction reported by Butt (2025) is the opposite of the prevailing pathological and unsatisfied story, which indicates that cultural values, family formation, and social support systems might mediate a psychological outcome.

Meanwhile, the growing infiltration of globalized media and social networking sites in Pakistan also creates new pressures which reflect the global trends. Appearance-based comparison is getting more intense with the increasing exposure of adolescents and the university students to Westernized beauty ideals, influencer culture, and content generated by algorithms. However, there is a paucity of research on the way social media addiction overlaps with body image satisfaction and mental health in one piece of analysis, especially among university students.

In terms of methodology, a significant portion of the literature focuses is based on cross-sectional designs and convenience sampling, which restrict the ability to make causal inference

and generalization. Although tested scales like the BSIQ and WEMWBS are widely employed, they do not incorporate multidimensional scales of social media dependency that include emotional dependence and compulsive usage instead of the amount of screen time.

### **2.6 Research Gaps and Rationale for the Present Study**

Although an increased scholarly interest is being given, a number of gaps are still apparent. To begin with, no research has explored the relationship between social media dependency, body image satisfaction, and mental wellbeing of Pakistani university students simultaneously. Second, the literature tends to focus on the negative consequences, without considering the circumstances where social media use can be concomitant and even beneficial to wellbeing. Third, mixed results on the differences between gender and psychological outcomes provoke the thought that more detailed, culturally sensitive studies are needed.

Moreover, although self-compassion and self-objectification have been discussed as mediators, the contribution of social media dependency as a psychological factor that affects the body image and wellbeing has not been under investigation. It is necessary to differentiate between meaningful and active engagement and maladaptive dependency to serve as the stepping stone towards theoretical clarity and the ability to inform interventions.

The current research fills these gaps by contributing to the existing body of literature through a multidimensional approach to body image, which incorporates verified scales of social media dependency, and by assessing their combined effects on the mental wellbeing. Placing the analysis in the context of the well-established theoretical frameworks and a Pakistani university setting, the proposed research will help to add a more balanced and culturally-based perspective to digital media in terms of its psychological effects.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The current research is based on the integrative theory which relies on sociocultural, cognitive and psychological theories to elaborate on how social media dependency, body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing of university students are interdependent. Since the concept of digital interaction and self-identification is complex, no single theory can be considered adequate to explain the intricacies of the interactions. Hence, this framework incorporates major lessons of the Sociocultural Theory, Social Comparison Theory, Objectification Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Self-Discrepancy Theory and the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model to offer an all-inclusive explanatory perspective.

#### **3.1 Sociocultural Theory and Media-Driven Body Ideals**

The Sociocultural Theory assumes that the societal norms, cultural values, and media images are central sources of influencing the perceptions of beauty and physical attractiveness in people. Under this view, the media serves as an effective agent of socialization, which spreads ideal of appearance that with time, people internalize. These ideals are enhanced in modern online spaces, where visual content and aesthetic perfection is favored, and where images—promoted by an algorithm and adhering to the major standards of beauty—take center stage on social media.

In this context, frequent exposure to the idealized images of the body may result in the individuals being made to consider their own image in comparison to the socially approved norms. Ineffectiveness of personal appearance compared with these ideals in respect to expectations can lead to dissatisfaction which may also disrupt the psychological wellbeing. Sociocultural Theory, therefore, offers a background explanation of the role of social media settings in shaping body image and why the addiction to such sites could increase body image worries among university students.

#### **3.2 Social Comparison Theory and Appearance-Based Evaluation**

The Social Comparison Theory also elucidates psychological processes involved in the media exposure impacting body image. According to the theory, all people possess a certain urge to

compare their capabilities, qualities, and looks with others. The constant upward social comparisons through social media help the user to be exposed to idealized images of others, celebrities, and influencers.

This kind of comparison is common and emotional to people who are very socially media dependent. Comparisons that are upwards in appearance tend to lead to a sense of being inadequate, dissatisfaction, and low self esteem especially when the comparisons are seen as impossible. Nevertheless, the consequences of social comparison are not as negative in all situations; in some circumstances, exposure to relatable or body-positive information can lead to acceptance and motivation. Such inconsistency highlights the need to study social media dependency as a moderating factor that can control the direction and strength of comparison-related effects on body image and wellbeing.

### **3.3 Objectification Theory and Self-Surveillance**

The Objectification Theory offers an insightful presentation of the gendered and psychological effects of media focusing on appearance. The argument made by the theory is that habitual exposure to objectifying representations stimulates one to absorb the observer view of their bodies, which in turn results to self-objectification. This process is expressed in the form of habitual body surveillance, concern with looks, decreased sensitivity to internal body conditions.

Self-objectification is also supported by such practices as selfie culture, photo editing, likes-seeking, and comment seeking behaviors in the digital space. These practices can enhance the body surveillance and dissatisfaction in university students who occur mostly to women. Cognitive resources are also depleted by self-objectification and this may affect emotional regulation and psychological wellbeing. Therefore, the Objectification Theory describes the role of social media dependency in reduction in mental wellbeing indirectly by influencing body image and self-perception.

### **3.4 Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media Dependency**

Where sociocultural and objectification frameworks set their stress on external factors, Uses and Gratifications Theory lays stress on individuality and motivation processes. According to this theory, people are active users of media in order to fulfill certain psychological and social needs, including the belonging, personal expression, entertainment, and emotional regulation. The social media sites can be especially effective in meeting these requirements because it is interactive and customized.

But when the social media implies the major or the only source of need satisfaction, dependence can occur. In these situations, people are more likely to turn to online interaction to be validated and to manage their mood, which may harm the offline coping strategies. This theoretical assumption can be used to understand the relationship between social media dependency and emotional susceptibility and psychological consequences because the lack of the ability to detach oneself to the platform can result in increased stress, anxiety, and self-assessive issues.

### **3.5 Self-Discrepancy Theory and Emotional Distress**

Self-Discrepancy Theory is a cognitive explanation of the emotional implications of media exposure and dissatisfaction with body image. This theory held that different people have many self-representations, one of which is the actual self (way a person thinks of oneself), the ideal self (way one would like to be), and the ought self (way a person thinks he or she ought to be). Mismatches between these self states cause negative affect like shame, guilt and anxiety.

The social media exacerbates self-inconsistencies by perpetually showing perfect and unrealistic standards of looks and lifestyle. In high-socially media dependent respondents, the exposure to such norms can be increased which results in the perceived differences between the real and the ideal self, which causes distress and even less well being. Body image

dissatisfaction thereby comes out as the most important psychological process that connects social media dependency with mental health outcomes.

### **3.6 The I-PACE Model and Problematic Social Media Use**

The Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model is an integrative model of problematic and addictive digital behaviors. The I-PACE model suggests that social media dependency is caused by the interplay involving the individual predispositions (e.g. low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction), affective responses (e.g. mood regulation), cognitive biases (e.g. overvaluation of online feedback), and executive functioning deficits (e.g. impaired self-control).

In this model, body image dissatisfaction can also be a risk factor and an effect of social media addiction. Those who are not satisfied with the look might find solace and confirmation in social media, which confirms the compulsive behavioral patterns. Such a cycle may harm psychological wellbeing as time passes because of growing emotional reliance on digital platforms. The I-PACE model, however, promotes a two-way and active conception of the relations that are under consideration in the current research.

### **3.7 Integrative Framework and Study Justification**

Using these theoretical viewpoints, the current research program conceptualizes the social media dependency as a key psychological mechanism that determines the levels of body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing among university students. The external forces that influence appearance ideals are described by sociocultural and comparison-based theories and the internal cognitive and emotional processes are explained by the objectification and self-discrepancy theory. I-PACE model and Uses and Gratifications Theory also explain why an individual will take specific actions and how these actions are motivated and reinforced leading to dependency.

This integrative conceptualization warrants the investigation of social media dependency as not just an excessive use but a multidimensional measure in the aspect of emotional dependence and cognitive investment. It also underpins the study of body image satisfaction as a psychological moderating variable between the digital behaviors and mental wellbeing. This framework is based on the known theory and aligned with the available empirical evidence, which gives it strong grounds of the hypotheses and approaches to the analysis in the study.

### **Methodology**

In the given chapter, the research methodology is described in detail in the current study. It also contains details on research design, sampling method, sample, inclusion and non inclusion criteria, operational definitions of variables, measurement scales, ethical issues, and data collection process.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The current research design was quantitative correlational research that will investigate the correlation between social media dependency, body image satisfaction, and mental wellbeing among and between young adults. It was considered to be an appropriate design because it will provide the opportunity to evaluate the direction and the strength between variables without manipulating them. The correlational method also allowed investigation of the predictive relationships with the help of regression.

#### **3.2 Sampling Strategy**

The study used a non-probability purposive mode of sampling to recruit the participants (Mukti, 2025). The reason behind the use of the sampling was to remove participants who failed to fit certain inclusion criteria contained in the goals of the research, especially age group and active use of social media.

#### **3.3 Sample**

The sample size was originally 200 university students (male and female) who undertook their studies at Lahore Garrison University. Printed questionnaires were used to collect the data, and the questionnaires were completed in the classroom. Following the data screening and elimination of unfinished or invalid responses, 180 participants were left in the sample and they were incorporated in the statistical analyses.

### 3.3.1 Inclusion Criteria

- Participants aged **18 to 25 years** were included in the study.
- Both **male and female** students were included.
- Participants had to be **active users of social media platforms**.

### 3.3.2 Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals reporting any **diagnosed psychological or physical illness** were excluded.
- Individuals who did not fall within the specified age range were excluded.

**Table 3.1**

**Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 180)**

Sample Characteristics	n	%	M	SD
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	45	23.0		
Female	135	68.9		
<b>Education</b>				
Intermediate	37	18.9		
BS/Bachelor's	142	72.4		
<b>Family System</b>				
Joint	133	67.9		
Nuclear	46	23.5		
<b>Area</b>				
Urban	154	78.6		
Rural	26	13.3		

Age (years)			20.99	1.65
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**Note.**  $n$  = frequency;  $M$  = mean;  $SD$  = standard deviation.

### 3.4 Operational Definitions

#### 3.4.1 Social Media Dependency

The social media dependency is an overuse and compulsive consumption of social media tools that disrupt normal functioning, emotional status, interpersonal relationships, and productivity.

#### 3.4.2 Body Image Satisfaction

Body image is the perception, attitude and judgments of an individual on their bodies like size, shape and attractiveness. It demonstrates the cognitive and emotional judgment on the body.

#### 3.4.3 Mental Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is described to be the overall psychological functioning of an individual, emotional balance, cognitive abilities, positive affect, and tolerance to daily stressors.

### 3.5 Measurement Assessment

#### 3.5.1 Social Media Addiction Scale–Student Form (SMAS-SF)

Social media dependency was measured by using the Social Media Addiction Scale Student Form (SMAS-SF) by Şahin (2018). The scale has 29 items that are measured on a 5-point Likert scale that is strongly disagree to strongly agree. It assesses the main factors of behavioral addiction such as salience, mood change, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. The scores are high which means social media dependency. The scale has high levels of reliability, and the Cronbachs alpha has been reported to be  $\alpha = .94$ .

#### 3.5.2 Body Self-Image Questionnaire (BSIQ)

Body image satisfaction was the subject of Body Image Satisfaction Measurement (Body Image Self-concept) of Cash (2000) Body Image Self-concept was conducted using the Body Image Satisfaction Questionnaire (Body Image Self-concept) that was created by Cash (2000). The scale measures cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of body image in a number of subscales and they include: Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE), Health-Fitness Influence (HFI), Investment in Ideals (II), Health-Fitness Evaluation (HFE), Attention to Grooming (AG), Height Dissatisfaction (HD), Fatness Evaluation (FE), Negative Affect (NA), and Social Dependence (SD). The responses are obtained on a Likert-type scale where the higher levels are a reflective of the level of satisfaction or concern depending on the subscale. The values of alpha of the BSIQ subscales are in the range of 0.70 to 0.88 which shows a good to very good reliability.

#### 3.5.3 Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)

The WarwickEdinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) designed by Tennant et al. (2007) was used to determine mental wellbeing. This self-report scale is a 14-item scale that is used to assess positive factors regarding mental health, such as optimism, relaxation, and effective functioning. The answers will be determined by a Likert scale of 5 points where none of the time to all of the time are rated. Cronbach of alpha = .89 The scale has been shown to be highly reliable.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the study.

- Permission was obtained from the respective authors to use the assessment instruments.
- Approval was obtained from the relevant university authorities prior to data collection.
- Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided **written informed consent**.
- Confidentiality, anonymity, and the **right to withdraw at any stage** without penalty were ensured.

### 3.7 Procedure

The data collection was done only after permission was received to utilize the assessment instruments. After the institutional approval, purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants. The questionnaires were distributed after giving informed consent and screening forms. Clear instructions were given and time was allowed to enable participants complete the measures. They were given anonymity and confidentiality.

Coding and analysis of the responses took place after data collection with the help of the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics of the data, reliability analysis of the data, Pearson correlation, independent samples t-tests, and multiple regression analysis were carried out. They included the SMAS-SF, BSIQ, and WEMWBS.

### Results

#### Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties

The reliability analysis and descriptive statistics were used to discuss the psychometric characteristics of the research variables: Social Media Dependency, Body Image Satisfaction, and Mental Wellbeing. Table 4.1 shows the means, standard deviations, possible and practical range of scores and the alpha coefficient of Cronbach of each scale.

#### Table

4.1

*Psychometric Properties of Social Media Dependency, Body Image Satisfaction, and Mental Wellbeing (N = 180)*

Scale	M	SD	Potential Range	Actual Range	$\alpha$
Social Media Dependency	85.73	19.24	29–145	43–145	.90
Body Image Satisfaction	75.04	17.46	27–135	37–129	.82
Mental Wellbeing	40.69	8.76	14–70	17–65	.84

There was a good internal consistency of all scales and the values of Cronbach alpha were between .82 and .90 which implies that the scales were satisfying with regard to reliability in the future analysis. The ranges of observed scores indicate that there were sufficient differences in the responses, which proves that the instruments succeeded in describing individual differences in social media dependency, body image satisfaction, and mental wellbeing.

#### Inter-Correlations among Study Variables

To test correlations between the main variables of the study, Pearson product-moment correlation test was performed. Table 4.2 shows the inter-relations among social media dependency, body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing.

#### Table

4.2

*Inter-Correlation of Social Media Dependency, Body Image Satisfaction, and Mental Wellbeing (N = 180)*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Social Media Dependency	–		

2. Body Image Satisfaction	.24**	–	
3. Mental Wellbeing	.19**	.10	–

Note.  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ .

The findings showed that there was a important positive correlation between social media dependency and body image satisfaction ( $r = .24, p = .01$ ), as well as the higher the social media dependency, the more body image satisfaction. Also, mental wellbeing had a positive relationship with social media dependency ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ). The correlation between body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing was however not significant ( $r = .10, p > 0.05$ ). Such results indicate that greater use of social media relates to more body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing, and body image satisfaction in the overall sample did not have a direct correlation with wellbeing.

### Correlations between Social Media Dependency and Body Image Subscales

In order to understand these relationships more than Pearson correlations were calculated involving the social media dependency, mental wellbeing and the subscales of body image satisfaction. Table 4.3 displays the results.

Table

4.3

*Inter-Correlation of Social Media Dependency (SMD), Mental Wellbeing (MW), and Body Image Satisfaction Subscales (N = 150)*

Variables	SMD	MW	OAE	HFI	II	HFE	AG	HD	FE	NA	SD
1. Social Media Dependency (SMD)	—										
2. Mental Wellbeing (MW)		—									
3. Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE)			—								
4. Health–Fitness Influence (HFI)				—							
5. Investment in Ideals (II)					—						
6. Health–Fitness Evaluation (HFE)						—					
7. Attention to Grooming (AG)							—				
8. Height Dissatisfaction (HD)								—			
9. Fatness Evaluation (FE)									—		
10. Negative Affect (NA)										—	
11. Social Dependence (SD)											—

There was a correlation analysis done where Investment in Ideals (II), Attention to Grooming (AG), Height Dissatisfaction (HD), Fatness Evaluation (FE), and Social Dependence (SD) were highly positively correlated with social media dependency. Further, Negative Affect (NA) and AG showed a great deal of positive correlations with social media dependency.

When it comes to mental wellbeing, Health-Fitness Evaluation (HFE) revealed a very significant and positive correlation with mental wellbeing, which holds that positive views of physical health and fitness are strongly related to mental wellbeing. In addition, Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE) and Attention to Grooming (AG) had a high positive correlation with mental wellbeing. Other body image subscales did not reveal significant correlations with mental wellbeing, which points to the selective impact of certain appearance-related dimensions on psychological results.

### Gender Differences in Study Variables

The independent samples *t*-tests were used to compare the gender difference in the social media dependency, the body image satisfaction and the mental wellbeing. Table 4.4 provides the results.

**Table 4.4**  
*Gender Differences in Social Media Dependency, Body Image Satisfaction, and Mental Wellbeing (N = 180)*

Variable	Test	t-value	p-value	Direction of Difference
Social Media Dependency	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	-3.41	< .01	Females > Males
Mental Wellbeing	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	0.84	> .05	No significant difference
Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE)	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	1.12	> .05	No significant difference
Health-Fitness Influence (HFI)	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	2.92	< .01	Males > Females
Investment in Ideals (II)	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	0.67	> .05	No significant difference
Health-Fitness Evaluation (HFE)	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	0.91	> .05	No significant difference
Attention to Grooming (AG)	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	1.03	> .05	No significant difference

The results indicated a **significant gender difference in social media dependency**, with women reporting significantly higher levels of dependency than men ( $t = -3.41, p < .01$ ). A significant gender difference was also observed for **Health-Fitness Influence (HFI)**, with men scoring higher than women ( $t = 2.92, p < .01$ ), suggesting greater male engagement with body image concerns related to health and fitness.

No significant gender differences were found for overall mental wellbeing or other body image subscales. These findings suggest that while women are more dependent on social media, men may place greater emphasis on fitness-related aspects of body image.

### Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was aimed to test the hypothesis according to which the dependency on social media could be a significant predictor of body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing. Table 4.5 gives the results.

**Table 4.5**  
*Regression Coefficients of Social Media Dependency Predicting Body Image Satisfaction and Mental Wellbeing (N = 180)*

Model	Variable	B	$\beta$	SE	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>
Model 1	SMD → Body Image Satisfaction	0.22	.24	0.06	.05	.05

Model 2	SMD → Mental Wellbeing	0.08	.19	0.03	.03	.03
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The outcome of the regression analysis revealed the dependency on social media as a crucial predictor of body image satisfaction ( $R^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ). On the same note, social media dependency also had a significant predictive value of mental wellbeing with an estimated 3% variance ( $R^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The total ANOVA outcomes have established that both the regression models are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ).

Despite the small effect sizes, the results show that social media dependency is a significant factor that determines the body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing among university students. The small variation accounted indicates that there are other possible psychological, social or environmental factors that can also drive these results.

### Discussion

The current paper has explored the correlation between social media dependency, body image satisfaction, and mental wellbeing of university students. In contrast to the largely deficit-focused accounts of the existent literature, the results in the current study demonstrated that social media addiction has a positive correlation with body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing, but the magnitude of these relationships was minor. These findings imply the possibility of a more complex and context-specific role of social media engagement than it was previously thought, especially with a population of university students in Pakistan.

#### Social Media Dependency and Body Image Satisfaction

The most interesting results of this research were that there is an overwhelming positive correlation between social media dependency and body image satisfaction. This finding disputes the prevalent belief that the more one is exposed to social media, the more body dissatisfaction is bound to take place. Another topic that has been highlighted by much of the existing literature, especially the research carried out in a Western setting, is the detrimental effect of appearance-based content, social comparison, and internalization of unattainable beauty ideals. Nevertheless, the current results can indicate that social media can also be used by certain young adults to express themselves, affirm their identity, and find body-positive narratives.

This observation can be explained by the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which argues that individuals can use the media in order to satisfy their psychological needs: belonging and self-presentation and self-validation. The students at the universities can carefully manage their on-line representations in a manner that promotes their positive self-images. The exposure to positive peer groups, exercising material, or cultural relevant beauty standards can help to increase body satisfaction instead of dissatisfaction. Also, the positive effect of idealized images could be decreased through normalization of various body shapes and growing presence of body positivity movements on social media.

This interpretation is also favored by the subscale analysis. The positive correlations between the social media dependency and body image dimensions including Investment in Ideals, Attention to Grooming, Health-Fitness Influence and Social Dependence indicate that social media could promote active participation in appearance management and self-care practices. Instead of the symptoms of pathological self-objectification, such associations can be signs of increased body awareness and agency in culturally acceptable conformity.

#### Social Media Dependency and Mental Wellbeing

The existence of the positive correlation between social media dependency and mental wellbeing leads to the further complexity of the simplistic depiction of social media as mentally damaging. Despite the fact that the strength of the relationship was not high, the results suggest that the greater the extent of involvement in social media, the higher the likelihood of improved

emotional functioning of university students. This is in line with the emerging research, which argues that social media can create social support, emotional expression, and stress relief on its purposeful use.

Social media could satisfy some of basic psychological needs like relatedness and competence according to the Self-Determination Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. The online communication can ensure that students are kept in touch with other students, especially in a particularly academic setting where there might be lack of physical contact. Social connectedness in collectivist cultures like Pakistan is a factor that is of critical importance to psychological wellbeing and social media networks can improve familial and peer links across physical borders.

In addition, the large correlations between the mental wellbeing and the certain body image subscales, especially Health-Fitness Evaluation, would indicate that perceptions of physical health and functionality can be more directly connected to wellbeing than appearance only. This helps to explain holistic conceptualizations of body image where aesthetic perfection is less important than health, functionality and self-care.

### **Body Image Satisfaction and Mental Wellbeing**

Remarkably, the direct correlation between general body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing was not statistically significant. This result is contrary to the existence of a large body of literature proving a strong relationship between body satisfaction and psychological health. One of the possible explanations is that the concept of mental wellbeing, indicated by the WEMWBS, focuses on the positive functioning instead of distress or pathology. There is a possibility that body image satisfaction is a more significant predictor of negative psychological outcomes reduction (e.g. depression or anxiety) than positive wellbeing.

The other reason is the fact that body image is multidimensional. Although some of the subcomponents like health assessment and grooming were found to have a positive correlation with wellbeing, some of the dimensions might have a neutral or even a negative effect. This highlights the need to study body image as a multi-faceted construct and not just using global scores.

### **Gender Differences in Social Media Dependency and Body Image**

The gender distinctions shown in the current research provide more information about the sophisticated nature of social media consumption. The women registered their higher rate of social media dependency than men which correlates with the prior studies indicating that women are more prone to use social networking as a socializing tool and self-representation than men. Nevertheless, men ranked more in Health-Influence Fitness, which means that they valued fitness and physical ability more.

These results are a manifestation of gendered cultural standards of appearance and body ideal. Whereas women might feel under pressure to ensure they are attractive with the use of online interaction, men might focus on strength, fitness, and functionality. Notably, no gender disparities were formidable in mental wellbeing, which indicates that regardless of different ways of engagement, both genders might find equal psychological value in the use of social media.

### **Predictive Role of Social Media Dependency**

Regression analyses showed a significant predictability of social media dependency on both body image satisfaction and mental wellbeing, albeit with a low level of variance. These findings suggest that although the dependency on social media is a significant determinant, it is not the only determinant of psychological outcomes. There are other variables like self-esteem, self-compassion, personality, and offline social support that would make a significant contribution to body image and wellbeing.

In the views of the I-PACE model, social media dependency can serve in the role of a coping mechanism and reinforcing behavior pattern. In cases of positive self-perceptions, social media could be beneficial in promoting wellbeing by strengthening identity and social relationships. Nevertheless, in the case of people possessing any kind of vulnerability, the same tendencies of dependency can result in the negative consequences. This two-way direction interpretation underlines the necessity to go beyond the simplistic one-dimensional models of the social media impacts.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

The implications of the findings of this study is that they add to the body of theoretical discussions that deterministic models of social media concentrate on the determinants of the social media. Rather, they advocate context-sensitive and user-centered frameworks consider adaptive and maladaptive digital engagement modes. In practice, these findings indicate that the important aspect of the intervention is not to decrease the use of social media, but to engage in healthy, mindful, and meaningful interactions.

Universities can also be advantaged in terms of integrating digital literacy programs that would focus on self-awareness, critical media consumption, and emotional regulation. Promoting body-positive media, fitness-related participation, and moderate engagement between online and offline can help to increase the psychological advantages of using social media.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The study has a number of limitations in spite of its contributions. The cross-sectional design constrains causality, and the purposive sampling method limits the ability of generalization. Social desirability bias also may apply in self-report measures. Future studies ought to adopt longitudinal designs, a wide range of institutional settings and examine mediating factors, which could be self-compassion, social comparison orientation, and the type of content.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, the current research indicates that social media addiction is positively linked to both body image satisfaction and mental comfort of students in universities. These results underscore the multicapability of the digital engagement and disrupt the narratives of harm prevalence. The theoretical perspective taken by the study reveals the necessity to consider the context of using social media in the context of bigger psychological, cultural, and social frameworks.

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