

The impact of Instagram usage on body image and self-esteem among youth in India - An exploratory study

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Abstract- Social networking sites have grown in popularity among younger people in India during the past few years. Due to its visually appealing content, Instagram, a photos and video-sharing social media platform, has become extremely popular with young people. Social media sites offer numerous advantages, yet they have been connected to detrimental effects on psychological health, especially in the areas of esteem and body image. The purpose of the current study is to examine how Instagram use affects young people's perceptions of their bodies and their self-esteem in India.

There have been discussions concerning Instagram's possible effects on self-esteem and body image as its use has increased. The goal of this exploratory study is to find out how Instagram use affects young people's perceptions of their body image and sense of self-esteem. Using a probability sampling technique, 317 volunteers between the ages of 15 and 30 were chosen as the sample for this quantitative study.

The participants answered questions based on the study's objectives including how frequently they use Instagram, the kinds of content they view, and overall levels of self-esteem and satisfaction with their bodies and self-esteem using the Rosenberg self-esteem measurement scale. The results of this study may contribute to a better understanding of Instagram's influence on young people in India when it comes to body image and self-esteem.

The research may help make psychologists and other mental health practitioners more aware of the relationship that exists between social platforms and a person's mental health.

Keywords: Body Image Satisfaction, Body Dissatisfaction, Self Esteem, Social Comparison, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, Instagram, social media, Mental Health, Psychological Effects

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media websites are becoming more and more well-known because of the development of Internet technology. The most popular social media sites that individuals use on a daily basis are Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Instagram is an online social networking website that differs slightly from many other social media platforms such as Facebook as well as Twitter because it is only used for publishing images and brief videos, where users share images with their followers. The primary purpose of the platform is to facilitate the sharing of images and videos that users can alter via the use of creative tools or filters prior to posting on their individual profiles (Fardouly et al., 2017)¹. The prevalence of serious depression among young people (between 2005 and 2017) has climbed by 52% over the past year, according to data from the American Psychological Association. According to Instagram's data on mental health, children used social media sites 76 percent more frequently from 2019 to 2020 than they had in the previous years.

1.1 The Connection between Self-esteem and Body Image

Body image refers to a person's subjective perception of their own physical appearance, while self-esteem refers to a person's overall evaluation of their self-worth and value as a person. When a person has a positive body image, they tend to feel good about their physical appearance and are more likely to have high self-esteem. On the other hand, when a person has a negative body image, they may feel dissatisfied with their physical appearance and are more likely to experience low self-esteem. Negative body image can be influenced by a variety of factors, including societal and cultural ideals of beauty, media messages, and personal experiences with weight, appearance, or physical abilities. These factors can contribute to feelings of inadequacy or self-consciousness, leading to lower self-esteem. Conversely, positive body image can lead to greater self-esteem, as a person feels more comfortable and confident in their own skin. Cultivating a positive body image can involve learning to accept and appreciate one's body, focusing on the positive aspects of oneself, and challenging negative self-talk and harmful societal messages about beauty and worth. Overall,

the relationship between self-esteem and body image is complex and multifaceted, but it is clear that a positive body image can have a significant impact on a person's self-esteem and overall well-being. Many people in today's culture are dissatisfied with the way their bodies look. Researchers have discovered that when self-esteem declines, this body dissatisfaction rises (Bessenoff, 2006; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Hawkins et al., 2004)^{2,3,4}.

1.2 How Instagram Plays a Role in the Perception of Self-Esteem and Body Image of Youth

Social media, including Instagram, can have a significant impact on both body image and self-esteem. Instagram is a visual platform that often emphasizes physical appearance, presenting a carefully curated and idealized version of life that can lead to comparisons and feelings of inadequacy. The primary motivation for self-presentation is the desire for attention, particularly from peers, for their posts (Yau & Reich, 2019)⁸. Posting is not, however, the most common activity on Instagram. Adolescents and young adults are actually more likely to use Instagram for profile browsing and "liking" stuff than for other purposes. According to longitudinal research, looking at other people's perfected photos eventually raises depressive symptoms (Frison & Eggermont, 2017)⁹. Young people are influenced by three main factors, according to the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disturbance (Thompson et al., 1999)¹⁰: parents, peers, and the media (Keery et al., 2004)¹¹. Instagram users often turn to self-presentation practices because the platform allows users to edit information before sharing it on their profiles. Chua and Chang conducted interview research with 24 teenage girls and discovered that social media users often offer a "highly selective portrayal of themselves" in order to meet the expectations and preferences of their followers (Chua & Chang, 2016)⁷. In actuality, Instagram is a platform where appearance matters a lot. Research indicates that young people and teenagers face anxiety, are unhappy with their physical appearances, and feel under pressure to appear flawless on social media (Fardouly et al., 2017)¹. Peers play an increasingly significant role in body image issues as kids get older and enter puberty, particularly when friendliness and conformity are necessary for gaining acceptance from others (Ho et al., 2016; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Matera et al., 2013)^{12,13,14}. Users on Instagram are frequently exposed to images of seemingly perfect bodies, faces, and lifestyles, which can contribute to negative body image and lower self-esteem. Low-engagement male Instagram users with low body esteem strive for the "instabod" and take part in body-transformation activities in an attempt to resemble peers and Instagram stars, follow the health and fitness trend made famous by the platform, and appear successful (Chatzopoulou et al., 2020)¹⁸. This is especially true for younger users who may be more vulnerable to the influence of social media. However, it is important to note that Instagram can also be a source of positive inspiration and connection, with users sharing body-positive messages and promoting self-acceptance. Some influencers use their platform to challenge harmful beauty standards and encourage their followers to love their bodies as they are. Research indicated that women experienced higher levels of body dissatisfaction after repeatedly seeing appearance-focused actual profiles on Instagram of attractive same-sex individuals (Casale et al., 2019)²¹. Instagram photos of fitspiration, quotes about self-compassion, a combination of the two, or appearance-neutral images were randomly assigned to female undergraduate students in which the results showed no distinctions between observing fitspiration images and viewing neutral images, with the exception of the fitspiration viewers' lower levels of self-compassion; In contrast to women who watched neutral photos, women who viewed quotes about self-compassion displayed higher levels of body satisfaction, appreciation for their bodies, and self-compassion as well as lower levels of negative mood (Slater et al., 2017)²⁰. Considering how frequently young adults use social media and how much they rely on it, it's critical to recognize the ways in which social media can affect how people perceive their bodies and the problems associated with them (Perloff & R.M., 2014)⁶. Previous studies have indicated that some social media platforms, like Instagram, may be linked to feelings of inadequacy due to upward social comparison processes (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Engeln et al., 2020)^{15,16}. According to the social comparison theory, when there are no objective ways for people to evaluate themselves, they are driven to compare themselves to other people. (Festinger, 1954)¹⁷. Hence this study is relevant to find out the effects of Instagram usage on Indian youth and how they perceive their bodies and self-esteem.

1.3 Research Objectives

- To assess the frequency of Instagram usage among youth, and the type of content they use.
- To measure the level of body image satisfaction and self-esteem based on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale.
- Examine the relationship between Instagram usage and the users' body image and self-esteem level.

1.4 Significance of the Study

All female and male users will find benefit from the study's findings. The results of this study may be useful in understanding how increased usage of Instagram affects one's self-esteem and triggers body image issues and whether it has a positive or a negative impact on the overall netizen population. With the use of the study's recommendations and findings, future users may be able to analyze how to recognize and get rid of the feeling of low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. The research highlights the need for education and awareness programs to help young people

navigate social media in a healthy and positive way. This can include teaching young people about media literacy, promoting positive body image and self-esteem, and providing resources for mental health support. Lastly, the findings may be useful for mental health professionals to assess how self-esteem and body positive or body-negative their young patients could be.

2. METHOD

The type of data was Primary Data. The data was collected through a Quantitative Approach, using a survey questionnaire. The sample was selected by using a Probability Sampling Method, under which the sampling method used was Simple Random Sampling (SRS), because each potential sample has an equal probability of being chosen. Sample Size was 328.

Criteria for sample selection - Respondents should be from India; Respondents should be selected randomly to reduce sampling bias; Candidates should represent the characteristics of a larger population. A questionnaire was circulated among different people from different regions in India. The survey that was circulated consisted of specific questions which were answered by 328 respondents belonging to different locales, age groups, and educational backgrounds. Out of 328 responses, 11 erroneous responses were eliminated. The remaining 317 responses were taken into full consideration.

The following research questions were the main focus of this study:

- I. What is the frequency of Instagram usage among youth, and what type of content do they typically engage with?
- II. How satisfied are youth with their body image and self-esteem, based on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale?
- III. What is the relationship between Instagram usage and the users' body image and self-esteem?

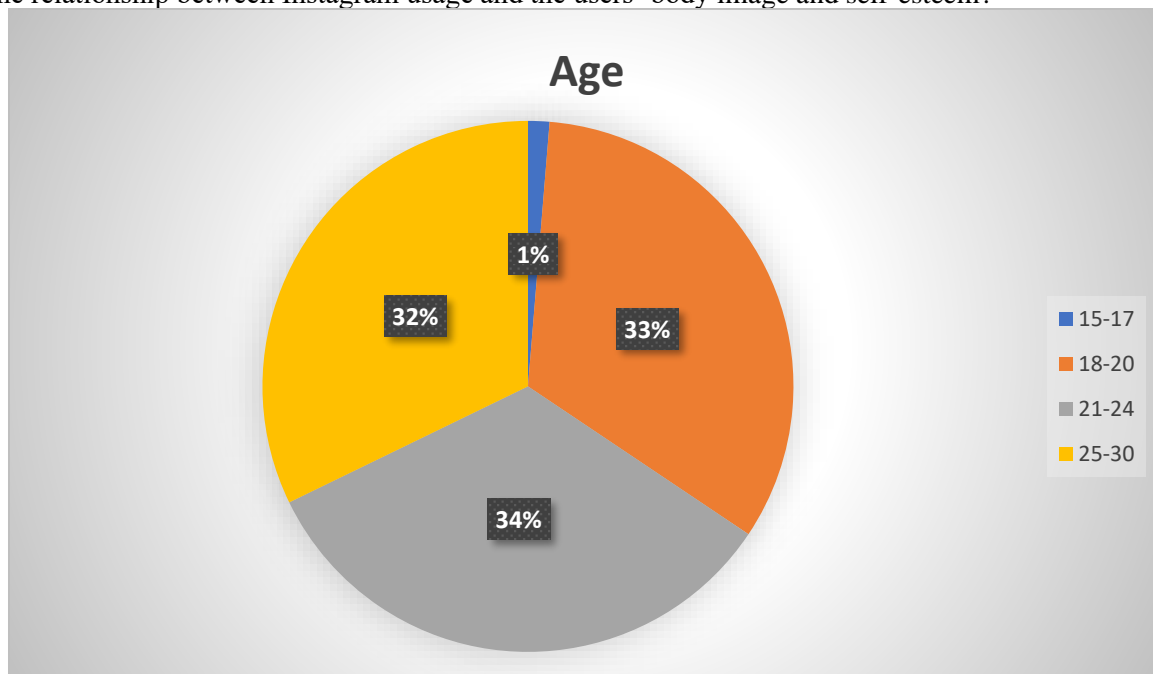


Figure 1. Age of the respondents

3. RESULTS

All of the responses to the questionnaire were between the ages of 18-30 years which represent youth. 33.4% of the participants were under the age of 21-24, while 33.1% were between 18-20. 32.2% of participants were of the age 25-30. Only 1.3% of the participants were 15-17 years of age (Figure 1).

The participants were asked to proceed with the questionnaire only if they were an active Instagram user. Hence, every respondent of this survey is directly assumed to be an Instagram user once they proceed with answering the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into 3-part subcategories for the researcher's understanding based on the research objectives and questions.

3.1. Part 1

Part 1 focused purely on the frequency of Instagram usage by the respondents, and on the content they usually consume.

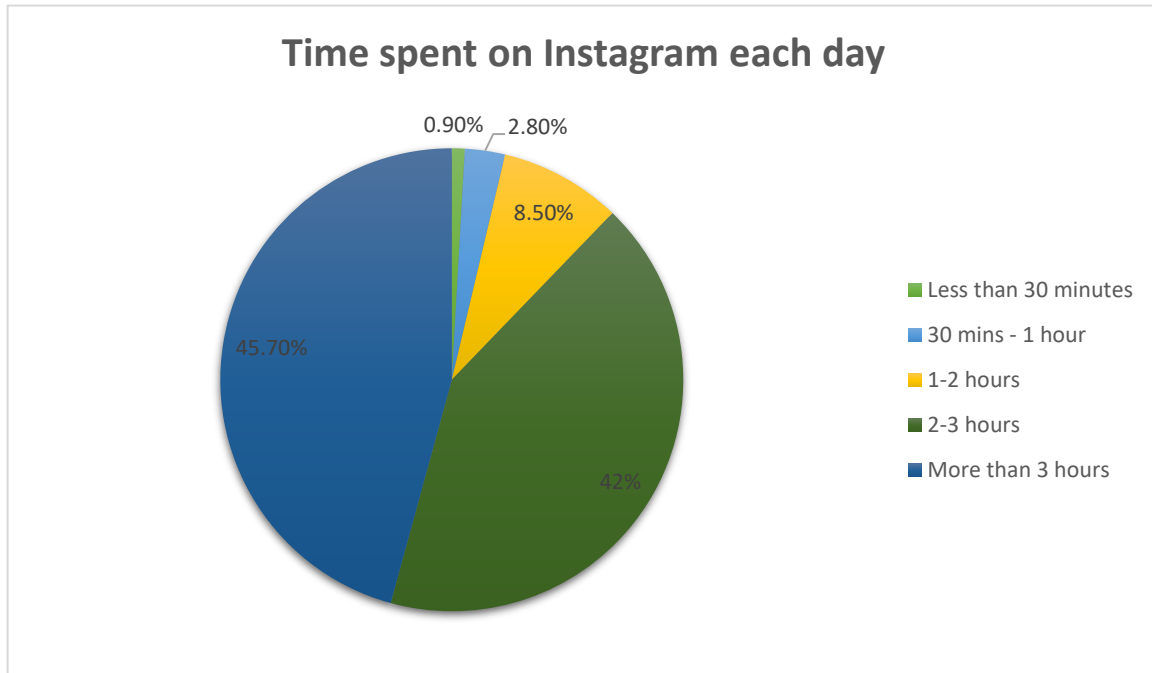


Figure 2. Time spent on Instagram everyday by the respondents

According to the chart, the majority of respondents (45.7%) spend more than 3 hours of their time on Instagram. 42% of the respondents spent 2-3 hours on Instagram daily. Only 8.5% of respondents used Instagram for 1-2 hours daily. Very negligible number of users spend less than 1 hour and less than 30 minutes on Instagram daily (Figure 2).

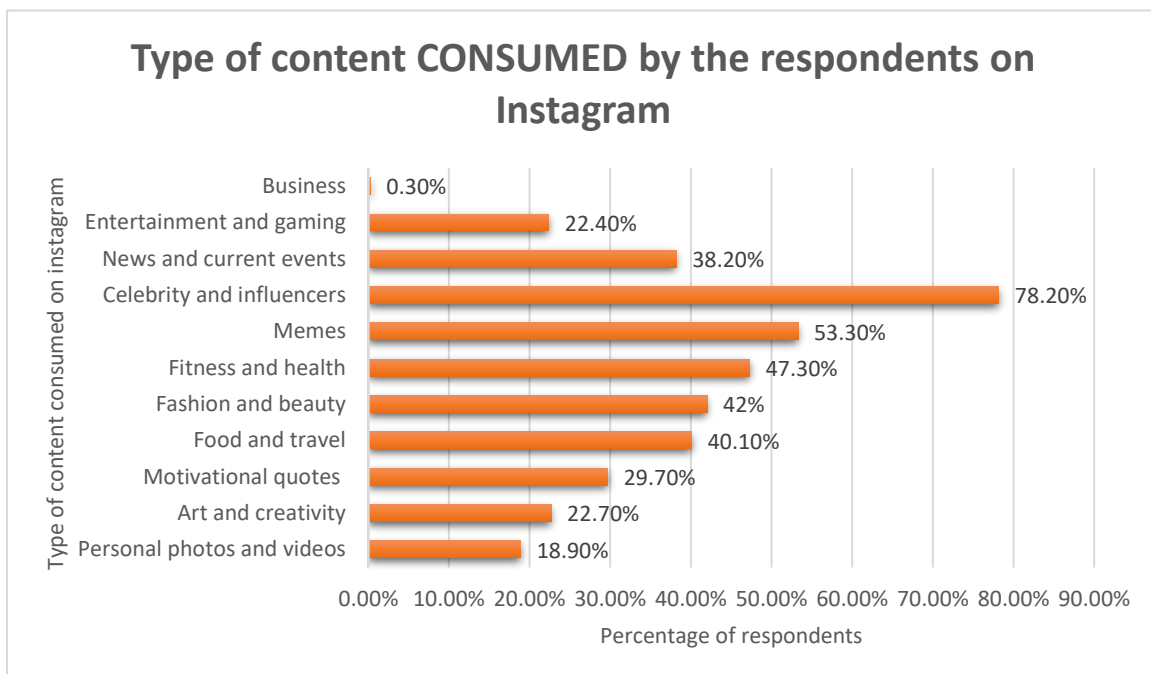


Figure 3. Type of content consumed by respondents on Instagram

When it comes to the type of content the respondents consume on Instagram, the majority (78.2%) of them consume celebrity and influencer content. This insight has now proved to be very useful for this study as a lot of unrealistic body standards are promoted and brought about usually by celebrities and influencers only (Figure 3).

3.2. Part 2

Part 2 focused on the level of self-esteem based on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a widely used psychological tool for assessing an individual's level of self-esteem. It was developed by Morris Rosenberg, a sociologist, in 1965. The scale consists of ten statements that participants rate on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Out of 10 statements, due to time constraint reasons, 5 items were taken out of the scale. These 5 items were not seen as necessary. Rest of the 5 items were taken in for the survey for the information needed.

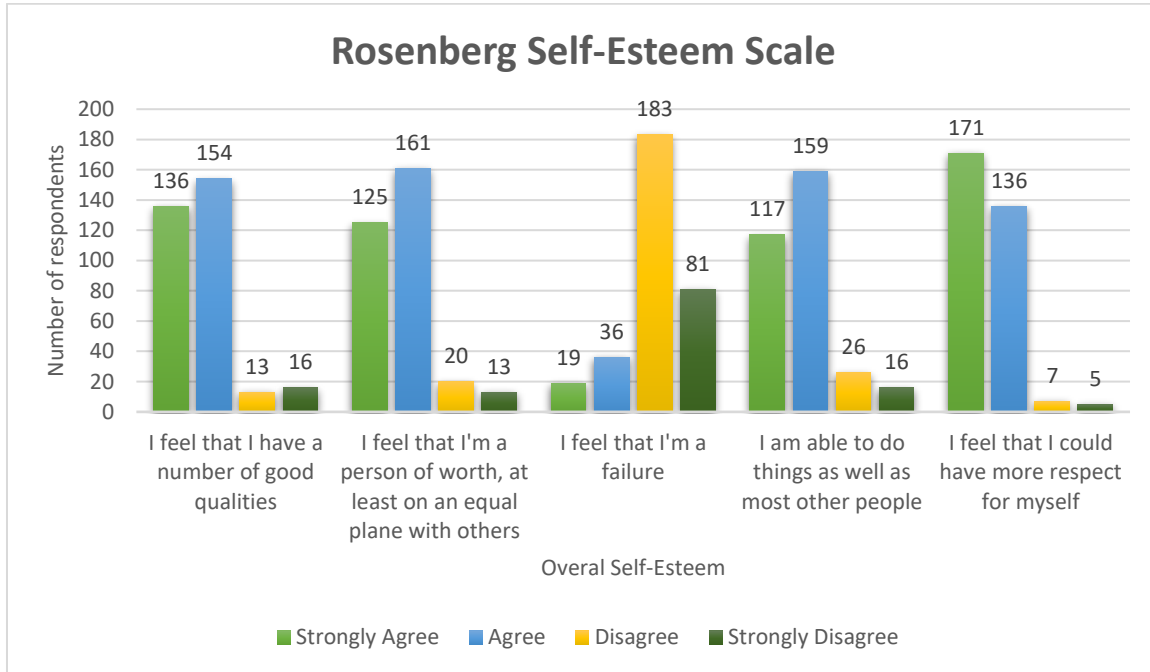


Figure 4. Overall Self-esteem of the respondents based on Rosenberg Self-esteem scale

Based on the responses from the users, as the graph in Figure 4 suggests, respondents have high self-esteem. Majority of the respondents have agreed on all the positive statements and disagreed indefinitely on the negative statements. This question was purely based on the interpretation of the overall self-esteem of the respondents, and was not inclined towards Instagram specifically. Hence, it is safe to say that on a general basis, respondents enjoyed high self-esteem and were satisfied with themselves. The respondents agreed strongly about having many good qualities, they agreed on the fact that they feel worthy, they strongly disagreed on the statement which suggested that they are a failure, they agreed on the statement which stated that they can do things as well as most people do, they also strongly agreed that they could respect themselves more.

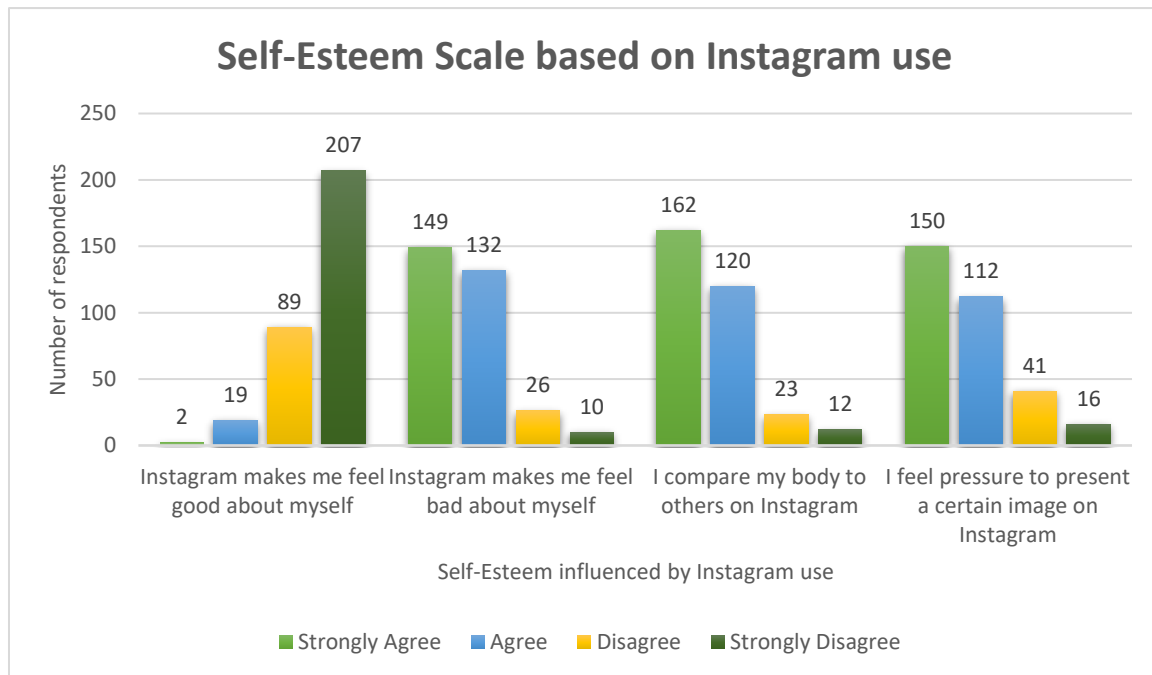


Figure 5. Self-esteem influenced by Instagram use

The next question was designed specifically to check how respondents feel about themselves when it comes to Instagram specifically (Figure 5). Respondents strongly disagreed that Instagram makes them feel good about themselves. They strongly agreed that Instagram makes them feel bad about themselves. They also strongly agreed that they are prone to comparing their bodies with others on Instagram. They also strongly agreed to have felt pressure to present a certain image of themselves on Instagram. In contrast to the previous assessment based on Rosenberg's overall self-esteem scale of the respondents, the respondents had significantly low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction when it comes to Instagram specifically. Very negligible number of respondents were positive about themselves and their body on Instagram.

3.3 Part 3

Part 3 examined the relationship between Instagram usage and the users' body image and self-esteem level. The assessment will be made based on how positive or how negative the impact of Instagram and its content is for the respondents.

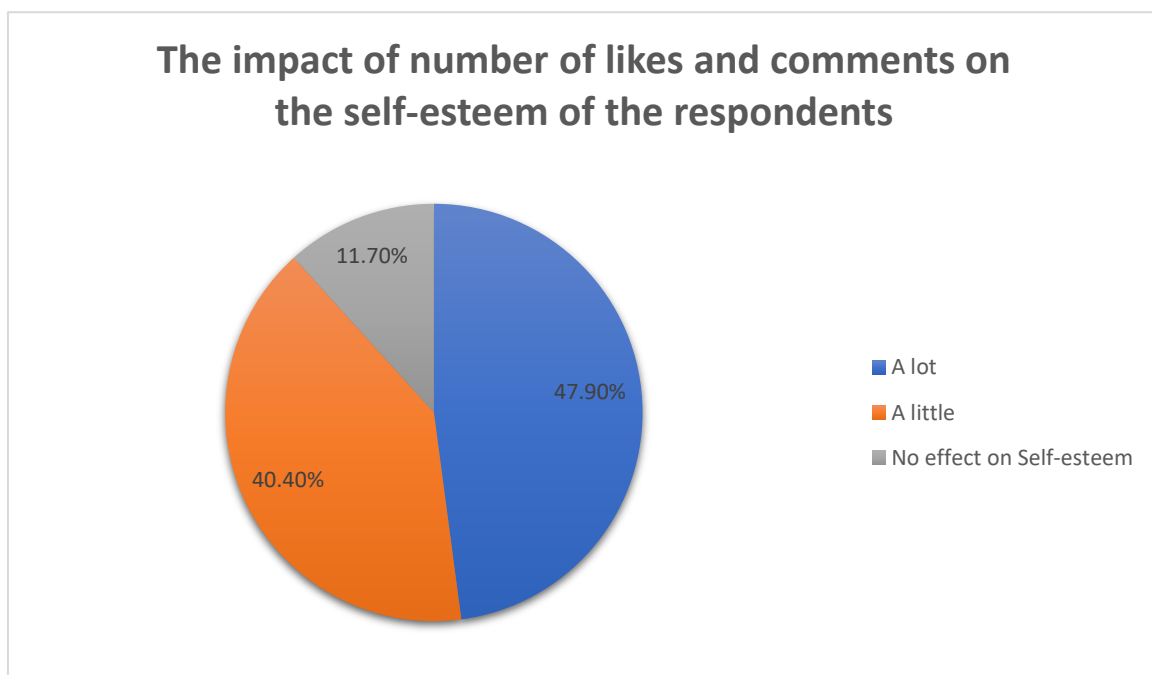


Figure 6. Impact of likes and comments on the self-esteem of the respondents

Almost half of the respondents feel that the number of likes and comments on their posts affects their self-esteem a lot. Majority of respondents (47.9%) want a lot of likes and comments to validate their self-esteem. 40.4% of respondents have admitted that the number of likes and comments on their posts affects their self-esteem a little. 11.7% of respondents say they have no effect on self-esteem (Figure 6).

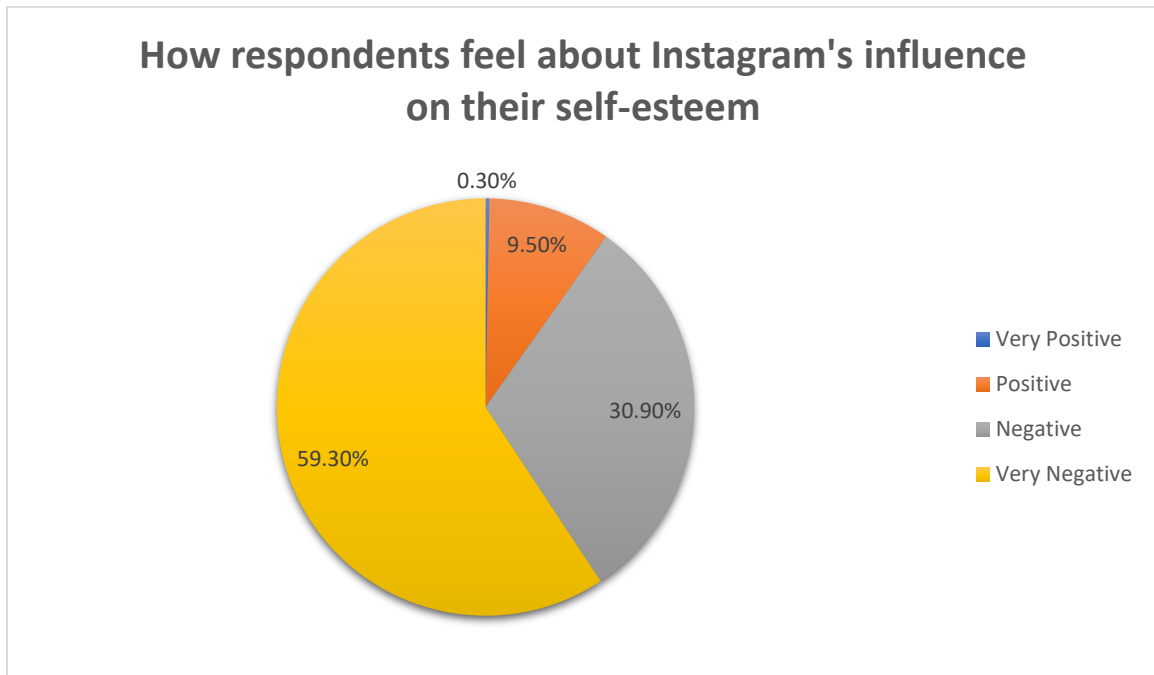


Figure 7. How respondents feel about Instagram’s influence on their self-esteem

Almost all of the respondents (59.3% and 30.9%) have admitted that Instagram has a very negative influence on their self-esteem. Only 9.5% of respondents/users say it has a positive influence on their self-esteem. Only one respondent chose the option which said “very positive” (Figure 7).

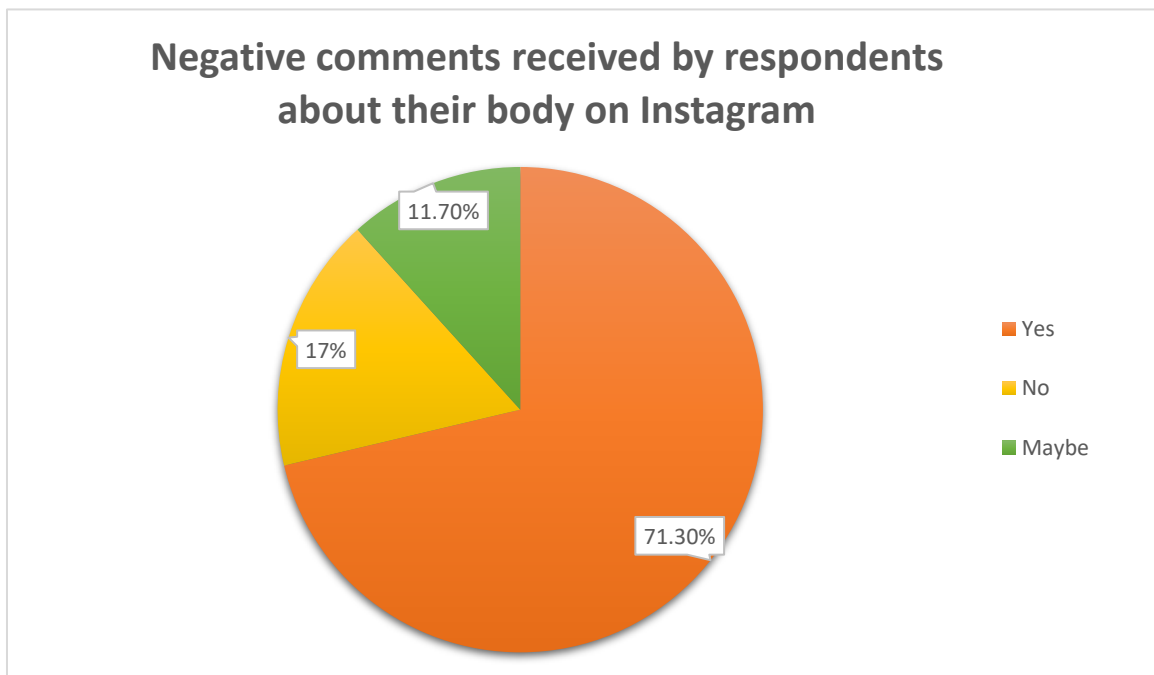


Figure 8. Negative comments received by respondents about their body on Instagram

A majority of respondents (71.3%) admitted to have received negative comments about their body on Instagram. 11.7% of respondents were not sure, and 17% of the respondents did not receive any negative comments about their body on Instagram (Figure 8).

4. DISCUSSION

The study's objective was to use a quantitative approach to assess the frequency of Instagram usage among youth, and type of content they use., to measure the level of body image satisfaction and self-esteem based on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, and to examine the relationship between Instagram usage and the users' body image and self-esteem between the ages of 18 and 30.

The study evaluated the participants based on their gender, and the results indicated that almost an equal number of male and female respondents participated in the survey, with females representing a slight majority at 51.1%, while males were in a slight minority at 48.8%. Therefore, the respondents can be evaluated equally in terms of gender.

4.1 What is the frequency of Instagram usage among youth, and what type of content do they typically engage with?

According to the data received and thoroughly evaluated, this study revealed that the majority of respondents spent more than 2 hours on Instagram daily, with 45.7% spending more than 3 hours on the platform. This suggests that Instagram has become a popular source of entertainment and communication among young people in India. This finding is in line with the global trend of increased social media usage, which has been attributed to the rise of smartphones and the availability of high-speed internet. This finding is particularly concerning, as excessive usage of Instagram has been linked to negative impacts on mental health, including a decline in self-esteem and body image issues. The constant exposure to carefully curated images of celebrities and influencers, who often perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards, can cause individuals to compare themselves to these images and feel inadequate.

The most concerning finding of the survey is the high percentage of respondents (78.2%) who consume celebrity and influencer content on Instagram. As noted earlier, exposure to these images can have negative impacts on body image and self-esteem, particularly for young people who are still developing their sense of self and identity. It is also worth noting that many celebrities and influencers promote diet and fitness products that are often ineffective or even dangerous, leading users to engage in unhealthy behaviours in an attempt to achieve their desired body shape or size. For those with lower levels of self-esteem, the negative effects of Instagram usage on self-esteem through self-expectations became more pronounced (Ahadzadeh et al., 2017)⁷.

4.2 How satisfied are youth with their body image and self-esteem, based on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale?

The data revealed that a significant proportion of Instagram users in India experience low self-esteem when they see celebrities or influencers promoting the concept of a "perfect" body or stress-free lifestyle. This finding highlights the negative impact of social media on users' mental health, particularly their self-esteem. Despite the fact that not all "perfect" things showcased by these celebrities/influencers on Instagram are true, a vast majority of respondents still felt low self-esteem. This result suggests that the perceived ideal body image and lifestyle on Instagram are creating an unhealthy standard for young people to live up to.

Moreover, the study found that a large proportion of respondents in India are dissatisfied with their body image. Specifically, 46.1% and 37.5% of respondents suffer from intense dissatisfaction with their body image, while only 13.2% and 3.2% of respondents are satisfied with their body image. These figures indicate that Instagram is contributing to the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty standards, which negatively impact individuals' body image and mental health. Based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the majority of respondents reported having high self-esteem and being satisfied with themselves. However, when specifically asked about their experiences on Instagram, the results were quite different. Respondents strongly agreed that Instagram made them feel bad about themselves and that they were prone to comparing their bodies with others. They also reported feeling pressure to present a certain image of themselves on Instagram. These findings suggest that while respondents may have high self-esteem overall, their experiences on social media can significantly impact their self-esteem and body image.

Respondents reported feeling pressure to present a certain image of themselves on Instagram, which suggests that they may be engaging in impression management to create a certain online persona (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)²⁰. This phenomenon can be particularly harmful for individuals who already struggle with self-esteem and body image, as it can perpetuate negative comparisons with others and reinforce feelings of inadequacy.

4.3 What is the relationship between Instagram usage and the users' body image and self-esteem?

Based on the data presented in the chart, it is evident that Instagram has a significant negative impact on the self-esteem and body image of its users. The majority of the respondents expressed a lack of confidence in their appearance, and more than half of them have suffered a high impact on their self-esteem due to their use of Instagram. The need for validation through likes and comments was also prevalent among the respondents, with many of them admitting to deleting posts that didn't receive a certain number of likes.

Negative comments about their bodies were also a prevalent experience for the majority of the respondents.

5. CONCLUSION

So, to answer the 3 questions this study aimed to find answers for-

1. The youth engage on Instagram with a frequency of more than 2 to 3 hours daily and majority of them consume content based on celebrity and influencers. This is, as mentioned above, concerning, due to the fact that celebrities and influencers generally promote very unrealistic body standards for their audience on a regular basis.
2. Based on the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, the majority of the respondents evaluated themselves to have a high self-esteem, but when it comes to their Instagram usage, most of them reported to have very low self-esteem and serious body image concerns. They were satisfied with themselves overall, which clearly means they enjoyed higher self-esteem and also enjoyed body image satisfaction. But Instagram-wise, they felt very low self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction.
3. The relationship between Instagram usage and the users' body image and self-esteem was of a highly negative one. Majority of the youth expressed a lack of confidence in their appearance, need for validation through likes and comments, Furthermore, the use of Instagram by the youth linked to various mental health issues, such as severe anxiety, addiction, increased stress and pressure, shame, guilt, negative self-talk, difficulty focusing, and depression.

5.1 Suggestions

Research has demonstrated that viewing Instagram photos of exquisite, trim, and fit women can lower one's sense of satisfaction with one's body (Casale et al., 2019)²¹. The findings from this research are in line with earlier studies that have demonstrated a relationship between social media use and poor mental health outcomes, particularly in young individuals. Social media use has been related in studies to anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem. This study emphasizes the necessity of education campaigns and other initiatives to address the detrimental effects that social media have on the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

People should be mindful of the possible harm that social media may do to their self-worth and perceptions of their bodies, and they should take precautions to lessen this harm. Limiting or completely stopping use of social media is one strategy to do this. Another strategy is to monitor the social media feeds that one follows and create one that encourages positive body image and self-acceptance. Also, addressing emotions of poor self-esteem as well as body dissatisfaction may benefit from getting assistance from close companions, family, or a therapist.

The promotion of self-care and self-compassion in young people can be accomplished through initiatives. Taking good care of one's bodily, social, and mental health is referred to as self-care. Self-compassion entails being compassionate, considerate, and accepting of oneself. Young people's mental health can be enhanced by encouraging them to engage in self-care and self-compassion practices. Self-care and self-compassion-focused social media campaigns can be used to carry out this intervention.

The social media companies taking more accountability for the content produced on their networks is another potential answer. This can entail encouraging diversity in appearances and enforcing stricter regulations on photo retouching.

Another option for addressing the issue is for educators and parents to have frank discussions with kids about how social media affects their perceptions of themselves and their bodies. Youth can be better prepared to use social media in a positive and beneficial way by increasing knowledge of its harmful consequences. Encouraging young individuals to follow Instagram accounts that support positive body image and self-acceptance as well as to take regular breaks from social networks when they're stressed are multiple options to do this.

Finally, it's critical to understand that the issue of low self-esteem and negative body image on social media won't be resolved quickly. It's a complicated problem that's impacted by a variety of societal, cultural, and emotional factors. But we can make significant progress towards building a healthier and more encouraging online community by banding together to increase awareness and encourage good body image and self-esteem.

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