Social Media Use, Self-Esteem, and Body Image among Psychology Students in a College in Bulacan, Philippines

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Abstract

Social media has become embedded in students' daily routines, raising continued questions about how online engagement relates to psychological self-evaluations. This study examined social media use, self-esteem, and body image among Psychology students in a private higher education institution in Bulacan, Philippines. Using a quantitative, descriptive–correlational design, data were collected from 192 students selected through stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire measured social media use (habitual use, social gratification/validation, emotional and psychological dependence), self-esteem (performance, social, and appearance self-esteem), and body image (body appreciation, physical appearance, and body shape/social physique). Internal consistency reliability indices were acceptable to excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.854$–0.940). Descriptive results indicated moderate social media use (composite $M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.44$) and moderate self-esteem (composite $M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.67$), alongside generally high body image (composite $M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.63$), particularly in body appreciation. Pearson correlation analysis showed no significant association between social media use and self-esteem ($r = 0.094$, $p = .193$) and no significant association between social media use and body image ($r = 0.038$, $p = .602$). In contrast, self-esteem demonstrated a moderate, statistically significant positive relationship with body image ($r = 0.451$, $p < .001$). Findings suggest that, in this cohort, body image is more closely aligned with internal self-evaluative resources than with overall social media use as broadly measured. Implications include strengthening student self-esteem and reflective digital practices through guidance-based programming, with future research encouraged to examine content-specific exposure and social comparison processes. Based on the findings, a guidance-based program (REAL: Recognize, Evaluate, Accept, and Live) is proposed for future implementation and evaluation to support self-esteem, body appreciation, and reflective digital engagement.

Keywords: *social media use; self-esteem; body image; body appreciation; college students; descriptive–correlational study; Philippines; body shape/social physique*

1. Introduction

Social media platforms—such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and related networked applications—have become routine infrastructures of student life. They shape how young adults communicate, seek information, sustain friendships, and present identity. While these platforms provide genuine benefits (e.g., social connection, access to communities, and opportunities for self-expression), they also generate sustained exposure to curated content, peer feedback metrics, and visually idealized portrayals of everyday life. In the context of student development, these exposures may be consequential because they can influence how individuals evaluate themselves, particularly in domains where social comparison is salient, such as personal appearance and perceived social acceptance.

Body image refers to an individual's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about the body and physical appearance. It includes cognitive evaluations (e.g., satisfaction with weight, shape, or specific features), affective reactions (e.g., comfort or distress about appearance), and social interpretations (e.g., beliefs about how one is viewed by others) (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Social media differs from earlier mass media in that users are not merely audiences; they are active participants who post content, curate images, and receive immediate feedback through likes, comments, and shares. These affordances can intensify self-monitoring and peer comparison, potentially shaping both body-related attitudes and broader self-worth. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that media exposure is meaningfully associated with body-image outcomes, although effect sizes vary by platform features, content type, and individual vulnerability (Huang et al., 2021).

Despite widespread concern that social media use harms self-esteem and body image, empirical findings are mixed and increasingly suggest that it is insufficient to examine "time spent" alone. The form of engagement matters. Vikram and Sutar (2024) highlight that passive scrolling, active posting, and exposure to appearance-related content may carry different psychological implications. In addition, individuals vary in their motivations for use, such as maintaining relationships, seeking validation, coping with stress, or entertainment—each of which may relate differently to self-esteem and body evaluation. Consequently, research that treats "social media use" as a single undifferentiated variable risks overlooking specific patterns that may be more psychologically relevant.

International evidence often reports associations between intensive engagement with idealized imagery and negative self-evaluations. Alfonso-Fuertes et al. (2023), for example, found that heavier Instagram use among young adults was associated with greater body dissatisfaction, stronger appearance comparison, and lower self-esteem. Çolak et al. (2023) reported that higher social media addiction is associated with lower self-esteem, with body image partially explaining this relationship in adolescents. Studies among college populations similarly suggest that frequent comparison to idealized online images can be linked to lower self-esteem (Mohammed Ali et al., 2024), while exposure to unrealistic beauty standards may shape internalized appearance ideals and dissatisfaction (Czubaj et al., 2025). However, the presence of mixed results across studies indicates that relationships may depend on contextual factors (e.g., culture, student subgroup), measurement strategies (global use vs. specific features), and protective resources (e.g., media literacy, social support).

This study focuses on Psychology students at First City Providential College. Psychology students are a relevant population because they are trained to reflect on human behavior and mental well-being, yet they remain embedded in the same digital environments that shape peer comparison and identity performance. Within higher education, well-being is also linked to academic engagement and the effectiveness of student support services. Institution-specific evidence is therefore needed to guide counseling and guidance initiatives, particularly when universities are increasingly expected to address digital well-being and mental health risks associated with online environments.

To support a more precise analysis, the present study operationalizes social media use through three behavioral-psychological dimensions: (a) habitual social media use (routine and automatic checking), (b) social gratification and validation (use motivated by social acknowledgment and feedback), and (c) emotional and psychological dependence (use as coping and difficulty disengaging). Self-esteem is treated as multidimensional (performance, social, and appearance self-evaluations), and body image is assessed through body appreciation, physical appearance perceptions, and social physique/shape evaluation. By examining these constructs together, the study seeks to clarify whether social media use—conceptualized beyond sheer frequency—shows statistically significant relationships with self-esteem and body image, and whether self-esteem is associated with students' body image.

The Philippine setting also includes policy and ethical considerations relevant to online self-presentation. Responsible handling of personal information and images is emphasized under the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), and the National Privacy Commission has issued reminders regarding risks associated with sharing photos and videos that contain personal data (Gov.ph, 2024). Although privacy law primarily governs data protection practices, it is also relevant to student well-being because online exposure, cyberbullying, and reputational harm can indirectly affect self-esteem and body-related concerns. These considerations reinforce the importance of examining social media practices in relation to student psychological outcomes and designing school-based interventions that support healthier and more reflective digital engagement.

1.1 Objectives

General Objective

To determine the relationships among social media use, self-esteem, and body image among Psychology students at First City Providential College.

Specific Objectives

a. Describe the level of social media use of Psychology students in terms of: (a) habitual social media use, (b) social gratification and validation, and (c) emotional and psychological dependence.

b. Describe the level of self-esteem of Psychology students in terms of: (a)

performance self-esteem, (b) social self-esteem, and (c) appearance self-esteem.

c. Describe the level of body image of Psychology students in terms of: (a) body appreciation, (b) physical appearance, and (c) body shape/social physique.

d. Determine whether there is a significant relationship between social media use and self-esteem.

e. Determine whether there is a significant relationship between social media use and body image.

f. Determine whether there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and body image.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Social Media Use and Self Esteem

Self-esteem is commonly defined as an individual's evaluative judgment of personal worth and competence, expressed across domains such as perceived performance capability, social adequacy, and appearance-related self-regard. Within social media environments, self-esteem may be shaped by platform-specific feedback structures (e.g., likes, reactions, and comments), perceptions of inclusion or exclusion, and repeated exposure to upward comparisons. Mohammed Ali et al. (2024) reported that frequent comparison with idealized online images among college students was associated with lower self-esteem, indicating that self-worth may become contingent on perceived online validation and prevailing attractiveness standards. Complementary perspectives on comparison processes further suggest that social media can function as a persistent "comparison environment," wherein self-evaluation is repeatedly recalibrated against curated portrayals of peers and influencers.

At the same time, the empirical literature does not support a uniformly negative interpretation of social media use. The psychological consequences of platform engagement appear to depend on how social media is used and what needs it serves. In a moderated mediation model, Zhang et al. (2023) found that social media use may be associated with psychological and subjective well-being through mechanisms such as online social support and self-esteem, implying that engagement can strengthen belongingness and perceived self-worth under supportive conditions. The divergence across findings reinforces the importance of measuring social media use through psychologically proximal dimensions (e.g., habitual use, validation seeking, affective dependence, or comparison orientation) rather than relying solely on broad frequency metrics.

2.2 Social media exposure and body image

Body image concerns have been consistently linked to visual social media environments in which appearance is prominently displayed and implicitly evaluated. Alfonso-Fuertes et al. (2023) reported that heavier Instagram use is associated with stronger appearance comparisons and higher body dissatisfaction among young adults. Related work emphasizes that curated visual content can normalize narrow attractiveness ideals and heighten sensitivity to perceived bodily "imperfections," particularly when users repeatedly encounter unrealistic portrayals of beauty and fitness (Czubaj et al., 2025). In this view, internalization mechanisms are central: recurring exposure to idealized bodies can gradually convert social ideals into personal standards, increasing dissatisfaction when one's appearance fails to approximate these norms.

However, broader quantitative syntheses indicate that media effects on body image vary meaningfully by population characteristics, content type, susceptibility, and coping resources (Huang et al., 2021). For some students, platform exposure includes body positivity content, supportive communities, and health-oriented information that may strengthen acceptance and resilience. Consequently, the association between social media use and body image may be weak, inconsistent, or conditional when exposure to appearance-focused content is limited, when engagement remains moderate, or when protective psychological resources (e.g., self-acceptance, critical media literacy, and supportive relationships) are salient.

2.3 Self-esteem and body image as related psychological resources

Across cultural contexts, self-esteem and body image are often empirically intertwined. Khalaf et al. (2021) reported that university students with higher self-esteem tend to show greater body appreciation and more positive evaluations of physical appearance. Meta-analytic work on body appreciation further indicates that respect, acceptance, and gratitude toward one's body are associated with healthier self-perception and more adaptive psychological outcomes (Tylka et al., 2022). These patterns are theoretically significant because they suggest that self-esteem may operate as a stabilizing psychological resource that supports body acceptance, even when appearance comparison is present within students' social environments.

For college students specifically, body image is not merely a perception of physical traits; it functions as a meaning-laden evaluation tied to

identity, belongingness, and perceived competence. When self-esteem is grounded in broader sources of value—such as academic efficacy, supportive social relationships, and self-acceptance—students may be less vulnerable to appearance-based threats and more capable of sustaining body appreciation despite exposure to idealized portrayals.

2.4 Philippine context and institutional implications

Philippine studies suggest that social media can intensify self-comparison and exposure to idealized standards among students, especially on platforms where appearance-focused content is salient (Carballo et al., 2024). Yet much of the local empirical work has emphasized senior high school populations, leaving fewer studies that examine college students within specific academic programs and developmental demands. This gap has practical implications for higher education institutions because student support services typically require evidence that distinguishes routine engagement from potentially riskier patterns—such as emotional dependence, validation seeking, and high comparison orientation—given that these dimensions are more actionable targets for guidance, counseling, and student development interventions.

From a broader higher-education leadership lens, the Philippine context also reflects interacting psychosocial and digital pressures affecting learners, particularly among Generation Z cohorts whose academic life is deeply embedded in digital environments. Integrative syntheses of challenges in Philippine health professions education, for example, emphasize the convergence of psychosocial strain, generational dynamics, and digitally mediated pressures as leadership-relevant concerns rather than purely individual issues (Bermido et al., 2025). Although this line of work does not reduce student well-being to social media alone, it supports an institutional framing in which digital exposure and student well-being are treated as linked components of academic risk management and holistic student support.

In parallel, Philippine evidence also indicates that social media discourse can function as a meaningful arena where values, evaluation criteria, and relational cues are expressed and reinforced within communities. Qualitative analysis of Facebook discourse in Laguna illustrates how online engagement can serve as a "living archive" of community meaning-making and value signaling (Espelita & Atento, 2025). While this evidence is anchored in higher education choice and marketing

contexts, it underscores the broader relevance of digital platforms as environments where social evaluation, belongingness cues, and perceived standards are publicly negotiated—an insight that complements student-development efforts aimed at media literacy, critical reflection, and psychologically safer online engagement.

2.5 Research Gap and Rationale

The literature supports three propositions relevant to this study: (a) social media use is multidimensional, and its correlates depend on motivations and patterns of engagement; (b) body image outcomes are more consistently linked to internalization and comparison processes than to exposure alone; and (c) self-esteem and body image demonstrate reliable positive associations. Nevertheless, findings vary across settings and populations, and relatively fewer Philippine studies examine college students using multidimensional indicators of social media engagement together with multidimensional measures of self-esteem and body image. Addressing this gap is important for producing institutionally relevant evidence and for informing student support programs that can emphasize media literacy, critical awareness of appearance ideals, and self-acceptance as protective resources.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive–correlational research design, implemented through a cross-sectional survey approach. This design is appropriate when the primary purpose is to determine whether variables are statistically related as they naturally occur in a population, without manipulation or assignment to experimental conditions (Devi et al., 2022). Consistent with correlational logic, the study estimated the strength and direction of associations among social media use, self-esteem, and body image, and did not advance causal claims.

3.2 Locale of the Study

The research was conducted at First City Providential College, a private higher education institution in Bulacan, Philippines, with participants drawn from the institution's Psychology student population. The locale was selected because social media engagement is common among enrolled students and the institutional context—particularly

through Guidance and Student Affairs—can benefit from evidence-based inputs for student well-being initiatives, counseling programming, and reflective digital engagement.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

The study participants consisted of 192 Psychology students enrolled at First City Providential College. A probability-based sampling approach was employed through stratified random sampling, intended to secure representation across student strata such as year level and/or class section. Stratification is appropriate when the population contains meaningful subgroups that should be represented in the sample, after which random selection supports coverage and reduces selection bias (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020; Simkus, 2023).

Eligibility criteria were: (a) current enrollment in the Psychology program during the period of data collection, (b) active use of at least one social media platform, and (c) willingness to participate through informed consent. The final sample size (N = 192) was treated as adequate for correlational analysis and the stable estimation of Pearson correlation coefficients under typical assumptions for parametric testing.

3.4 Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a structured, self-administered questionnaire composed of three substantive parts corresponding to the study variables: social media use, self-esteem, and body image. All items were rated using a five-point Likert-type response format, with response values arranged such that higher scores reflected higher levels of the construct being measured. Composite and domain scores were computed by aggregating item responses within each metric/domain, allowing both indicator-level description and construct-level analysis.

3.4.1 Social Media Use

Social media use was measured using a researcher-developed instrument operationalized into three behavioral–psychological metrics:

a. Habitual Social Media Use (routine and automatic checking behaviors),
b. Social Gratification and Validation (use motivated by feedback, acknowledgment, and perceived approval), and
c. Emotional and Psychological Dependence (difficulty disengaging and reliance on platforms for mood regulation or coping).

Prior to full administration, the scale underwent content review for clarity and was pilot-tested. Reliability testing through Cronbach's alpha indicated excellent internal consistency for the social media use measure ($\alpha = 0.94$).

3.4.2 Self-Esteem

Self-esteem was measured using an adapted self-esteem scale structured into three domains used as analytic metrics:

a. Performance Self-Esteem (perceived competence and confidence in academic or task functioning),
b. Social Self-Esteem (perceived social adequacy and comfort in interpersonal contexts), and
c. Appearance Self-Esteem (self-evaluations associated with physical appearance).

The adapted tool was pilot-tested, and reliability evidence reported in the study documentation indicated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.906$).

3.4.3 Body Image

Body image was assessed using an adapted set of items patterned after multidimensional body-related measurement approaches (e.g., multidimensional body-self relations framing), organized into three metrics:

a. Body Appreciation (respect, acceptance, and positive regard for one's body),
b. Physical Appearance Perceptions (satisfaction and perceived attractiveness), and
c. Body Shape/Social Physique Evaluation (concerns or comfort regarding body shape in social contexts).

Pilot testing and internal consistency checks were conducted. Across the instrument components used in the study, internal consistency reliability indices were reported as acceptable to excellent, with Cronbach's alpha values falling within $\alpha = 0.854$ to 0.940.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Following administrative approval, the researchers coordinated with program coordinators and class advisers to access eligible participants. Participants were oriented regarding the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality safeguards. Informed consent was secured prior to questionnaire administration.

Survey administration was conducted either in person during an agreed class schedule or through a controlled online form, depending on feasibility and institutional protocols. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness prior to analysis. Responses containing substantial missing data were

excluded to preserve the integrity of computed composite and domain scores.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were applied throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants retained the right to refuse participation or withdraw at any point without penalty. The survey design avoided the collection of personally identifying information within the analytic dataset, and any necessary administrative details (if collected for logistical purposes) were kept separate from response files. Data access was restricted to the research team, and results were reported only in aggregate form to prevent participant identification.

In addition, the study aligned its data handling and confidentiality practices with Philippine privacy expectations relevant to personal information and online-related data, consistent with institutional and national guidance on responsible handling of personal data and digital content (Gov.ph, 2024).

3.7 Data Analysis

Data were encoded, screened, cleaned, and analyzed using jamovi (The jamovi project, 2025), supported by the R statistical environment (R Core Team, 2025). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were computed to summarize the levels of social media use, self-esteem, and body image at both construct and domain levels. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for each measure.

To test the relationships among the variables, Pearson's product–moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed when assumptions for parametric correlation were sufficiently met (continuous/approximately interval composite

Table 1. Level of Social Media Use of Psychology Students

Habitual Social Media Use	Mean	Std Dev
I check my social media accounts out of habit.	4.06	0.85
Opening social media is one of the first things I do each day.	3.97	0.94
I use social media even when I don't have a specific purpose.	4.02	0.87
I find myself scrolling through social media without thinking about it.	3.93	1.01
Using social media has become part of my daily routine.	4.16	0.87

Social Gratification and Validation	Mean	Std Dev
I feel good when people like or react to my posts.	3.74	1.00
I post on social media to receive attention or feedback from others.	2.46	1.15
I feel more connected when people comment on my posts.	3.15	1.12
I rely on social media to stay socially updated.	3.21	1.19
I feel valued when others acknowledge my social media activities.	2.96	1.22

Emotional and Psychological Dependence	Mean	Std Dev
I feel uneasy when I cannot check my social media accounts.	2.78	1.08
I become anxious when my posts don't get enough reactions.	2.16	1.08
I turn to social media when I feel stressed or lonely.	3.38	1.10
I feel emotionally affected by what I see on social media.	3.30	1.01
I find it hard to reduce or control my time on social media.	3.30	1.17
Composite Mean	**3.370**	**0.441**

scores, linearity, and absence of extreme outliers). Pearson's r is appropriate for estimating linear relationships between quantitative variables under standard correlational assumptions (Temizhan et al., 2022). Statistical significance was evaluated at an alpha level of 0.05.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Level of Social Media Use among Psychology Students

Table 1 indicates that the Psychology students' overall social media use is moderate, as reflected by a composite mean of 3.37 (SD = 0.441). Interpreted as an aggregate across all 15 statements, this composite score suggests that students use social media regularly and meaningfully, but the pattern does not reflect extreme psychological reliance. The relatively small composite standard deviation further implies that responses tend to cluster around the average, indicating a broadly shared behavioral pattern within the group rather than sharply polarized subgroups (e.g., very low users versus highly dependent users).

A clearer reading emerges when the results are examined indicator by indicator, emphasizing the highest and lowest item scores within each domain.

Habitual Social Media Use

Among the three indicators, Habitual Social Media Use registers the strongest endorsement, indicating that social media is embedded in students' daily routines. The highest-scoring item in this subsection is "Using social media has become a part of my daily routine" (M = 4.16, SD = 0.87), which is also the highest mean in the entire table. This is reinforced by similarly high means for routine and automatic checking behaviors, including checking accounts out of habit (M = 4.06, SD = 0.85) and using social media even without a specific purpose (M = 4.02, SD = 0.87). Together, these results portray social media as a default behavioral habit, functioning almost like a background activity that accompanies everyday life.

Notably, even the comparatively lowest item in this domain—"I find myself scrolling through social media without thinking about it" (M = 3.93, SD = 1.01)—remains relatively high, suggesting that mindless or automatic scrolling is still common, although responses are more dispersed (as reflected in the slightly higher SD). Overall, this subsection supports the interpretation that students' social media engagement is primarily routine-driven, rather than purely instrumental (i.e., not limited to specific tasks or purposes).

Social Gratification and Validation

The second indicator, Social Gratification and Validation, reflects a more nuanced and moderate pattern. Students show moderate agreement that positive feedback contributes to pleasant feelings, with the highest item in this subsection being "I feel good when people like or react to my posts" (M = 3.74, SD = 1.00). This suggests that social reinforcement is psychologically meaningful, consistent with the social nature of online platforms where reactions serve as cues of recognition and belonging.

However, the lowest items in this subsection indicate limited endorsement of overt validation-seeking motives. In particular, "I post on social media to receive attention or feedback from others" (M = 2.46, SD = 1.15) is among the lowest means in the table. Similarly, feeling valued only when others acknowledge social media activities remains moderate-to-low (M = 2.96, SD = 1.22). These patterns indicate that while students may appreciate feedback when it occurs, they are not strongly driven to post for attention, nor do they define personal worth primarily through online acknowledgment. The comparatively higher standard deviations in this subsection (around 1.00–1.22) also suggest greater individual differences: some students likely do seek validation, but many do not, producing a moderate group average.

Emotional and Psychological Dependence

The third indicator, Emotional and Psychological Dependence, also yields a moderate overall pattern but with important internal contrasts. The highest item in this subsection is "I turn to social media when I feel stressed or lonely" (M = 3.38, SD = 1.10), implying that for a notable portion of students, social media can function as an accessible coping outlet or distraction. Additionally, students moderately agree that content affects them emotionally (M = 3.30, SD = 1.01) and that it can be hard to reduce time on social media (M = 3.30, SD = 1.17). These results indicate that emotional influence and self-regulation challenges are present, though not at extreme levels.

At the same time, the lowest item in the entire table appears in this domain: "I become anxious when my posts don't get enough reactions" (M = 2.16, SD = 1.08). This is a crucial interpretive anchor. It suggests that, even if students use social media habitually and sometimes as mood support, they generally do not exhibit strong anxiety tied to online approval metrics. In other words, the emotional component may operate more through consumption and coping than through approval dependence.

Integrative interpretation

Table 2. Level of Self Esteem Among Psychology Students

Performance self-esteem		
I feel confident about my abilities.	3.55	0.88
I am comfortable sharing my ideas and opinions in class or group discu:	2.61	1.07
I feel as smart as others.	3.59	1.13
I believe I can adapt to challenging academic tasks and still perform we	3.64	1.03
I am confident that I can achieve academic goals I set for myself.	3.35	0.90
Social self-esteem		
I feel comfortable expressing myself around my peers.	3.44	1.19
I feel confident interacting with others in social settings.	3.41	1.14
I feel capable of handling social situations carefully.	3.23	0.98
Appearance self-esteem		
I am content with how my body looks.	3.06	1.16
I feel that others respect and admire me.	3.47	1.17
I feel good about myself.	3.32	1.13
I feel good with my overall appearance.	3.32	1.03
Composite Mean	**3.350**	**0.670**

Taken together, the results depict a cohort of students who use social media as a stable daily habit, experience moderate social reward when receiving reactions, and show moderate emotional involvement—especially in using platforms as a coping tool—without demonstrating strong signs of validation-based anxiety. This "high habit, moderate gratification, moderate dependence" profile supports a balanced interpretation: social media is prominent and psychologically relevant, but it does not appear to dominate students' emotional equilibrium at the level suggested by severe dependence or self-worth contingency.

This pattern is consistent with the argument in Zhang et al. (2023) that social media use can be associated with well-being outcomes when mediated by factors such as self-esteem and online social support. In the present results, the relatively low endorsement of anxiety when posts receive few reactions, combined with moderate gratification and dependence scores, is compatible with the view that social media can operate as a social resource rather than a primary determinant of self-worth—particularly when engagement remains within manageable limits and is embedded in supportive peer networks rather than comparison-driven validation cycles.

4.2 Level of Self-Esteem among Psychology Students

Table 2 shows that Psychology students demonstrate generally moderate self-esteem, reflected by a composite mean of 3.35 (SD = 0.670). This aggregate score indicates that, as a group, students tend to hold reasonably positive self-evaluations across academic, social, and appearance-related domains, without reflecting either markedly low self-worth or uniformly elevated self-appraisals. The standard deviation of 0.670 suggests a moderate spread in responses: while many students cluster around the "moderate" range, there remains meaningful variability—implying that certain subgroups may experience self-esteem as either noticeably higher or lower than the group average.

A more instructive interpretation emerges when the three domains are read sequentially and anchored on the highest and lowest item means.

Performance self-esteem

Performance self-esteem appears to be the strongest domain, indicating that students generally feel capable in academic and competence-oriented contexts. The highest-rated item in the entire table—"I believe I can adapt to challenging academic tasks and still perform well" (M = 3.64, SD = 1.03)—suggests that students perceive themselves as resilient and adaptable when academic demands increase. This is supported by consistently high responses on items tapping general capability and relative competence: "I feel as smart as others" (M = 3.59, SD = 1.13) and "I feel confident about my abilities" (M = 3.55, SD = 0.88). Collectively, these results imply that students' self-esteem is anchored substantially in the belief that they can learn, adjust, and succeed when confronted with academic challenges—an encouraging pattern in a discipline that values analytical thinking and sustained study.

At the same time, performance self-esteem also contains the lowest-scoring item in the entire table: "I am comfortable sharing my ideas and opinions in class or group discussions" (M = 2.61, SD = 1.07). This is a critical finding because it shows that strong perceived competence does not automatically translate into comfort with public expression. In practical terms, students may believe they can do the work and meet academic expectations, yet still feel hesitant about speaking, defending ideas, or contributing in collaborative learning settings. The relatively elevated SD suggests individual differences—some students are highly comfortable, while others experience marked discomfort. This pattern points to a potential "confidence–expression gap," where internal academic self-belief is present but not consistently enacted in interpersonal academic contexts (e.g., recitations, presentations, peer critique). For an academic program like Psychology, where professional formation often includes communication skills, facilitation, and interpersonal engagement, this gap is institutionally relevant.

Social self-esteem

In the social self-esteem domain, item means are consistently within the moderate range, suggesting that students generally feel reasonably capable in peer interactions but do not report exceptionally strong social confidence. The strongest social item—"I feel comfortable expressing myself around my peers" (M = 3.44, SD = 1.19)—indicates that students tend to experience a basic level of comfort in peer contexts. A similar pattern appears in "I feel confident interacting with others in social settings" (M = 3.41, SD = 1.14). However, the comparatively lower rating for "I feel capable of handling social situations carefully" (M = 3.23, SD = 0.98) suggests that students may

experience less certainty regarding judgment, tact, or competence in complex social situations.

Two interpretive details are worth highlighting here. First, the social means are not low; they indicate functional comfort rather than social insecurity. Second, the relatively large SDs (particularly 1.19 and 1.14) signal notable diversity: some students likely experience strong social efficacy, while others may feel cautious, self-conscious, or less certain in social navigation. This is consistent with the reality that social self-esteem is often context-dependent—strong in familiar peer groups but weaker in evaluative or unfamiliar situations (e.g., meeting new people, presenting to a class, engaging with authority figures).

Appearance self-esteem

Appearance self-esteem emerges as the weakest domain overall, with all items remaining moderate but generally lower than performance-related indicators. The lowest appearance item—"I am content with how my body looks" (M = 3.06, SD = 1.16)—is particularly salient because it indicates that body satisfaction is the most tentative dimension of self-esteem among the domains assessed. Even if students do not report severe dissatisfaction, the data suggest that body-related confidence is not as secure as academic confidence.

At the same time, appearance self-esteem is not uniformly negative. Students report a moderately positive belief that they are positively regarded by others, as shown by "I feel that others respect and admire me" (M = 3.47, SD = 1.17)—the highest item in this domain. The two global self-feeling items also remain moderate and stable: "I feel good about myself" (M = 3.32, SD = 1.13) and "I feel good with my overall appearance" (M = 3.32, SD = 1.03). This combination—lower body contentment but moderate perceived respect—suggests a nuanced self-evaluative profile: students may feel generally acceptable and socially respected while still holding reservations about their bodies or physical attributes. Again, the SDs are relatively high, indicating that appearance-based self-esteem varies widely across individuals, which is typical in student populations exposed to strong social comparison pressures and changing identity demands.

Overall synthesis

In sum, Table 2 suggests that Psychology students' self-esteem is strongest in academic competence, moderate in social confidence, and most vulnerable in appearance-related appraisal. The most distinctive contrast is the pairing of high adaptability and academic confidence with low comfort in verbal participation—an actionable point for program development (e.g., structured low-

Table 3. Level of Body Image of Psychology Students

Body Appreciation		
I respect my body.	4.18	1.01
Despite my imperfections, I still love my body.	4.07	1.00
I appreciate what my body allows me to do every day.	4.16	0.94
I feel grateful for the unique traits and features of my body.	4.07	0.94
I do not allow unrealistically thin images of people in the media to affec	3.99	1.02
Physical Appearance		
I feel confident about my appearance when I'm in public.	3.52	0.98
I feel satisfied with my body size when I meet new people.	3.54	1.10
I'm generally pleased with how I look in photos and mirrors	3.46	1.17
I feel that my physical appearance reflects who I am as a person.	3.40	1.11
I feel comfortable with my weight when I'm with my friends	3.80	1.01
Body Shape / Social Physique		
I am comfortable with the appearance of my physique or figure.	3.63	0.90
I do not worry about wearing clothes that show my body shape.	3.43	1.09
I feel at ease when my body is being evaluated or seen by others durin	3.13	1.11
I feel that my body shape represents a healthy version of myself	3.51	0.96
I am comfortable with how fit my body appears to others.	3.53	0.92
Composite Mean	**3.700**	**0.630**

stakes speaking opportunities, supportive discussion formats, skills-building in presentation and group facilitation). Meanwhile, the relatively weaker appearance self-esteem highlights the need for student support initiatives that promote healthy self-concept formation and resilience against appearance-based comparison, particularly in a digital environment where such pressures can be intensified.

4.3 Level of Body Image among Psychology Students

Table 3 indicates that Psychology students exhibit a generally high level of body image, as shown by the composite mean of 3.70 (SD = 0.630). This overall score suggests that students tend to hold positive evaluations, acceptance, and comfort toward their bodies, both in private self-appraisal and in social contexts where appearance may be visible to others. The composite standard deviation of 0.630 reflects moderate variability, implying that while the dominant pattern is positive, there remains a meaningful spread in body-image experiences—consistent with the reality that body-related attitudes are shaped by individual differences in self-concept, comparison tendencies, and exposure to evaluative social situations.

A domain-level interpretation further clarifies how this high composite body image is distributed across Body Appreciation, Physical Appearance, and Body Shape/Social Physique, particularly when anchored on the highest and lowest items.

Body Appreciation

Body Appreciation emerges as the strongest domain and provides the clearest evidence for a positive body image profile. The highest mean score

in the entire table is "I respect my body" (M = 4.18, SD = 1.01), closely followed by "I appreciate what my body allows me to do every day" (M = 4.16, SD = 0.94). These items represent a form of body image that is not merely aesthetic but functional and value-based, emphasizing respect and gratitude for the body's capabilities. Students also report high agreement with "Despite my imperfections, I still love my body" (M = 4.07, SD = 1.00) and "I feel grateful for the unique traits and features of my body" (M = 4.07, SD = 0.94). Collectively, these results suggest a relatively robust internal relationship with the body—characterized by acceptance, appreciation, and an ability to hold imperfections without collapsing into negative self-evaluation.

The lowest item within Body Appreciation—and still in the high range—is "I do not allow unrealistically thin images of people in the media to affect [me]" (M = 3.99, SD = 1.02). While this remains high, it is interpretively important because it is the item most directly tied to external pressure. The slightly lower mean and notable standard deviation indicate that, for some students, media imagery may still exert influence, even if the group as a whole reports resilience. This aligns with a nuanced interpretation: students endorse body respect and gratitude strongly, but resistance to cultural or media standards may be less uniform—likely reflecting differences in platform exposure, appearance comparison habits, or sensitivity to idealized imagery.

Physical Appearance

The Physical Appearance domain shows a more mixed pattern—generally positive, but less uniformly high than Body Appreciation. The highest item in this domain is "I feel comfortable with my weight when I'm with my friends" (M = 3.80, SD = 1.01). This suggests that body comfort may be strongest in supportive peer contexts, where acceptance and familiarity reduce evaluative pressure. The other items fall in the moderate-to-high range: confidence about appearance in public (M = 3.52, SD = 0.98) and satisfaction with body size when meeting new people (M = 3.54, SD = 1.10) indicate that students generally feel socially presentable and not strongly threatened by first impressions.

However, the lowest item within this domain—"I feel that my physical appearance reflects who I am as a person" (M = 3.40, SD = 1.11)—signals a subtle distinction: students may be reasonably comfortable with appearance, yet less inclined to treat it as a central marker of identity. This can be interpreted positively, insofar as it suggests that appearance is not the sole or dominant basis of self-definition. At the same time, the

relatively high standard deviations for this domain (often above 1.00) indicate substantial individual variation, implying that some students likely attach stronger identity meaning to appearance, while others do not. Similarly, "I'm generally pleased with how I look in photos and mirrors" (M = 3.46, SD = 1.17) reflects moderate endorsement and relatively wide dispersion—an important indicator that image-based self-evaluation (mirrors, photos) remains a psychologically sensitive space for many young adults, even when general body appreciation is high.

Body Shape and Social Physique

The Body Shape/Social Physique domain largely supports the conclusion of high body image, though it also reveals the most socially evaluative vulnerability points. The strongest item is "I am comfortable with the appearance of my physique or figure" (M = 3.63, SD = 0.90), followed by "I am comfortable with how my body appears to others" (M = 3.53, SD = 0.92) and "I feel that my body shape represents a healthy version of myself" (M = 3.51, SD = 0.96). These results suggest that students possess a relatively stable sense of bodily comfort and interpret their body shape in terms of health and acceptability, rather than shame or persistent dissatisfaction.

Yet the clearest low point in this domain—and one of the lowest in the table overall—is "I feel at ease when my body is being evaluated or seen by others during [activities]" (M = 3.13, SD = 1.11). This item is interpretively central because it captures evaluative exposure, where the body becomes visible and implicitly judged. The comparatively lower mean and higher SD indicate that comfort declines in contexts resembling public scrutiny (e.g., physical activities, situations involving visibility of body movement or shape). This does not negate the overall positive body image but suggests that many students may still experience situational self-consciousness when the body is socially "on display." Similarly, "I do not worry about wearing clothes that show my body shape" (M = 3.43, SD = 1.09) indicates moderate comfort, again pointing to context-dependent sensitivity around visibility and judgment.

Overall synthesis and literature alignment

Overall, Table 3 presents a constructive body image profile: students report strong body appreciation, coupled with generally positive but context-sensitive confidence regarding appearance and social physique. The pattern is especially notable for its emphasis on respect and gratitude—dimensions of body image that are widely recognized as protective and psychologically adaptive. This aligns with Tylka et al. (2022), who

emphasize that body appreciation—marked by respect, acceptance, and gratitude—is associated with healthier self-perception and adaptive functioning. At the same time, the lower means on items involving public evaluation and media influence are consistent with the view that even individuals with generally positive body image may still show vulnerability in high-comparison or high-visibility settings, a pattern also reflected in the broader literature on young adults' appearance-related self-evaluations (Wang et al., 2022).

Taken together, Tables 1 to 3 describe a student cohort characterized by moderate social media use (with habitual use most salient), moderate self-esteem (strongest in performance-related confidence but comparatively weaker in appearance-related self-appraisal), and generally high body image, especially in body appreciation. These descriptive patterns are important because they indicate that students' engagement with social media is largely routine, while their self-evaluations and body-related attitudes remain broadly functional and positive at the group level. The next step in the analysis is to move beyond "levels" and determine whether these constructs are statistically related. Accordingly, Table 4 presents Pearson's correlation coefficients assessing the magnitude and significance of the associations among social media use, self-esteem, and body image among Psychology students.

4.4 Relationships among Social Media Use, Self-Esteem, and Body Image

Table 4 summarizes the bivariate associations among social media use, self-esteem, and body image using Pearson's r. Overall, the results indicate that social media use is not significantly associated with either self-esteem or body image, whereas self-esteem and body image exhibit a statistically significant positive relationship of moderate magnitude. This pattern suggests that, within this sample of Psychology students, individual differences in self-esteem correspond meaningfully with differences in body image, while differences in

social media use—at least as measured in this study—do not show reliable statistical alignment with either outcome variable.

First, the correlation between social media use and self-esteem is very weak and non-significant ($r = 0.094$, df = 190, $p = 0.193$). The direction of the coefficient is positive, but the effect size is trivial and the probability value exceeds the conventional 0.05 threshold. In practical terms, this indicates that students reporting higher social media use do not systematically report higher or lower self-esteem than students reporting lower use. The finding supports a more cautious interpretation of social media as a psychological variable: it suggests that general patterns of use may be insufficient to explain self-esteem differences unless the analysis accounts for more proximal mechanisms (e.g., upward social comparison, internalization of ideals, validation-contingent self-worth) or contextual conditions (e.g., peer support, digital literacy, offline stressors). In short, within this cohort, social media engagement appears routine (as shown in descriptive results), but it is not statistically coupled with students' self-esteem levels.

Second, the association between social media use and body image is near zero and likewise non-significant ($r = 0.038$, df = 190, $p = 0.602$). The extremely small coefficient indicates an absence of meaningful linear relationship: higher or lower social media use does not correspond to appreciable differences in body image scores. This result is particularly notable because common narratives often assume that heavier social media use is necessarily linked to poorer body image. The current finding suggests that such a relationship is not observable at the level of general use in this sample. One plausible interpretation is that students' body image—especially given the high body appreciation reported in Table 3—may be shaped more strongly by stable personal and social resources than by overall frequency or habitual engagement with social platforms. It also implies that any social media–body image linkage may depend on content and process variables not directly captured by an

Table 4. Bivariate Correlations Among Social Media Use, Self-Esteem, and Body Image (Pearson's r, df=190)

	Pearson R	p-value
Self-Esteem vs Social Media	0.094	0.193
Body Image vs Social Media	0.038	0.602
Body Image vs Self-Esteem	0.451	<0.001

aggregate measure (e.g., appearance-focused feeds, comparison orientation, or exposure to idealized bodies).

In contrast, the relationship between self-esteem and body image stands out as the only statistically meaningful association in the matrix. The correlation is moderate and statistically significant ($r = 0.451$, $df = 190$, $p < .001$), indicating that students who report higher self-esteem also tend to report more positive body image. This coefficient suggests a substantive alignment between internal self-evaluation (including confidence, social comfort, and appearance-related self-regard) and body-related attitudes such as appreciation and comfort with one's physique. Importantly, the magnitude is not merely statistically significant; it is also practically interpretable as a moderate association, meaning that self-esteem is a psychologically relevant correlate of body image within this population.

This result is consistent with prior evidence indicating that higher self-esteem is associated with greater body appreciation and more positive appearance evaluations. Khalaf et al. (2021), for instance, reported that university students with stronger self-esteem tend to exhibit healthier body-related attitudes, supporting the present finding that self-esteem and body image move together in the expected direction. Meanwhile, the non-significant correlations involving social media use align with emerging findings that general social media use is not a stable predictor of body image or self-esteem across contexts; instead, relationships tend to appear more consistently when studies examine problematic use patterns, comparison behaviors, or appearance-centered exposure rather than use broadly defined. Thus, taken as a whole, Table 4 indicates that self-esteem is the key correlate of body image in this dataset, whereas social media use, as operationalized here, does not show statistically reliable associations with either construct.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The present study examined the levels and interrelationships among social media use, self-esteem, and body image among Psychology students. Descriptive results indicated moderate social media use, moderate self-esteem, and generally high body image, particularly in the domain of body appreciation. When these constructs were tested for association, the correlational analysis revealed a clear pattern: social media use was not significantly associated with self-esteem or body image, while self-esteem showed a moderate, statistically significant positive association with body image. Taken together, the findings suggest that in this cohort, students' body-related

perceptions are more closely aligned with broader self-evaluative resources than with social media use as broadly operationalized.

A central result of the study is the absence of a statistically significant relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Although social media engagement was present and largely habitual, it did not covary meaningfully with students' self-esteem scores. This outcome is consistent with the growing recognition that "social media use" is not a uniform psychological exposure. Even when use is frequent, its relationship to self-esteem may depend on the quality and psychological function of engagement (e.g., comparison-driven browsing, validation-contingent posting, supportive communication, or informational use). The descriptive profile in Table 1 suggests that students' strongest tendency involves routine checking and daily integration, while the more psychologically loaded elements—validation-seeking and emotional dependence—remain moderate. This combination may explain why self-esteem differences are not systematically reflected in overall usage differences: students can be high in habit without being high in self-worth contingency. In settings where social media serves mainly as a communication infrastructure, routine use may be insufficient to differentiate students' underlying self-evaluations.

Similarly, the nonsignificant relationship between social media use and body image indicates that body image among these Psychology students does not vary systematically with their level of reported social media use. This finding is important because it counters a simplistic assumption that higher use necessarily corresponds to poorer body image. A more plausible interpretation is that body-image outcomes are more sensitive to content exposure and interpretive processes (e.g., internalization of appearance ideals, upward comparison, engagement with highly curated influencer content) than to general engagement or time spent. In the present dataset, students report relatively strong body appreciation (Table 3), including respect for the body and gratitude for its functionality. Such a profile may reflect psychological resources that buffer students from the appearance-based pressures typically associated with social platforms. It is also possible that the relatively moderate levels of gratification/validation seeking reduce vulnerability to appearance comparison cycles, thereby diminishing any observable association between use and body image.

In contrast, the study found a statistically significant and moderate positive relationship between self-esteem and body image, suggesting that students who view themselves more positively also tend to evaluate their bodies more positively. This result is theoretically coherent and consistent

with evidence that body image is not solely an aesthetic judgment but is embedded in broader self-regard and identity-related evaluation. Khalaf et al. (2021) similarly report that higher self-esteem is associated with greater body appreciation and more favorable appearance evaluations among university students. The present finding therefore supports the view that self-esteem functions as a meaningful correlate—or psychological companion—of body image in young adults. In practical terms, students' body-related comfort appears more strongly linked to their internal self-evaluations than to their general level of social media engagement.

Importantly, the correlational results are also consistent with the descriptive pattern across Tables 1–3. Students show moderate self-esteem with particularly strong performance-related confidence, but comparatively weaker comfort in speaking up in academic discussions (Table 2). Meanwhile, body image is high overall, with the strongest scores in body appreciation and more moderate comfort in socially evaluative contexts (Table 3). These patterns suggest that students' body image is generally adaptive but context-sensitive, and that self-esteem may provide a stabilizing foundation for maintaining positive body attitudes, particularly in social settings. The significant self-esteem–body image relationship may therefore reflect the role of global self-regard in shaping how students interpret appearance-related cues and manage evaluative pressure.

From an institutional and student development perspective, the findings point to practical directions. First, the consistent link between self-esteem and body image indicates that interventions aimed at strengthening self-esteem—especially balanced self-regard rooted in competence, social belonging, and self-acceptance—may also support healthier body image. Second, while social media use did not correlate significantly with the outcomes, Table 1 still indicates that habitual use is high; thus, student programs may benefit from emphasizing reflective and intentional use rather than framing social media as uniformly harmful. Media literacy initiatives could focus on recognizing curated content, managing comparison triggers, and promoting supportive online interactions. Third, the lowest self-esteem item—limited comfort in sharing ideas in class—suggests a developmental opportunity for the academic program. Structured low-stakes participation activities, supportive discussion formats, and communication skill-building may help students translate internal academic confidence into visible engagement,

potentially strengthening both social confidence and overall self-evaluation.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. The study is cross-sectional and correlational; therefore, findings indicate statistical association rather than directionality. Measures rely on self-report, which may be influenced by social desirability or individual differences in self-awareness. In addition, the operationalization of social media use captures broad engagement tendencies (habit, validation, dependence) but does not directly measure platform-specific exposures, appearance-centered content, or comparison behaviors that may be more proximal predictors of body image and self-esteem. Future research may therefore examine content type (appearance-focused versus informational), comparison orientation, and protective factors such as social support, self-compassion, or media literacy as moderators. Subgroup analyses (e.g., by sex, year level, or intensity of appearance-related platform use) may also clarify whether certain student segments show stronger associations masked in the aggregate results.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the relationships among social media use, self-esteem, and body image among Psychology students at First City Providential College. The results indicated moderate levels of social media use and self-esteem, alongside a generally high level of body image, particularly in the domain of body appreciation and students' reported ability to resist unrealistic appearance standards. Correlational analysis further showed that social media use was not significantly associated with self-esteem, and social media use was not significantly associated with body image. These findings suggest that, within this sample and as operationalized in the study (habitual use, social gratification/validation, and emotional/psychological dependence), social media engagement does not show a reliable statistical alignment with students' self-esteem or body-image evaluations.

In contrast, the study identified a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between self-esteem and body image, indicating that students with higher self-esteem also tend to report more positive body image. This result underscores the salience of internal self-evaluative resources in shaping students' body-related attitudes. The

findings support the view that, at least in this cohort, body image is more closely associated with self-esteem than with general social media use.

5.2 Recommendations and Proposed Program

Based on the findings—particularly the moderate levels of self-esteem and the significant association between self-esteem and body image—future research is encouraged to examine more specific social media mechanisms, such as passive scrolling versus active posting, exposure to appearance-focused content, and social comparison tendencies, which may be more proximal predictors of psychological outcomes than general social media use. Qualitative methods may also be incorporated to clarify the emotional and identity-related processes that accompany online engagement. Replication using broader samples across year levels, academic programs, and institutions is recommended to assess the stability of the observed non-significant relationships.

From an institutional perspective, a proposed Guidance and Student Development intervention, the REAL Program (Recognize, Evaluate, Accept, and Live), is recommended for future implementation and evaluation. The program is designed to strengthen students' self-esteem, reinforce positive body appreciation, and promote reflective and literate engagement with digital environments. Importantly, because the present study is correlational, the REAL Program is presented as an action plan derived from the findings, and its effectiveness should be assessed in a subsequent program evaluation or intervention study (e.g., pre–post design, process monitoring, and participant feedback).

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