Social Media's Effect on Body Image Satisfaction in Educational Settings in the Kurdistan Region

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the correlation between social-media usage and body-image satisfaction among adolescents in educational settings in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and to investigate potential variations based on gender, age, and weight. A cross-sectional, data-based study was conducted among 294 adolescents (148 males, 146 females; age 10–20 years). Data were gathered through a mix of paper and online questionnaires using the Social Media Addiction Scale – Student Form (SMAS-SF) and the Adolescents' Body Image Satisfaction Scale (ABISS). The mean (SMAS-SF) score of 75.8 (SD = 20.7) indicated moderate social-media use. No significant gender, age, or weight differences were found in either social media use or body image satisfaction ($p > 0.05$). A weak but significant positive correlation was observed between total social media use and overall body image satisfaction. Adolescent social media use in the Kurdistan Region is moderate and not strongly differentiated by gender, age, or weight. However, greater use correlates slightly with higher body-image satisfaction, suggesting a complex interaction in which cultural context and content type moderate social media effects. Interventions should promote balanced media engagement and body acceptance programs in schools.

KEY WORDS: Body image, educational settings, mental health, social media, virtual standards

1.INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, social media has become an integral part and is considered a basic need among adolescents in educational settings; it has changed the way young people communicate, compare, and perceive themselves, especially on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, where many feel strong pressure to keep up a perfect image. Reports indicate that as of October 2025, 6.04 billion individuals worldwide were internet users, which amounted to 73.2 percent of the global population. Of this total, 5.66 billion, or 68.7 percent of the world's population, were social media users, which shows how unavoidable social media has become (Statista 2025). Social media is a very effective electronic tool that has redefined communication, data sharing, and the establishment of links between different social groups (Omar et al., 2024). In our

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modern society, the use of mobile phones is so widespread that communication and information access have been transformed more quickly, making phones indispensable in everyday life (Gull and Ruth Sravani, 2024). The fact is that youth are typically the most frequent users, and such usage has led to several positive developments in our society, accompanied by social capital building and an increase in the psychological well-being of the citizens (Buda et al., 2021). Still, the negative aspects—excessive use, harassment, and certain health concerns—remain an ongoing problem (Ahmed, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2025; Hama Amin & Mustafa Kh, 2023; WHO, 2024; Fan et al., 2025; Noori et al., 2022). Several studies, such as Jarman et al. (2021, 2024); Paraskeva et al. (2024) and Bij de Vaate et al. (2023), report that higher exposure to social media is linked to increased body dissatisfaction and poorer self-perception. Body image satisfaction refers to how someone thinks and feels about their body (Cash, 2004; Ferguson, 2024). Much of the research explains that negative feelings toward one's appearance often led to drops in confidence and difficulties dealing with natural body changes or resisting unrealistic beauty expectations (Coyne et al., 2025; Czubaj et al., 2025). Body dissatisfaction is now widely recognized as a growing concern among young people and is considered a challenge to their mental health and well-being (Ferguson, 2024). Since social media is used so frequently, it has played a noticeable role in shaping how adolescents view themselves and their surroundings, which makes it important to study theconnection between social media use, body image, and mental health from several angles (Jarman et al., 2021).

While numerous international studies have investigated these matters, there remains a paucity of research specifically addressing the relationship between social media usage and body image satisfaction among adolescents in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the correlation between social media use and body image satisfaction, as well as exploring whether gender, age, and weight moderate this relationship. By addressing these issues, the results of the study add new empirical insights into how Kurdish adolescents use and experience social media content. Moreover, it attempts to bridge the research gap by integrating Social Comparison Theory and Body Image Satisfaction Theory within a non-Western cultural context.

The current study aims to answer the following question: 1. To what extent do Kurdish adolescents use social media? 2. To examine whether significant differences exist in social media use and body image satisfaction based on gender and age groups. 3. What are the correlations between social media use and body image satisfaction

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical FrameworkThe main theoretical framework for this study is about Social Comparison Theory and the tripartite influence model of body image. From the perspective of Social Comparison Theory, individuals assess their looks, behaviors, and values by comparing their own with others,

particularly those who look similar. Adolescents often make appearance-based comparisons on social media, which often results in self-evaluation based on filtered and idealized photos (Roberts et al., 2022). The second model, which is the Tripartite Influence Model, stresses the vital role of social pressure, such as peers, family, social media, and trending… in shaping individuals' body image by internalizing cultural norms. Teenagers who are at a destination stage of identity development are results to be especially vulnerable to the effects of online pictures and feedback mechanisms that reinforce self-objectification (Barbierik et al., 2023; Roberts et al., 2022).

2.2 Social Media Use Among AdolescentsTeenagers' usage of social media is extremely rooted in their lives (Ahmed, 2023), especially platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, where users are urged to post and explore good-looking pictures of themselves (Jarman et al., 2021). Social media becomes multifunctional, allowing individuals to communicate, educate, and engage in fun activities. Still, using it can be problematic and cause issues that are related to overuse, online abuse, and emotional exhaustion (Odgers and Jensen, 2020). Adolescents' dependency on smartphones and digital platforms has changed their lives completely, such as daily routines and relationships with peers, and it sometimes even leads to problematic usage habits and, at the end, results in addiction (Ahmadi Shooli and Rahimi, 2024; Ahmed et al., 2025). Positive sides of social media, such as increasing social connection and self-expression, have been addressed (Buda et al., 2021). To measure the extent and consumption pattern of Kurdish adolescents in this study, the Social Media Addiction Scale-student form (SMAS-SF) by Şahin (2018) was utilized.

2.3 Body Image SatisfactionA variety of factors, such as gender, age, and cultural environment, were discovered to have an influence on body dissatisfaction (Francisco et al., 2015). In the context of differences between genders, male adolescents are addressed that they may emphasize muscularity ideals, while female adolescents may absorb thin-ideal beauty standards (Peixoto Labre, 2002). Additionally, new studies emphasize the experience of adolescents who are gender non-conforming, who may face increased pressures that cause them to feel distressed and unsatisfied (Burstall et al., 2024). In this study the Adolescents Body Image Scale (ABISS) was used to measure the construction among Kurdish adolescents, which Leone et al. (2014) created the scale.

2.4 Relationship Between Social Media Use and Body ImageAdolescents' attitudes on their bodies have been significantly influenced by social media, both as a potential cause of harm and as a type of empowerment (Akram and Kumar, 2017; Coyne et al., 2025). On the other hand, negative correlation was reported by Coyne et al. (2025) and Czubaj et al. (2025)**.** who relates high social media exposure to lower self-esteem and enhanced body dissatisfaction (Coyne et al., 2025). Variability in these results can be caused by user motives, content exposure, and platform-specific factors (Flores Mata and

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Castellano-Tejedor, 2024). To fully understand the relationship between content type, cultured context, and individuals' vulnerabilities, a nuanced approach is necessary.

2.5 Related Studies

Although social media and body image have been widely investigated worldwide, there is limited data from Middle Eastern contexts, especially the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Research from diverse cultures (Charmaraman et al., 2025; Fan et al., 2025; Ndindeng, 2025) indicates that teenagers who overuse social media in an unhealthy way report feeling less satisfaction and more distress. In the opposite, moderate users show improved emotional results when they interact with realistic and encouraging content (Fan et al., 2025). Despite these findings, there is still a lack of localized studies examining the relationship between Kurdish teenagers` use of social media and their satisfaction with their bodies; in order to fill this gap, the current research examines gender, age, and weight differences in this relationship by combining Social Comparison Theory and Body Image Satisfaction Theory.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Setting and Study Design

This cross-sectional, quantitative study was conducted among adolescents aged 10–20 years in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) between 25 December 2024 and 10 February 2025.

3.2 Participants

Participants were adolescents aged 10–20 years recruited from secondary schools, high schools, and higher education institutions in Koya City and other areas within the KRI.

The **inclusion criteria** were teenagers between the ages of 10 and 20 who were currently enrolled in school and were willing to take part in the study. **Exclusion criteria** encompassed individuals not within the designated age range or those who provided incomplete questionnaires.

3.3 Data collection procedure

A total of 294 participants completed valid questionnaires: 240 paper-based from secondary and high schools in Koya City and 54 responses were through Google Forms from public universities and institutes. We used convenience and self-selection sampling methods. Researchers oversaw handing out questionnaires in classrooms for paper-based data collection. The survey link was sent out through academic and student communication platforms so that people could fill it out online.

3.4 Informed consent

Before taking part, all participants gave their informed consent. For participants who were under 18 years old, parental consent was also obtained.

3.5 Instruments

Demographic Questionnaire.

Participants supplied demographic data, encompassing age, gender, educational attainment, and additional pertinent background attributes.

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

SMAS-SF was developed by Şahin (2018), the SMAS-SF includes 29 items across four subscales—virtual tolerance, virtual communication, virtual problems, and virtual information—rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree → 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater perceived social media dependence. The purpose SMAS-SF used was because it developed and validated specifically for students and adolescents (Şahin, 2018). It measures several dimensions of use (tolerance, communication, problems, information) rather than a single score, which suits our sample of school and university students.

Adolescents' Body Image Satisfaction Scale (ABISS)

ABISS was developed by Leone et al. (2014). The ABISS consists of 16 items across three subscales: body competence, body inadequacy, and internal conflict, rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree → 4 = strongly agree). Higher

ABISS scores indicate greater dissatisfaction. The purpose of choosing ABISS was because it was designed to assess body image in adolescents through three clear dimensions: body competence, body inadequacy and internal conflict. It is short (16 items) and easy for young respondents to complete within the time available in classrooms.

3.6 Ethical consideration

Ethical approval was obtained from the Koya University Ethics Committee (Ref. 18/12/2024). Written informed consent and parental consent for minors were secured. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Questionnaires took approximately 15 minutes to complete under research supervision.

3.7 Data analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS v26. Normality was tested via Shapiro–Wilk and histogram inspection, showing non-normal distributions. Non-parametric analyses were applied, like descriptive statistics, the Mann–Whitney U test, the Kruskal–Wallis H test, and Spearman's ρ for correlations.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Participant Characteristics

The sample included 148 males (50.3%) and 146 females (49.7%). Participants represented various educational levels (secondary = 16.3%, high school = 56.5%, institute = 8.5%, college = 18.7%).

Table 1.

Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 294)

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	148	50.3
	Female	146	49.7
Age group (years)	10–13	49	16.7
	14–16	141	48.0
	17–20	104	35.3
Educational level	Secondary school	48	16.3
	High school	166	56.5
	Institute	25	8.5
	College	55	18.7
Body weight category	Underweight	47	16.0
	Normal	181	61.6
	Overweight	48	16.3
	Obese	18	6.1

Note: Values reflect valid responses; minor missing data excluded.

4.1 Levels of social media use and Body Image Satisfaction

Table 2 shows the scores of social media use and body image satisfaction; that the total SMAS-SF mean was 75.77 (SD = 0.72), indicating a moderate level of social media use among adolescents. Among subscales, virtual communication gets the highest scores in reverse to virtual tolerance, which got the lowest score. In addition, the ABISS mean score was 37.85 (SD = 8.63), with domain means ranging between 11.76 and 13.96. Overall, adolescents showed a moderate level of both social-media usage and body-image satisfaction; in those results, virtual communication represented the most obvious aspect of online activity.

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics of social-media-use and body-image-satisfaction scores

Scale / Subscale	Min	Max	Mean	SD
SMAS-SF Total	29	145	75.77	20.72
Virtual Tolerance	5	25	13.89	5.17
Virtual Communication	6	30	22.46	7.96

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Virtual Problems	5	25	21.99	7.19
Virtual Information	5	25	17.42	5.40
ABISS Total	16	64	37.85	8.63
Body Competence	5	20	11.76	3.56
Body Inadequacy	5	20	12.13	3.84
Internal Conflict	6	24	13.96	4.01

Note: SMAS-SF = Social Media Addiction Scale – Student Form; ABISS = Adolescent Body Image Satisfaction Scale.

4.2 Gender, Age, and weight differences

Tables 3 and 4 show gender, age, and weight-group differences in total SMAS-SF and ABISS scores. Results indicate no statistically significant differences between males and females, neither in SMAS-SF total (U = 10, 547.5; p = .725) nor in ABISS total scores (U = 10, 190.5; p = .399). Similarly, no significant differences were observed across age groups (SMAS-SF: H = 2.48, p = .289; ABISS: H = 1.28, p = .528) or weight categories (SMAS-SF: H = 5.09, p = .279; ABISS: H = 4.72, p = .316). These findings indicate that gender, age, and weight were not significantly associated with social media use or body image satisfaction.

Table 3.

Gender differences in social-media use and body-image satisfaction (Mann–Whitney U test)

Variable	Male Mean Rank	Female Mean Rank	U	p-value
SMAS-SF Total	147.82	146.15	10 547.5	0.725
ABISS Total	150.61	143.28	10 190.5	0.399

Note: p > 0.05 = non-significant.

Table 4. Age- and weight-group differences (Kruskal–Wallis H test)

Variable	Grouping factor	H	p-value
SMAS-SF Total	Age group	2.48	0.289
ABISS Total	Age group	1.28	0.528
SMAS-SF Total	Weight category	5.09	0.279
ABISS Total	Weight category	4.72	0.316

4.3 Correlation between social-media use and body-image satisfaction

Table 5 clarifies the correlation between total SMAS-SF, and ABISS scores. Results showed that total SMAS-SF had a weak positive correlation with ABISS total (ρ = .136, p < .01). Furthermore, subscales of virtual communication and virtual information positively linked with body competence and body inadequacy (ρ = .15–.21, p < .01), whereas other subscales were not significantly related. Overall, the correlation between Social Media Use and Body Image Satisfaction was positive but weak in magnitude.

Table 5. *Correlations between social-media-use and body-image-satisfaction subscales (Spearman's ρ)*

SMAS-SF Subscale	Body Competence	Body Inadequacy	Internal Conflict	ABISS Total
Virtual Tolerance	0.08	0.05	0.03	0.07

Virtual Communication	0.21**	0.15**	0.09	0.17**
Virtual Problems	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.06
Virtual Information	0.18**	0.16**	0.11	0.14**
SMAS-SF Total	0.16**	0.12*	0.09	0.136**

Notes: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01. Higher ABISS scores indicate greater body-image satisfaction.

4.4 DISCUSSION

The findings show moderate social media use among adolescents in the Kurdistan Region, inconsistent with previous studies (Ahmed, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2025; Boniel-Nissim et al., 2022). The lack of gender, age, or weight differences suggests that exposure to digital platforms is widespread and uniform across demographic groups.

The small positive correlation between social media use and body image satisfaction somehow does not equate with the results of other studies where higher use often predicts dissatisfaction (Fan et al., 2025; Jarman et al., 2024) since our results indicate just a weak link between social media use and body image satisfaction. This divergence might reflect cultural protective factors—such as stronger family bonds, community cohesion, and moderated online self-presentation norms—that buffer negative social comparison. Kurdish adolescents may use social media primarily for communication and information rather than image-focused self-promotion, explaining the mild positive association.

Nevertheless, the presence of any correlation suggests that body-image attitudes remain susceptible to online influences. Programs promoting media literacy and balanced digital habits could strengthen resilience against harmful comparison. School-based psychologists and counselors can integrate programs on realistic body standards and the psychological effects of edited imagery.

5. CONCLUSION

Adolescents in the Kurdistan Region exhibit moderate social media engagement and overall positive body image satisfaction, with minimal demographic differences. Social media use shows a slight positive correlation with body image satisfaction, while weak correlations do not imply causation, it indicating a nuanced relationship shaped by cultural context. Educational and counseling interventions should focus on developing healthy online behaviors and promoting realistic body perceptions within Kurdish society. The study's non-random convenience sample, limited to Koya City and several universities, restricts generalizability. Self-report measures may introduce response bias. Future research should adopt longitudinal or mixed methods designs across multiple governorates and include qualitative interviews to explore underlying psychosocial mechanisms. Public health and educational authorities should organize seminars and workshops led by psychologists to raise awareness about healthy social media use. National programs could collaborate with schools and youth centers to integrate digital-wellness education. Like any work, this study has several limitations. This finding

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cannot be generalized to the entire theme of adolescents in the Kurdistan region because of the small sample size, which was limited to a specific subset of adolescents. In addition, the sample was not randomly selected, and the sample consisted of students from only one city in the KRI, specifically students from three schools in Koya city. Some of the responses showed patterns such as contradictory answers, the same mark on all items, or completion times that were excessively short, which suggest that some participants may not have answered attentively or honestly. These indicators raised concerns about the reliability of those specific responses. Furthermore, using Google Forms rather than manual administration reduces opportunities for direct observation of questionnaire completion. Consequently, participants were unable to seek clarifications if needed.

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ملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى بحث العلاقة بين استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والرضا عن صورة الجسم لدى المراهقين في البيئات التعليمية بإقليم كردستان العراق. أُجريت دراسة مقطعية قائمة على البيانات شملت 294 مراهقًا (148 ذكرًا، 146 أنثى؛ تتراوح أعمارهم بين 10 و20 عامًا). جُمعت البيانات من خلال مزيج من الاستبيانات الورقية والإلكترونية باستخدام مقياس إدمان وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي - نسخة ومقياس رضا المراهقين عن صورة (SMAS-SF) الطلاب أشار متوسط درجة مقياس إدمان وسائل .(ABISS) أجسامهم البالغ (SMAS-SF) التواصل الاجتماعي - نسخة الطلاب 75.8 (الانحراف المعياري = 20.7) إلى استخدام متوسط لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. لم تُلاحظ فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الجنسين أو الأعمار أو الأوزان في استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أو الرضا عن صورة الجسم (قيمة الاحتمال > 0.05). لوحظ وجود ارتباط إيجابي ضعيف ولكنه ذو دلالة إحصائية بين إجمالي استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والرضا العام عن صورة الجسم. يُعد استخدام المراهقين لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في إقليم كردستان متوسطًا، ولا يختلف اختلافًا كبيرًا باختلاف الجنس أو العمر أو الوزن. مع ذلك، يرتبط الاستخدام المتزايد لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ارتباطًا طفيفًا بتحسن الرضا عن صورة الجسم، مما يشير إلى تفاعل معقد حيث يؤثر السياق الثقافي ونوع المحتوى على تأثيرات هذه الوسائل. ينبغي أن تُشجع التدخلات في المدارس على التفاعل المتوازن مع وسائل الإعلام وبرامج تقبّل الجسم

الكلمات المفتاحية: صورة الجسم، البيئات التعليمية، الصحة النفسية، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، المعايير الافتراضية

پوختە

ئەم توێژینەوەیە ئامانجی لێکۆڵینەوە بوو لە پەیوەندی نێوان بەکارهێنانی سۆشیال میدیا و ڕەزامەندی لە وێنەی جەستە لە نێوان هەرزەکاران لە شوێنە پەروەردەییەکان لە هەرێمی کوردستانی عێراق. توێژینەوەیەکی بڕبڕەیی و داتا-بزوێنەر لەگەڵ 294 هەرزەکار (148 نێر، 146 مێ، تەمەنی 10-20 ساڵ) ئەنجامدرا. داتاکان لە ڕێگەی تێکەڵەیەک لە پرسیارنامەی کاغەزی و ئەلیکترۆنی بە بەکارهێنانی پێوەرەکانی ئالوودەبوونی سۆشیال میدیا و پێوەرەکانی ڕەزامەندی لە (SMAS-SF) – وەشانی خوێندکار کۆکرانەوە. ماماوەندی (ABISS) وێنەی جەستەی هەرزەکاران (لادانێکی ستاندارد = 20.7) SMAS-SF نمرەی 75.8 لە ئاماژەی بە بەکارهێنانی سۆشیال میدیای ماماوەند کرد. هیچ جیاوازییەکی ئاماری گرنگ لە نێوان ڕەگەز، تەمەن، یان کێش لە بەکارهێنانی سۆشیال میدیا یان ڕەزامەندی لە وێنەی جەستەدا بەدی پەیوەندییەکی ئەرێنی لاواز بەڵام لە ڕووی .($p < 0.05$) نەکرا ئاماریەوە گرنگ لە نێوان کۆی بەکارهێنانی سۆشیال میدیا و ڕەزامەندی گشتی لە وێنەی جەستەدا دۆزرایەوە. بەکارهێنانی سۆشیال میدیای هەرزەکاران لە هەرێمی کوردستان مامناوەندە و بە پێی ڕەگەز و تەمەن و کێش جیاوازییەکی بەرچاوی نییە. بەڵام زیادبوونی بەکارهێنانی سۆشیال میدیا تەنها کەمێک پەیوەندی بە باشتربوونی ڕەزامەندی لە وێنەی جەستە هەیە، ئەمەش پێشنیاری یارییەکی ئاڵۆزە کە تێیدا چوارچێوەی کولتووری و جۆری ناوەرۆک کاریگەرییان لەسەر کاریگەرییەکانی ئەم پلاتفۆرمانە هەیە. دەستێوەردانەکان لە قوتابخانەکاندا پێویستە بەشداریکردنی هاوسەنگی میدیا و بەرنامەکانی وەرگرتنی جەستە بەرەوپێش ببەن

وشەی سەرەکی: وێنەی جەستە، ژینگە پەروەردەییەکان، تەندروستی دەروونی، سۆشیال میدیا، نۆرمەکانی مەجازی