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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BODY IMAGE ISSUES AMONG TEENAGERS OF LUDHIANA

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Abstract

This article examines the effect of social media exposure on the body satisfaction levels of the teenagers in Ludhiana. The thin-ideal body for teenage girls and muscular-ideal body for teenage boys, which is prominent on social media, is disruptive for teenagers' mental health and eating habits. Consequently, teenagers become prone to developing eating disorders. Research suggests that teenagers who spend more time on social media are at a greater risk of developing obesity.

Research Methodology: I have reviewed several scholarly articles to formulate my research and arguments. This article also lays emphasis on the responses given by teenagers belonging to Ludhiana, whom I have interviewed over a span of two months. Thus, the methodology used for this article is a mix of critical discourse analysis, surveys and interviews.

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Introduction:-

Teenagers spend the highest amount of time on their devices surfing on the Internet. Today's teen culture is heavily influenced by social media. Social media helps teenagers in keeping in touch with people, establishing mutual interests with acquaintances, exchanging music or art and serves as medium for exploration and self-expression. However, extended exposure to social media is problematic as it has been found to be associated with mental health disorders like depression, anxiety, along with sleep disorders and obsessive-compulsive symptoms. In particular, recent studies have examined the relationship between Internet usage and body perception in teenagers.

Eating disorders as a result of negative body image are becoming increasingly common in teenage girls because of the unrealistic portrayal of females in mainstream media. Teenagers who use social media often have negative thoughts about their appearance, weight, and physique. The influence of idealised media representations, particularly thin-ideal models for females and muscular-ideal models for boys, on teen attitudes has been extensively studied.

I have chosen to pursue research on this topic because I wish to explore and critically analyse the ways in which exposure to social media can impact teenagers' body image and eating habits. It is imperative to understand these factors so that the necessary measures are taken to help teenagers maintain a normal, healthy weight so that they grow to become healthy adults. Obesity has a severe impact on the physical, social and emotional well-being in teenagers.

A poor body image has a detrimental impact on social functioning, mental and physical health, and lifestyle decisions. Along with having an adverse impact on other bodily functions, eating disorders can have negative effects on the cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, neurological, and endocrine systems.

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Hypothesis:

Media internalisation in teenagers may cause them to develop negative body image and eating disorders. Excessive screen time and the oppressive presence of unrealistic body ideals on social media can lower self-esteem and raise stress levels which may result in teenage obesity.

Research questions

1. Why is it important to develop a positive body image during adolescence?
2. Why are teenagers more prone to developing a poor body image?
3. What is the role of social media in shaping teenagers' perceptions of their bodies?
4. How does exposure to social media lead to the genesis of eating disorders and obesity?

Body image during puberty

Body image refers to how a person perceives their physical appearance. A person's perspective of what constitutes the perfect body within their particular social and cultural milieu interacts with their ideas, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours about their own body to form their body image. A negative perception of one's physical appearance that results in unhealthy behaviours, such as bad eating habits, altered levels of physical activity, substance misuse, or less social interactions, is known as having an unfavourable body image. The beginning of puberty is a time of significant bodily change as well as dynamic peer interactions. The best single predictor of self esteem in adolescents has been found to be body image satisfaction. A negative body image has a detrimental impact on social functioning, mental and physical health, and lifestyle decisions. It may result in harmful eating habits, eating disorders, excessive or insufficient exercise, substance abuse, and a desire for unrequired surgical interventions. Once developed, a negative body image might persist until adulthood. This shows just how important it is to have a healthy body image during puberty.

Role of social media

According to research, the mass media has a significant impact on how people feel about their bodies. According to recent findings, even a brief exposure to Facebook might lead to outcomes that are worse for body image. Concerns about body image are quite prevalent among teenagers. Since physical changes brought on by puberty often make people feel worse about their bodies. Therefore, problematic internet use may have a bigger negative impact on body satisfaction or body esteem, especially among teens.

An average person now uses social media for more than ten hours per day. An average teenager in Ludhiana spends more than 4.5 hours scrolling on social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Twitter and YouTube. This is due to the ease with which Internet-based material may be accessed on smartphones or tablets. Teenagers frequently use their smartphones to access Social Networking Sites (SNSs), a specific category of social media. SNSs, or social networking services, like Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram are web-based applications that let users set up public or private profiles and build networks of friends or followers. Despite the fact that media material does not reflect reality, it nonetheless becomes the benchmark by which one judges oneself and other people.

Teenagers frequently compare themselves to others, especially during adolescence, in an effort to feel better about their bodies. Social comparison is the evaluation of one's own physique in relation to that of others. When asked about how social media has impacted their image of their body, Aaira Banda, a 17 year old female, replied that social media has negatively affected her body image because of the overexposure to 'idealised' body types. Tanmay Gupta, an 18 year old male, replied that social media has made him a little conscious and insecure about his body.

Teenagers who compare their bodies to those ideal standards of beauty pushed by the media may feel self-conscious. When posting selfies on social media, users frequently use filters and image editing softwares to improve their appearance. As a result, both the photographs of models and celebrities as well as the pictures of one's own acquaintances on social media sites may be artificial and romanticised. The available data suggests that comments made about someone's physical appearance—both positive and negative—have a detrimental effect on people's self-esteem. Tanmay mentions that social media has really affected his mental health. He has found himself feeling jealous and dejected when he sees the 'perfect six pack abs' on male models. Aaira mentions that seeing everyone running after attaining the 'idealised hour-glass body type' has degraded her self confidence.

Body dissatisfaction among teenage girls

For both adult women and adolescent girls, spending more time online, especially on social networking sites like Facebook, has been linked to negative body image consequences. This connection might result from the media's promotion of idealised and consequently unattainable standards of beauty. Viewers mistakenly believe that the idealised reel images are indeed real, even if the touted body shape and weight are unattainable for the typical individual. As a result, they begin to view the suggested ideal standard as the social definition of beautiful and become unhappy with who they are.

Adolescent girls who frequently post "selfies" and are more prone to invest in re-fashioning their self-images reported having worse body image issues. Researchers found that women's likelihood of having a negative body image increases when they report more appearance-related social comparison. Women who seek to develop and maintain a realistic and healthy body perception face significant obstacles as a result of the digital culture. Despite this, the thin ideal of female beauty is still widely prevalent on SNSs and has been linked to eating problems and body dissatisfaction among females.

Thinspiration is the practice of sharing thin-ideal body photos on social media. Social media posts that actively promote thinness and weight loss are referred to as "thinspiration." Strong is the new skinny, according to some websites, so the thin ideal is not the only ideal standard of beauty for women. Websites that promote a fit and healthy lifestyle are known as "fitspiration" sites since they feature athletic ideal content.

For female viewers, the athletic ideal figure has the same negative effects as the skinny one because women who strive for this ideal weight may wind up engaged in harmful habits like purging or restricted eating. These two standards cause women to have body dissatisfaction and drive them to engage not only in unhealthy eating practices but also in exercise routines.

Body dissatisfaction among teenage boys

Body dissatisfaction is connected with social comparisons for physical features for both girls and boys, despite the fact that there are fewer studies on body dissatisfaction in males than in women. Body dissatisfaction in men is connected to poor eating habits, eating disorders, and reduced self-esteem. As more and more images of muscular male bodies appear in films, music videos, advertising, and periodicals, societal pressure on men's appearances is on the rise. Lower levels of self-esteem and body satisfaction as well as higher levels of detrimental behavioural and psychological effects were linked to exposure to muscular ideals. More muscular male models are being used in periodicals and advertising today than in the past. This indicates that, on the one hand, the disparity between one's own body and the ideals portrayed in the media is bigger than before, which may be a major contributing factor to body dissatisfaction.

On the other side, men's body dissatisfaction is rising as the ideal male figure portrayed in the media is getting more and more unrealistic. The ideal male physique is becoming increasingly muscular and thus unachievable. The "Drive for Muscularity as the ideal masculinity" is a term used to describe men's obsession with developing huge muscles that are concentrated on their upper bodies. A different factor has been identified called "Drive for Leanness," which is characterised as the desire for a lean body with clearly defined muscles and little body fat. In Drive for Leanness, the male character longs for a body type that is particularly slim and resembles an "athletic" physique. During his interview, Tanmay also admitted that he feels the constant need to look lean and muscular because of social media. He believes that having a perfect figure has actually become a requirement in today's world. He sometimes feels like he is competing with every other male his age to get a muscular and handsome body so that he can look good on social media.

Eating disorders

Eating disorders have been made more common by social media, and the statistics involving these damaging messages are worrisome. Teenagers are more likely than ever to worry about their weight, shape, size, and body image, which leads them to different kinds of dieting in order to reduce weight. The causes of these issues with body image and weight are poorly understood. These actions have been put up as potential contributing factors to the emergence of eating disorders.

Today, there are over 100 pro-anorexia websites, which not only promote disordered eating but also provide detailed instructions on purging, severely limiting calorie intake, and engaging in excessive exercise. According to

epidemiological research, eating problems have become more common in adolescent girls over the past 50 years. Social media can promote rivalry and comparison, which affects how individuals perceive their own bodies. People may believe that their lives, bodies, or experiences are inferior to others after viewing tastefully altered photos. The way a person feels about their body may affect their self-esteem and lead to detrimental ideas and self-harming habits. Many researchers have hypothesised that the media may play a key role in developing and intensifying the phenomenon of body dissatisfaction and, as a result, may help explain the rise in eating disorders. In particular for females, the media may have a big role in influencing how young people view their bodies.

Eating problems can occur in people of any gender. Boys may also do this, albeit examples are less frequent. Boys who have eating disorders frequently overwork themselves. They might start lifting weights in an effort to build more muscle or taking up running to pick up the pace. Boys may use social media to share their new gym routines and to follow influencers who share their workout or bulking diet plans. The pressure to achieve specific weight goals or physical attributes might become much more acute when connected to social media. Those who already enjoy athletics may start following extreme routines they encounter on social media as a result of the continual pressure to succeed. This strategy might result in eating disorders.

Obesity

Children and adolescents' health and wellbeing are clearly at risk due to obesity. Recent studies have shown that screen time is a significant contributor to the genesis of obesity. Exposure to screen media increases binge-eating of high-calorie products, low-nutrient foods and drinks that affects teenagers' tastes and consumption patterns. It also disrupts their daily sleep cycles and body clocks for the worse, thereby giving rise to further medical troubles. It has been found that kids whose parents restrict their screen usage have a 40% lower obesity rate than kids whose parents do not.

An additional crucial topic is the content that people use social media to consume. Victimization and social isolation have been linked to obesity. Technology use may encourage inactivity and replace otherwise active actions, which may lead to an unbalanced flow of energy. A surplus of calories are consumed by adolescents who use technology, which has also been linked to increased energy intake even when they are not hungry. Furthermore, technology-based advertising of unhealthy meals like fast food and beverages with added sugars contributes to an increase in the intake of these items across generations, particularly among children and young adults. These commercials are not only on TV; they are also present online, notably in modern mobile phone applications. Several energy drink manufacturers have recently taken the lead sponsorship roles for several video games. Teenagers and young children are heavily exposed to these applications and become prime targets for promotion of harmful drinks and foods.

Excessive screen time has also been linked in studies to insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, and even early mortality. The link between screen time and obesity is therefore obvious, but the precise causes are not. Possible explanations include the following: an increase in sedentary behaviour and the displacement of more active activities, the influence of food advertising on kids' food and drink preferences and disruptions of regular sleep patterns. Diya Talwar, a 14 year old female states that she has procrastinated exercising multiple times while spending time on her phone. Raavya Jain, a 16 year old female, mentions that she feels like bingeing on high calorie foods when she sees their advertisements because they look so appetising that it becomes hard for her to stop herself. She also states that an irregular sleeping schedule has affected her eating habits. As a result, sometimes she doesn't feel like eating for the entire day and on some occasions she overeats to such an extent which isn't healthy.

Conclusion:-

The research for this article was completed over a short span of two months. Eleven teenagers of different ages, all belonging to Ludhiana, were interviewed during the process of writing this article.

This study can be reviewed in the future extensively with respect to the gathering of data and the theoretical analysis. Research can be broadened by studying the patterns of digital media use in relation to body esteem levels. Ideas and knowledge from several fields (such as behavioural science, communication, computer science, medicine, and public health) can be applied and integrated to employ digital media interventions which can prevent and reduce body dissatisfaction. It would be viable to understand the causal connection of characteristics of various digital media and context of media exposure with outcomes associated with negative body image. Additionally, it would be feasible to carry out a more thorough data collection process; the survey could be carried out in other nations and its

scope could be expanded. This empirical study is more of a suggested version of a few tactics; further investigation is always encouraged.

Irrespective of its limitations, the relevance of this topic in contemporary times is quite significant given that more than half of the world now uses social media. I believe that the study's conclusions and the kinds of issues they prompted are important enough to warrant additional investigation. Within the existing dialogue, it is crucial to bring forth a fresh viewpoint going in a different path.

This article tries to outline the different ways in which social media affects teenagers' body image. Social media negatively impacts body satisfaction in both teenage boys and girls. Body dissatisfaction results in lower self-esteem and causes adolescents to engage in unhealthy behaviours. Eating disorders are becoming increasingly common among teenage girls because of media internalisation. As the ideal male physique presented in the media is becoming more and more unrealistic, body dissatisfaction in teenage boys is also increasing. Excessive time spent on social media may lead to a sedentary lifestyle and sleep disturbances, which predisposes teenagers to obesity.

Implementation of strategies to reduce the negative effects of social media has become crucial. I believe that teenagers should be encouraged to use social media mindfully to combat the problem of media internalisation. Adequate representation should be given to realistic and diverse body types instead of surgically altered and enhanced bodies in the media. so that teenagers do not feel dissatisfied with their bodies.

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