

Gender, Social Media Usage, and Type of Gym Activity on Body Image Among Urban Emerging Adults

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Abstract : This study examines the influence of social media usage, gym activities (weightlifting vs. cardiovascular exercise), and gender on body image perceptions among urban emerging adults in India. The research aimed to assess how these factors interact to shape body esteem, a crucial aspect of psychological well-being in a society increasingly influenced by media portrayals of idealized bodies. A purposive sample of 317 participants aged 18-27 years (167 male, 150 female) was recruited through snowball sampling across diverse urban areas. Body esteem was measured using the Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA), which evaluates perceptions related to appearance, weight, and how individuals perceive others' view their bodies. Data was collected via online surveys, and Mann-Whitney U tests were used to examine differences in body esteem scores based on the type of gym activity, gender, and social media usage. Results revealed that participants who engaged in cardiovascular activities had significantly higher body esteem compared to those who participated in weightlifting ($p = 0.020$). Gender differences were also notable, with females reporting higher body esteem than males ($p = 0.01$). These findings suggest that women may experience more positive body perceptions, possibly influenced by the broader body positivity movement. Contrary to expectations, social media usage was found to be significantly associated with the drive for thinness ($p = 0.030$) but not with overall body esteem scores ($p = 0.329$). This suggests that while social media may contribute to specific body dissatisfaction related to thinness, it does not appear to be a major factor influencing overall body esteem in this sample. These results underscore the significant role of physical activity and gender in shaping body image perceptions while challenging the view that social media is the primary driver of negative body image in emerging adults. The findings indicate that physical activity, particularly cardiovascular exercise, may have a protective effect on body esteem, whereas weightlifting could potentially contribute to body dissatisfaction, especially among males. The study also highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of social media's role in shaping body image, suggesting that its impact may be less pronounced than previously thought when compared to other social factors such as gender and physical activity. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on body image in emerging adults, particularly in the context of urban India, where media and fitness culture heavily influence perceptions of the ideal body. It calls for further research into the long-term effects of social media on body image, the role of specific fitness cultures, and how gender norms continue to shape body image concerns. The findings have important implications for designing mental health and fitness interventions that are tailored to address the unique challenges faced by young adults, especially those who may experience heightened dissatisfaction with their bodies due to societal pressures or media portrayals.

Keywords : body image, gender, gym activity, social media usage

Conference Title : ICPABS 2025 : International Conference on Psychological and Behavioural Sciences

Conference Location : Bengaluru, India

Conference Dates : January 30-31, 2025