

Exploring Gender Differences, Perceptions, and Behaviors: The Interplay Between Social Media Addiction and Social Appearance Anxiety Among Young Adults

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Abstract

The pervasive influence of social media has significantly impacted the mental health and well-being of young adults, particularly through increased social media addiction (SMA) and social appearance anxiety (SAA). Our study investigates the relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety among young adults, highlighting the interplay between compulsive social media use and concerns about physical appearance. A sample of 549 undergraduate students from Turkey, including 339 females and 210 males, completed the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) and the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS). Data were analyzed using correlation, independent t-tests, and linear regression to explore the relationships and differences between variables. Our study found significant relationships between SMA and SAA, with higher levels of addiction linked to increased appearance anxiety. Social comparison tendencies and photo-editing behaviors were also associated with higher SMA and SAA. No significant gender differences were observed, suggesting a universal impact of social media on these psychological issues. The findings underscore the intertwined nature of SMA and SAA, emphasizing the need for comprehensive interventions that address both aspects to improve mental health outcomes. Promoting positive self-comparisons and reducing photo-editing behaviors online can help mitigate the negative effects of social media use on young adults' mental well-being.

Keywords: social media addiction, social appearance anxiety, university students, mental health, body image concern

1. Introduction

In recent years, the pervasive influence of social media has profoundly affected the mental health and well-being of young adults. Our study

examines the relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety, shedding light on how compulsive social media use exacerbates concerns about physical

appearance among young adults. Social media platforms, with their visual-centric nature and constant stream of idealized images, create an environment where users are continually exposed to unattainable standards of beauty and success. This exposure can lead to increased feelings of inadequacy and anxiety about one's appearance, as suggested by several studies (Koç et al., 2023; Onat Kocabiyık, 2021b; Zhang et al., 2023). By exploring this relationship, our research aims to highlight the psychological impact of social media on young adults, a demographic particularly vulnerable to these influences.

The significance of investigating social media addiction and its link to social appearance anxiety lies in its relevance to contemporary societal dynamics. Previous research has established a strong association between problematic social media use and various mental health issues, including depression and anxiety (Hou et al., 2019; Shensa et al., 2017; Zhao & Zhou, 2020). Additionally, studies have explored the impact of social media addiction on social appearance anxiety, demonstrating that excessive use of social media can exacerbate concerns about physical appearance and lead to heightened anxiety (Caner et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2023; Kurunç & Şahin, 2023). However, there is a need to extend these findings to different cultural contexts. Our study specifically focuses on Turkish young adults, providing empirical evidence that supports and expands upon previous research. By examining this relationship in a Turkish sample, our study aims to highlight cultural nuances and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how social media addiction impacts social appearance anxiety across diverse populations.

The problem statement of this research focuses on how addictive behaviors related to social media usage contribute to heightened social appearance anxiety among young adults. Given the visual-centric nature of platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where users are often judged based on their appearance, it is imperative to investigate the psychological impact of these interactions (Fitzgerald et al., 2022; Koç et al., 2023). The problem extends to identifying mediating factors that exacerbate this relationship, such as self-esteem and social comparison tendencies. Previous studies have shown that self-comparison on social media platforms can lead to decreased self-esteem and

increased anxiety (Kim et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021; Yue et al., 2022). Our study is needed to provide empirical insights into these dynamics, guiding interventions aimed at reducing the negative impacts of social media on mental health.

The necessity of our study is further underscored by the existing gap in the literature concerning the intersection of social media addiction and social appearance anxiety. While previous research has explored the individual impacts of social media addiction and appearance anxiety, few studies have integrated these constructs to examine their combined effect on young adults' mental health (Levinson et al., 2013; Lyvers et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2023). By addressing this gap, the study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how digital environments influence psychological well-being, particularly among young adults navigating critical developmental stages. Our research will fill a significant void in the existing literature and provide a basis for future studies to build upon.

The current trends of increasing social media usage among young adults, coupled with rising concerns about mental health, make this study particularly relevant. Digital platforms continue to evolve and integrate deeper into daily life, leading to higher instances of social media addiction and its associated mental health issues (Cohen et al., 2016; Khatimah & Ryan, 2023; White-Gosselin & Poulin, 2024). Understanding the impact of these platforms on users' psychological states becomes imperative. Our research not only aims to fill existing gaps but also to provide actionable insights for developing targeted interventions to support young adults in managing social media use and mitigating its negative effects on their mental well-being. By linking the concepts of social media addiction and social appearance anxiety through theoretical frameworks such as the Social Comparison Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory, our study offers a timely and relevant examination of an increasingly important issue (Onat Kocabiyık & Donat Bacioğlu, 2022; White-Gosselin & Poulin, 2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender Differences

Research has consistently shown that gender differences exist in social media addiction, with females generally exhibiting higher levels of addiction compared to males. The addictive

components of social media usage have been highlighted as a potential risk factor for mental health issues, which were more prevalent among females (Shensa et al., 2017). During the COVID-19 pandemic, young women exhibited higher levels of social media addiction and its associated negative mental health outcomes (Zhao & Zhou, 2020). Additionally, self-esteem played a mediating role in the impact of social media addiction on mental health, a factor that could be influenced by gender-specific social pressures experienced by females (Hou et al., 2019). The lack of self-control, contributing to social media addiction, was found to be more pronounced in females, leading to higher levels of distress and mental health issues (Koç et al., 2023). Despite these consistent findings, some studies have shown no significant relationship between gender and social media addiction, suggesting the need for more nuanced research across different demographics (Lim et al., 2021). Furthermore, it has been noted that females often engage more in social media activities like liking posts, commenting, sharing, and following individuals with similar interests, which could contribute to higher perceived addiction levels (Allahverdi, 2022). In contrast, males have been found to exhibit higher levels of addiction to internet gaming, suggesting that the type of online activity may also play a role in gender differences in addiction (Giordano et al., 2023). This disparity highlights the importance of considering the specific context and nature of social media use when examining gender differences in addiction. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H¹: Social media addiction differs in terms of gender.

Social appearance anxiety also exhibits notable gender differences. Social appearance anxiety was significantly higher in females and often linked to perfectionism and fear of negative evaluation (Levinson et al., 2013). This anxiety was frequently associated with body image concerns and eating disorders, as females are more susceptible to societal pressures regarding appearance (Gao et al., 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, increased social media use among females was linked to higher levels of appearance anxiety, emphasizing the role of social comparison in exacerbating these concerns (Caner et al., 2022). Furthermore, self-compassion has been identified as a protective factor that can mitigate the impact of appearance anxiety on social anxiety, providing

potential intervention strategies (Gao et al., 2023). However, some studies have found that males also experience high levels of social appearance anxiety, particularly in contexts where physical appearance is heavily scrutinized, such as sports or performance settings (Ermiş & İmamoğlu, 2019). These findings highlight the complex interplay between gender, societal expectations, and psychological well-being. Despite the significant body of research, gaps remain in understanding how cultural, social, and individual factors intersect to influence gender differences in social appearance anxiety. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H²: Social appearance anxiety differs in terms of gender.

2.2 Perceptions on the Effect of Use Social Media on Appearance

Social media addiction has been extensively linked to negative perceptions of physical appearance. Research has demonstrated that excessive social media use exposes individuals to idealised body standards, which can lead to heightened body dissatisfaction. For instance, those who are highly addicted to social media often have higher body mass index (BMI) values and engage in unhealthy eating behaviours such as emotional and external eating, which further exacerbates negative body image (Ayyıldız & Şahin, 2022). Additionally, the mechanisms of reinforcement and punishment inherent in social media platforms contribute to anxieties related to physical appearance, as users seek validation through likes and comments, reinforcing negative body perceptions (J. Wang & Zhang, 2023). The correlation between social media addiction and psychological factors such as narcissism, depression, and low self-esteem further complicates this relationship, suggesting that these issues mediate the impact of social media addiction on body image (Soraci et al., 2023). Moreover, social withdrawal has been shown to influence social media addiction both directly and indirectly through negative body image, adding another layer of complexity to this dynamic (S. Liu, 2023). These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of social media addiction's influence on physical appearance, necessitating a holistic approach to understanding and addressing these issues. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H³: Social media addiction differs in terms of

perceptions on the effect of use social media on physical appearance.

Social appearance anxiety, the fear of being negatively evaluated based on one's appearance, significantly influences the relationship between social media use and body image. Individuals with high social appearance anxiety are more prone to problematic social media behaviours, including excessive selfie-taking and frequent updates on physical appearance, in an effort to manage their anxiety (Boursier et al., 2020). This constant comparison with idealised images and the relentless pursuit of social validation can lead to increased feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with one's appearance. Furthermore, the interaction between social appearance anxiety and other psychological factors such as alexithymia and self-esteem can exacerbate body dissatisfaction (Gori & Topino, 2023). Studies have shown that social media addiction can lead to emotional distress, further impacting perceptions of physical appearance (Yazdani et al., 2022). Additionally, the effects of social media on body image are not uniform across all users, with factors such as gender and individual differences playing significant roles (Boursier et al., 2020). Research indicates that social appearance anxiety amplifies the negative effects of social media addiction on physical appearance, suggesting a complex interplay of psychological variables that warrants further exploration. By understanding these dynamics, more effective interventions can be developed to mitigate the adverse impacts of social media on individuals' body image and overall well-being. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H⁴: Social appearance anxiety differs in terms of perceptions on the effect of use social media on physical appearance.

2.3 Social Comparison Tendencies in Social Media

Social media addiction has been shown to correlate significantly with social comparison tendencies, impacting the mental health and well-being of young adults. Research highlighted that excessive use of social media often leads to prioritizing online interactions over real-life connections, resulting in heightened social life suffering and mental health issues (Onyeizu et al., 2022). This phenomenon is compounded by the complex interplay of various factors, including age, gender, intensity of use, social comparison tendencies, stress, empathic concern,

conscientiousness, and depression, which collectively contribute to over 50% of the variance in social media addiction (Dailey et al., 2020). Studies have also found a significant relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem, where excessive use can lead to lower self-esteem due to increased social comparison tendencies (Pawar & Shah, 2019). Furthermore, individuals with narcissistic traits and lower self-esteem are more likely to engage in excessive social media use, seeking validation and affirmation through online interactions to address underlying psychological needs (Andreassen et al., 2017). The intricate relationship between social media addiction, self-esteem, general belongingness, and social comparison emphasizes how these platforms provide ample avenues for individuals to engage in social comparison, affecting their emotional well-being either positively or negatively (Kavaklı & Ünal, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H⁵: Social media addiction differs in terms of social comparison tendency.

Social appearance anxiety, similarly, has been linked to social comparison tendencies, particularly in the context of body image and self-objectification. Excessive social media use significantly predicts engagement in body comparison behaviors, which in turn influences body esteem levels and sleep quality (Abdalqader & Joseph, 2020). This relationship is particularly pronounced among female university students, where higher social media use correlates with increased body comparison and appearance anxiety. Research found that social comparison and obsessive thinking significantly predict social media addiction, highlighting the impact of these factors on users' behavior patterns and emotional responses (Onat Kocabıyık, 2021a). Moreover, social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, which showcase images of appealing peers, intensify social comparison tendencies, leading to feelings of hope and admiration or sadness and pity, depending on whether the comparison is upward or downward (Workman et al., 2020). Studies also suggest that social appearance anxiety is positively associated with social comparison tendencies, where individuals experiencing appearance-related concerns are more inclined to engage in comparing themselves to others on social platforms (S. Liu, 2023). This suggests that appearance anxiety not

only affects psychological well-being but also perpetuates a cycle of social comparison that can exacerbate anxiety and depressive symptoms. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H₆: Social appearance anxiety differs in terms of social comparison tendency.

2.4 Appearance Dissatisfaction

Research has consistently shown that social media addiction is closely linked to appearance dissatisfaction. Internalising media ideals and engaging in appearance comparisons have been significant factors contributing to body dissatisfaction, often associated with social media addiction (Rodgers et al., 2015). This notion was further supported by findings that social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, which are image-centric, were strongly associated with body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms (Griffiths et al., 2018). There was also a significant relationship between alexithymia and social media addiction, mediated by body image concerns such as body dissatisfaction, underscoring the psychological factors involved (Gori & Topino, 2023). Furthermore, perceived information overload among social media users could lead to fatigue, frustration, and dissatisfaction, suggesting that excessive use of social media could exacerbate negative emotions and dissatisfaction, potentially extending to appearance dissatisfaction (Dai et al., 2020). Other studies indicated that excessive social media use negatively impacts self-esteem and fosters social comparison, media fear of missing out, and appearance anxiety, all of which exacerbate body dissatisfaction (Bissell & Chou, 2023; Suhud et al., 2023). Although the existing literature provides a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics, there remains a need for further research on the effects of social media addiction on appearance dissatisfaction and potential interventions to mitigate these impacts. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H₇: Social media addiction differs in terms of appearance dissatisfaction.

Social appearance anxiety has also been identified as a significant factor contributing to appearance dissatisfaction. It has been highlighted that social appearance anxiety, which involves the apprehension of negative judgment from others, can exacerbate appearance dissatisfaction (Turel et al., 2018). Further evidence demonstrated that social

appearance anxiety significantly predicts various aspects of appearance dissatisfaction, including body dissatisfaction, bulimia symptoms, shape concern, weight concern, and eating concern (Levinson & Rodebaugh, 2012). This strong relationship between social appearance anxiety and appearance dissatisfaction is evident in multiple studies, which found that social appearance anxiety significantly impacts body image concerns and dating anxiety (Seekis et al., 2020; Swami et al., 2022). Moreover, the intensity of exercise, discrepancy between current and desired physical states, and eating attitudes significantly predict dissatisfaction with appearance, highlighting the role of physical state discrepancies in appearance anxiety (Blažev et al., 2020). However, gaps remain in understanding how social appearance anxiety intersects with different demographic variables, such as age and cultural background, and the potential protective factors that could mitigate its negative effects. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H₈: Social appearance anxiety differs in terms of appearance dissatisfaction.

2.5 Photo-Editing Behavior

Social media addiction has been identified as a significant factor influencing photo-editing behaviour. Researchers have found that excessive engagement with social media platforms can heighten the propensity to alter one's appearance in photos. For instance, individuals with high social media usage were more likely to use photo editing applications and express a desire for cosmetic surgery, suggesting a link between digital self-presentation and real-life aesthetic changes (Chen et al., 2019). Additionally, the constant exposure to idealized images and the pressure to conform to societal beauty standards on social media have been shown to increase users' tendencies to engage in photo-editing activities (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). This behaviour is often driven by the desire to enhance self-image and receive positive reinforcement in the form of likes and comments, further perpetuating the cycle of social media addiction and photo manipulation (Zhou, 2023). The findings indicate a clear pattern: as social media use intensifies, so does the inclination to edit photos, reflecting the deep-rooted impact of digital interactions on self-perception and behaviour. However, there is a need for more nuanced

studies that explore how different types of social media content and platforms specifically affect photo-editing tendencies. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H⁹: Social media addiction differs in terms of photo-editing behaviour.

Social appearance anxiety has also been closely associated with photo-editing behaviour. Studies have demonstrated that individuals who experience higher levels of social physique anxiety and body-related shame are more likely to spend considerable time editing their selfies (Gilliland et al., 2018). This behaviour serves as a coping mechanism to mitigate their appearance-related concerns and achieve an idealized version of themselves online. Furthermore, self-objectification and evaluation anxiety have been significant predictors of photo manipulation, indicating that individuals who frequently worry about their physical appearance are more prone to altering their photos (Mustafa & Akram, 2022). The relationship between social appearance anxiety and photo-editing behaviour underscores the psychological impacts of societal pressures and the need for further exploration into how these factors influence digital self-presentation (Gioia et al., 2023). Moreover, existing literature suggests that media literacy could play a crucial role in mitigating these effects, as individuals with higher media literacy are less likely to engage in appearance comparisons and photo editing (Mingoia et al., 2019). According to these findings, if social appearance anxiety affects photo-editing behaviour, then individuals experiencing higher social appearance anxiety will engage more in photo-editing activities. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H¹⁰: Social appearance anxiety differs in terms of photo-editing behaviour.

2.6 Social Media Addiction and Social Appearance Anxiety

The intricate relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety has been extensively examined in recent literature, revealing significant correlations and psychological impacts. It was found that social media addiction is significantly linked to increased social appearance anxiety, particularly in contexts where self-perception and attachment styles play crucial roles (Bayraktar & Balcı Çelik, 2023). Research suggested a bidirectional relationship between social media

use and social appearance anxiety, with each factor exacerbating the other (Caner et al., 2022). Studies indicated that social appearance anxiety and automatic thoughts are strong predictors of social media addiction, while psychological well-being does not significantly contribute to this model (Aslan & Tolan, 2022). Furthermore, it was highlighted that social media addiction leads to psychological distress, including depression and anxiety, which can negatively impact relationship satisfaction and potentially increase social appearance anxiety (Satıcı et al., 2023). Traits such as alexithymia, narcissism, and social anxiety were also associated with social media addiction, shedding light on their potential link to social appearance anxiety (Lyvers et al., 2022). The specific impact of social media on females was noted, with increased appearance anxiety attributed to the pressures of self-presentation and online communication (S. Liu, 2023). Despite these insights, further research is necessary to fully understand the causal pathways and underlying mechanisms driving the relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H¹¹: There is a relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The population of this study consisted of young adults between the ages of 18-25 years who are undergraduate students in Faculties of Sport Sciences in Turkey. The sample was composed of 549 young adults who are currently enrolled as undergraduate students in the Faculties of Sport Sciences in Konya province. Among the participants, 339 were females and 210 were males. The participants were selected using a simple random sampling method to ensure that every individual in the population had an equal chance of being included in the study. This sampling technique was employed to enhance the representativeness of the sample and to generalize the findings to the broader population of undergraduate students in the Faculties of Sport Sciences across Turkey. The demographic characteristics of the participants were systematically recorded and analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the sample. The age and gender distribution were considered important factors in examining the relationships between social media addiction,

social appearance anxiety, and other related variables within this specific demographic. The use of a simple random sampling method strengthens the reliability and validity of the study's findings by minimizing selection bias and ensuring a diverse and representative sample.

3.2 Measures

The measures used in this study included the SMAS (Çömlekçi & Başol, 2019) and the SAAS (Doğan, 2011). Additionally, several questions were prepared to measure variables in the demographic section. These questions included: "Do you think social media has an impact on appearance?" to assess perceptions on the effect of social media use on appearance; "Do you compare the appearance of people you come across on social media with your own appearance?" to measure social comparison tendencies in social media; "Do you feel uncomfortable with your appearance?" to evaluate appearance dissatisfaction; and "When you want to share a photo on social media, do you make changes (filter, photoshop, etc.) on that photo?" to examine photo-editing behavior. These tools and questions were designed to comprehensively capture the relationships between social media addiction, social appearance anxiety, and related behaviors and perceptions among the participants.

3.2.1 Social Media Addiction Scale

The SMAS, developed by Günüş (2009) and revised by Çömlekçi and Başol (2019), was used to measure social media addiction. The scale consists of seven statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The study by Çömlekçi and Başol (2019) used the LISREL 8.71 programme to perform a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The results showed that the standardised loadings of the scale were between 0.52 and 0.86 and all values were significant ($t > 1.96$). Furthermore, the scale was found to be a valid and reliable instrument following the analysis ($\chi^2/df = 54.40/14 = 3.88$, RMSEA = 0.078, NFI = 0.96, NNFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.95, AGFI = 0.89). The analysis revealed that the internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) of the social media addiction scale was 0.850.

3.2.2 Social Appearance Anxiety Scale

The SAAS was developed by Hart et al. (2008) to measure individuals' social appearance anxiety. The scale is a 16-item, 5-point Likert-type, self-report scale. It consists of cognitive, affective

and behavioural statements about individuals' appearance anxiety. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Doğan (2011). To determine the psychometric properties of the the SAAS, it was conducted exploratory and CFA criterion-related validity, item analysis, test-retest, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and test split methods. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) yielded a single-factor structure explaining 53.4% of the total variance. The factor loadings of the scale statements were found to vary between 0.35 and 0.87. The CFA was conducted to determine whether the factor structure of the original form would be confirmed in a sample of Turkish university students revealed that the model showed an adequate fit. The fit indices of the model obtained in the CFA were examined and it was confirmed that the minimum Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 143.79$, $N = 254$) was significant. The fit index values were as follows: RMSEA = 0.051, NFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, RFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.93 and AGFI = 0.90.

3.3 Data Collection Process

The data collection process for this study was conducted systematically to ensure accuracy and reliability. After obtaining ethical approval from the relevant institutional review boards, data were collected from undergraduate students in the Faculties of Sport Sciences in Konya province. Surveys were administered during regular class hours to maximize participation and minimize disruption. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses, with informed consent obtained from all. The survey included standardized and validated instruments such as the SMAS and the SAAS to measure relevant variables. Trained researchers supervised the data collection to answer any questions and ensure accurate completion of the surveys. Completed surveys were securely stored for data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study employed several statistical techniques to examine the relationships between social media addiction, social appearance anxiety, and other relevant variables. Frequency analysis was initially conducted to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants, providing a clear overview of the sample composition.

Correlation analysis was used to explore the strength and direction of associations between the key variables, identifying significant correlations and potential patterns within the data. To compare differences between groups, an independent groups t-test was performed, assessing whether there were significant differences in social media addiction and social appearance anxiety between males and females. Linear regression analysis was employed to investigate the predictive relationships between the variables, examining how social media addiction could predict levels of social appearance anxiety.

4. Results

4.1 Normality Results

The normality of the data for both the SMAS

and the SAAS was assessed using skewness and kurtosis. For the SMAS, the skewness was 0.593 ($SE = 0.104$) and the kurtosis was 0.050 ($SE = 0.208$), indicating a moderate positive skew and a distribution close to normal but slightly peaked. Similarly, the SAAS had the skewness of 0.651 ($SE = 0.104$) and the kurtosis of -0.240 ($SE = 0.208$), suggesting a moderate positive skew and a slightly flatter distribution. According to normality thresholds, skewness values between -1 and 1 and kurtosis values between -1.5 and 1.5 are considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2014). These results indicate that the data for both scales exhibit moderate skewness and kurtosis, suggesting they are sufficiently close to a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric statistical methods are deemed appropriate for further analysis in this study (Figure 1).

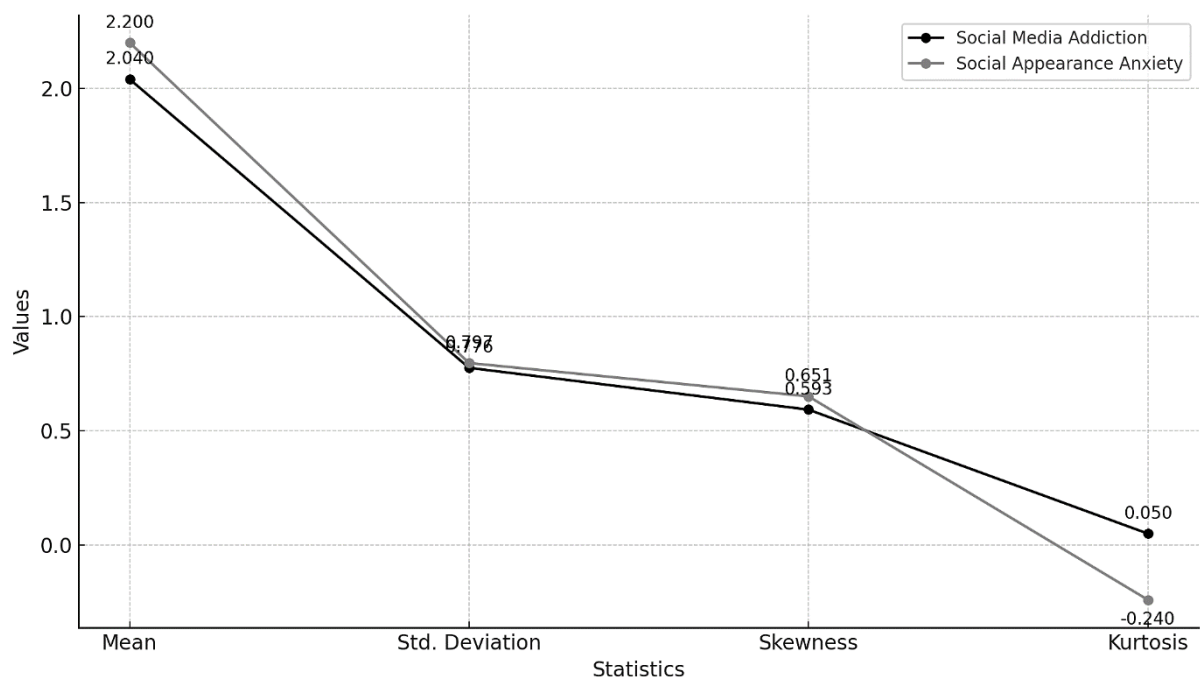


Figure 1. Normality Results

4.2 Correlation Matrix Results

The correlation matrix (Figure 2) results show that gender influences how individuals perceive the impact of social media on appearance, with a significant positive relationship ($R = 0.161$, $p < 0.001$). People who perceive a stronger impact of social media on appearance are more likely to engage in social comparison ($R = 0.394$, $p < 0.001$), feel dissatisfied with their appearance ($R = 0.187$, $p < 0.001$), and use photo-editing tools ($R = 0.251$, $p < 0.001$). Those who frequently compare themselves to others on social media

are also more likely to be dissatisfied with their appearance ($R = 0.373$, $p < 0.001$) and edit their photos ($R = 0.245$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, individuals who are unhappy with their appearance are more likely to edit their photos before sharing them on social media ($R = 0.233$, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, higher levels of social media addiction are associated with lower perceptions of its impact on appearance ($R = -0.089$, $p < 0.05$), less social comparison ($R = -0.241$, $p < 0.001$), lower appearance dissatisfaction ($R = -0.317$, $p < 0.001$), and less photo-editing behavior ($R = -0.170$, $p < 0.001$).

Lastly, individuals with higher social appearance anxiety are less likely to compare themselves to others ($R = -0.249, p < 0.001$), feel dissatisfied with their appearance ($R = -0.421, p <$

0.001), and edit their photos ($R = -0.218, p < 0.001$), but are more likely to be addicted to social media ($R = 0.419, p < 0.001$).

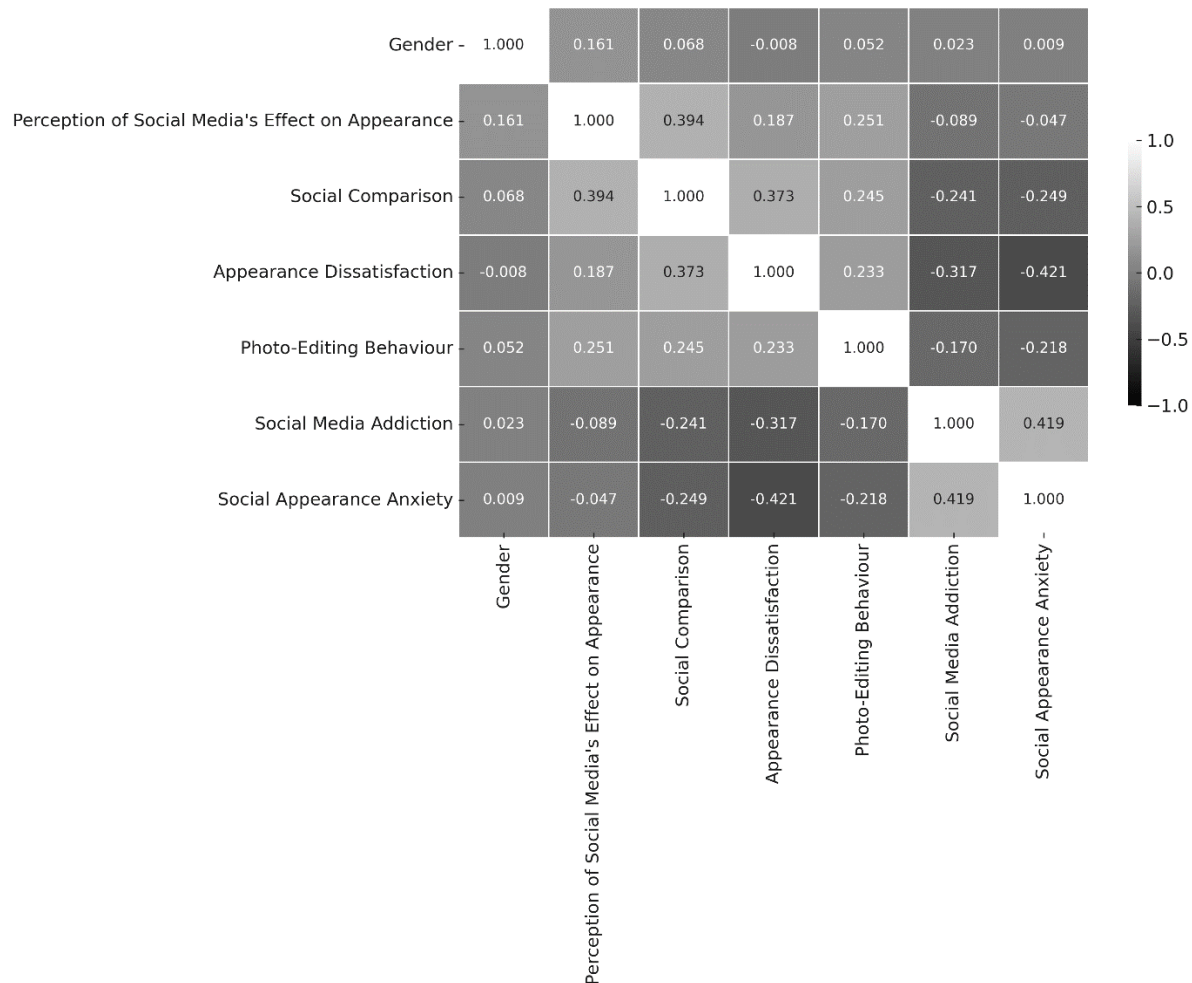


Figure 2. Correlation Results

4.3 Independent Samples T-Test Results

The analysis of the data using independent groups t-tests (Figure 3) revealed several significant differences. In terms of gender, there were no significant differences found for either Social Media Addiction (SMA) or Social Appearance Anxiety (SAA), so these results were not included in this study as a figure of merit. When examining the perceptions on the effect of social media use on appearance, there was a significant difference in SMA scores, with those perceiving an effect scoring higher, although no significant difference was found for SAA scores. Regarding social comparison tendencies, individuals who reported engaging in social comparison had significantly higher

scores for both SMA and SAA compared to those who did not. Appearance dissatisfaction also showed significant differences, with those dissatisfied with their appearance having higher mean scores for both SMA and SAA. Similarly, in the context of photo-editing behavior, individuals who edited their photos had significantly higher scores for both SMA and SAA compared to those who did not. These findings suggest that perceptions of social media's impact on appearance, social comparison tendencies, appearance dissatisfaction, and photo-editing behaviors are all important factors associated with higher levels of social media addiction and social appearance anxiety.

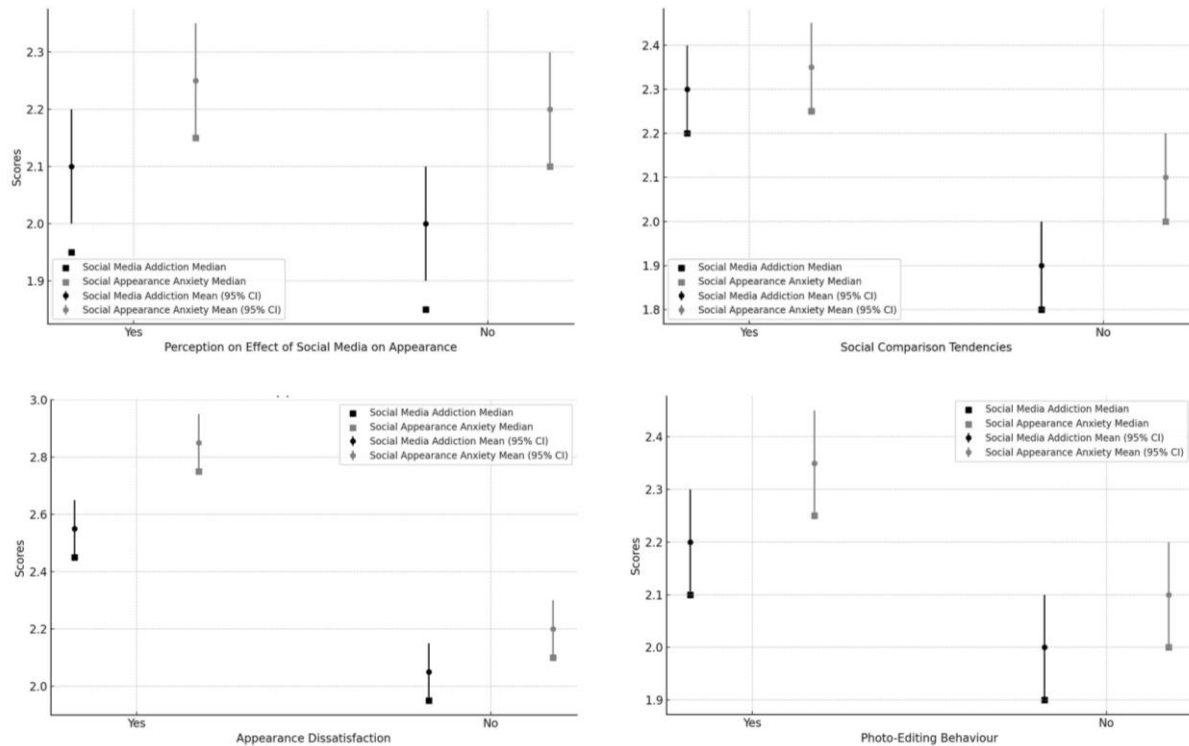


Figure 3. Independent Samples T-Test Results

4.4 Regression Results

The linear regression analysis (Figure 4) illustrated in the graph demonstrates the effect of Social Media Addiction on Social Appearance Anxiety. The regression line indicates a positive relationship, suggesting that as Social Media Addiction increases, Social Appearance Anxiety also tends to increase. This relationship is statistically significant, as indicated by the regression table. The R^2 value of 0.176, displayed on the graph, signifies that Social Media Addiction explains 17.6% of the variance in

Social Appearance Anxiety. Although this indicates a meaningful relationship, it also suggests that other factors contribute to Social Appearance Anxiety. The scatter plot of data points shows individual variations around the regression line, reflecting the moderate predictive power of Social Media Addiction on Social Appearance Anxiety. This finding underscores the importance of considering social media use in understanding factors that influence social appearance concerns.

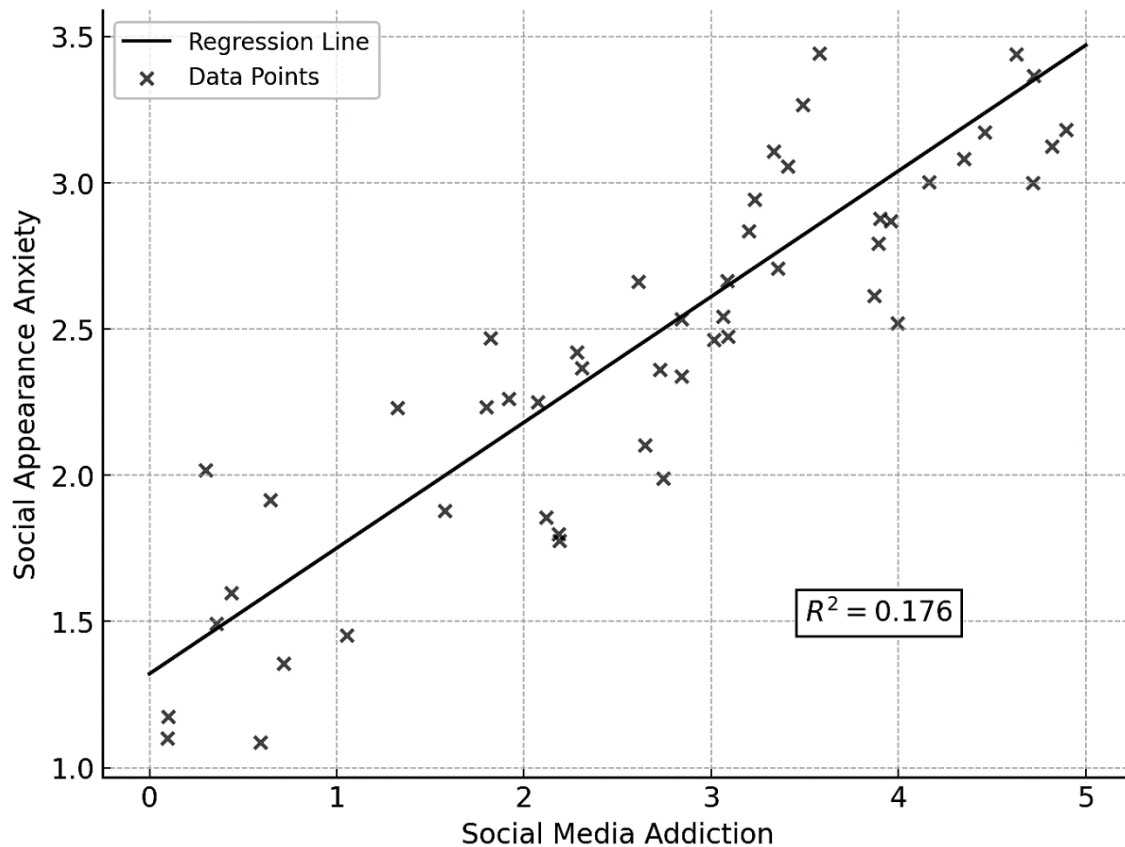


Figure 4. Regression Results

5. Discussion

The positive correlation between gender and perceptions of social media's impact on appearance underscores the need to consider gender differences when addressing body image issues exacerbated by social media. This aligns with existing research highlighting how societal pressures and media portrayals of beauty standards disproportionately affect women, leading to heightened body dissatisfaction and social comparison tendencies (Hou et al., 2019; Shensa et al., 2017). Furthermore, individuals who perceive a stronger impact of social media on their appearance are more likely to engage in social comparison, feel dissatisfied with their appearance, and use photo-editing tools. These behaviors perpetuate a cycle of negative self-evaluation and the pursuit of idealized beauty standards, as supported by social comparison theory and recent studies on the psychological impacts of social media (Fox & Vendemia, 2016; Rodgers et al., 2015). Interestingly, higher levels of social media addiction were associated with lower perceptions of social media's impact on appearance, less social comparison, lower

appearance dissatisfaction, and reduced photo-editing behavior. This inverse relationship suggests that individuals deeply immersed in social media may develop desensitization to its negative impacts or engage with social media in ways that do not exacerbate appearance concerns. Conversely, those with higher social appearance anxiety are less likely to compare themselves to others, feel dissatisfied with their appearance, and edit their photos, yet are more likely to be addicted to social media. This complex dynamic highlights the need for multifaceted interventions that address both the addictive nature of social media and the appearance-related anxieties it fosters, emphasizing the importance of promoting positive self-perception and reducing reliance on appearance-modifying behaviors online (Gao et al., 2023; Onat Kocabiyik, 2021a).

Our study indicated that neither social media addiction nor social appearance anxiety significantly differ in terms of gender. This result contrasts with previous research suggesting gender differences in these areas, with some studies indicating higher levels of social media addiction and appearance concerns

among females due to societal pressures and media portrayal of beauty standards (Şar, 2018; Sevindi, 2020). The lack of significant gender differences observed in this study may imply that the impact of social media on addiction and appearance anxiety affects individuals similarly regardless of gender. Other studies have reported mixed results, with some finding no significant gender differences (Kocak et al., 2023) while others observed higher prevalence rates among females (Allahverdi, 2022; Yue et al., 2022). This finding contributes to the literature by suggesting that interventions and preventive measures for social media addiction and appearance anxiety should be inclusive and not gender-specific, thereby addressing the universal impact of social media on these psychological issues (Giordano et al., 2023).

Participants who perceive social media use as having an effect on physical appearance were found to exhibit higher levels of social media addiction, while no significant difference was observed in social appearance anxiety. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that the perception of social media's impact on physical appearance can intensify engagement and addiction to these platforms (Güney Sabancı et al., 2021; S. Liu, 2023). The notion that social media influences physical appearance perceptions has been supported by studies showing that negative body image and social withdrawal correlate with social media addiction (Ayyıldız & Şahin, 2022). Further research has suggested that the portrayal of idealized body images on social media contributes to this perception, leading to increased addiction levels (Soraci et al., 2023). Practitioners can use this information to develop awareness programs that address misconceptions about social media's influence on physical appearance, potentially reducing individuals' reliance on these platforms for self-validation.

Our study revealed that social media addiction and social appearance anxiety significantly differed in terms of social comparison tendencies, with higher levels observed among participants who frequently compare themselves to others on social media. This finding is consistent with social comparison theory, which suggests that individuals' self-esteem and satisfaction can be adversely affected when they constantly compare themselves to others (Kavaklı & Ünal, 2021). Previous studies have

supported this notion, showing that social comparison on social media platforms is linked to increased levels of anxiety and depression (Onyeizu et al., 2022; Pawar & Shah, 2019). Additionally, research has indicated that narcissistic traits and lower self-esteem are associated with higher social media use, driven by a need for validation through comparison (Andreassen et al., 2017; Workman et al., 2020). Our study advances the understanding of how social comparison on social media contributes to mental health issues, reinforcing the need for interventions that promote positive self-comparisons and reduce the tendency for unhealthy comparisons (Wai & Osman, 2019).

Higher levels of social media addiction and social appearance anxiety were observed among participants who were dissatisfied with their appearance. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the correlation between body dissatisfaction and increased social media use, where individuals turn to social media for validation and comparison (Griffiths et al., 2018). Studies have demonstrated that internalizing media ideals and engaging in appearance comparisons contribute to body dissatisfaction, a factor closely associated with eating disorders and other mental health issues (Rodgers et al., 2015; Vuong et al., 2021). Research has also indicated that individuals with higher appearance dissatisfaction are more likely to engage in social media activities that exacerbate these feelings, such as posting edited photos (Pan et al., 2022; Scully et al., 2023). Our study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence supporting the relationship between appearance dissatisfaction and social media-related anxieties, suggesting that addressing body dissatisfaction is crucial in interventions aimed at reducing social media addiction (Yang et al., 2020).

Participants who engage in photo-editing behavior on social media were found to exhibit higher levels of both social media addiction and social appearance anxiety. This finding is supported by existing literature, which suggests that editing and posting photos can amplify appearance concerns and lead to increased social media engagement (Wick & Keel, 2020). Studies have indicated that photo-editing behaviors are associated with higher levels of self-objectification and appearance-related anxiety, contributing to a cycle of addiction and dissatisfaction (Chen et al., 2019; Fox &

Vendemia, 2016). Further research has shown that individuals who frequently edit their photos are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and engage in behaviors aimed at improving their appearance, such as considering cosmetic procedures (Agrawal & Agrawal, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2019). These findings suggest that interventions should focus on promoting authenticity and reducing the pressure to alter one's appearance online, thereby mitigating the negative impacts of photo-editing behaviors on mental health (Wang et al., 2023).

A positive relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety was identified, corroborating previous studies that have linked these phenomena (Levinson & Rodebaugh, 2016). This relationship underscores the intertwined nature of social media use and appearance-related anxieties, suggesting that addressing one issue could potentially alleviate the other. Studies have indicated that individuals with high levels of social appearance anxiety are more likely to engage in excessive social media use as a means of seeking validation and reducing their anxiety (Hai & Yang, 2022; Liu et al., 2022). Research has also shown that social media platforms that emphasize visual content can exacerbate appearance concerns and lead to increased anxiety and depression (Fardouly et al., 2015; Gao et al., 2023). Our study fills a gap by providing contemporary data on the relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety, highlighting the importance of integrated interventions that address both issues to promote better mental health outcomes (Seekis et al., 2020).

5.1 Limitations

Despite the significant findings and contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences, and the sample, limited to undergraduate students from Konya, may not be representative of the broader population of young adults. The reliance on self-reported measures may introduce bias, such as social desirability bias, and the focus on visual-centric platforms like Instagram and TikTok overlooks the impact of other social media types. Additionally, the study did not consider other influencing factors, such as personality traits, family dynamics, and offline social interactions, which could provide a more holistic understanding of social media addiction

and social appearance anxiety. Cultural factors and societal norms regarding appearance and social media use were not deeply explored, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings across different cultural contexts.

5.2 Future Research

Future research should aim to further elucidate the complex interactions between social media use, addiction, and various psychological outcomes. Longitudinal studies are recommended to understand the causal relationships and long-term effects of social media addiction and social appearance anxiety. Investigating the impact of different types of social media platforms and content (e.g., image-based vs. text-based) on these issues could provide more nuanced insights. Additionally, examining the role of cultural and societal factors in shaping social media behaviors and perceptions would help to contextualize findings across diverse populations. Research should also explore the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as media literacy programs and digital detox strategies, in reducing social media addiction and appearance-related anxieties. Furthermore, studies incorporating qualitative methods could provide deeper insights into the personal experiences and motivations behind social media use and its psychological impact. Finally, expanding the focus to include other demographic variables, such as age, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, could enhance the generalizability of findings and inform more targeted intervention strategies. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological implications of social media and inform more effective prevention and treatment approaches.

6. Conclusion

Our study has provided significant insights into the multifaceted relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety, highlighting the roles of gender, perceptions of social media's impact on physical appearance, social comparison tendencies, appearance dissatisfaction, and photo-editing behaviors. Contrary to some prior research, no significant gender differences were observed, suggesting a universal impact of social media on these psychological issues. The perception of social media's influence on physical appearance was

found to exacerbate addiction, though not appearance anxiety, emphasizing the need for awareness programs to address these misconceptions. Social comparison tendencies and appearance dissatisfaction were identified as critical factors contributing to higher levels of addiction and anxiety, reinforcing the importance of interventions that promote positive self-comparisons and address body dissatisfaction. Photo-editing behaviors were also linked to increased addiction and anxiety, suggesting that promoting authenticity online could mitigate these effects. Finally, the positive relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety underscores the intertwined nature of these issues, indicating that comprehensive interventions targeting both aspects are essential for improving mental health outcomes. These findings contribute to the existing literature and provide valuable implications for practitioners and policymakers in developing inclusive and effective strategies to combat the negative effects of social media use.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics Statement

This study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University, Institute of Social Sciences. The certificate number for the approval is 2024/456.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

Table 1. Descriptive Results of Participants Demographics and Social Media Behaviors

Variables	<i>f</i>	%	<i>SD</i>
1. Gender			
(1) Female	339	61.7	.486
(2) Male	210	38.3	
2. Age			
(1) 18-21	293	53.4	.499
(2) 22-25	256	46.6	
3. Do you think social media has an impact on appearance?			
(1) Yes	337	61.4	.487
(2) No	212	38.6	
4. Do you compare the appearance of people you come across on social media with your own appearance?			
(1) Yes	222	40.4	.491
(2) No	327	59.6	
5. Do you feel uncomfortable with your appearance?			
(1) Yes	118	21.5	.411
(2) No	431	78.5	
6. When you want to share a photo on social media, do you make			

changes (filter, photoshop, etc.) on that photo?			
(1) Yes	203	37.0	.483
(2) No	346	63.9	
Total	549	100.0	

Table 2. Normality Results

Statistics	Social Media Addiction Scale	Social Appearance Scale	Anxiety
Sample	549	549	
Mean	2.04	2.20	
Standard deviation	0.776	0.797	
Skewness	0.593	0.651	
Std. error skewness	0.104	0.104	
Kurtosis	0.0500	-0.240	
Std. error kurtosis	0.208	0.208	

Table 3. Correlation Matrix Results

Variables	Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Gender	<i>R</i>	—						
	<i>p</i>	—						
2 Perception of Social Media's Effect on Appearance	<i>R</i>	0.161***	—					
	<i>p</i>	< .001	—					
3 Social Comparison	<i>R</i>	0.068	0.394***	—				
	<i>p</i>	0.111	< .001	—				
4 Appearance Dissatisfaction	<i>R</i>	-0.008	0.187***	0.373***	—			
	<i>p</i>	0.854	< .001	< .001	—			
5 Photo-Editing Behaviour	<i>R</i>	0.052	0.251***	0.245***	0.233***	—		
	<i>p</i>	0.227	< .001	< .001	< .001	—		
6 Social Media Addiction	<i>R</i>	0.023	-0.089*	-0.241***	-0.317***	-0.170***	—	
	<i>p</i>	0.594	0.037	< .001	< .001	< .001	—	
7 Social Appearance Anxiety	<i>R</i>	0.009	-0.047	-0.249***	-0.421***	-0.218***	0.419***	—
	<i>p</i>	0.829	0.275	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Differences in Gender

Variables	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Effect Size
Social Media Addiction	Female	2.02	-.534	547	.594	-.046
	Male	2.06				
Social Appearance	Female	2.19	-.216	547	.829	-.019

Anxiety Male 2.21

Table 5. Differences in Perceptions on the Effect of Use Social Media on Appearance

Variables	Group	M	t	df	p	Effect Size
Social Media Addiction	Yes	2.09	2.09	547	.037	.183
	No	1.95				
Social Appearance Anxiety	Yes	2.23	1.09	547	.275	.095
	No	2.15				

Table 6.

Variables	Group	M	t	df	p	Effect Size
Social Media Addiction	Yes	2.26	5.80	547	< .001	.504
	No	1.88				
Social Appearance Anxiety	Yes	2.44	6.00	547	< .001	.522
	No	2.03				

Table 7. Differences in Appearance Dissatisfaction

Variables	Group	M	t	df	p	Effect Size
Social Media Addiction	Yes	2.51	7.81	547	< .001	.811
	No	1.91				
Social Appearance Anxiety	Yes	2.84	10.86	547	< .001	1.13
	No	2.02				

Table 8. Differences in Photo-Editing Behaviour

Variables	Group	M	t	df	p	Effect Size
Social Media Addiction	Yes	2.21	4.04	547	< .001	.357
	No	1.94				
Social Appearance Anxiety	Yes	2.42	5.22	547	< .001	.462
	No	2.06				

Table 9. Linear Regression Results

Predictor	Estimate	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Intercept	1.321	15.2	< .001		
Social Media Addiction	0.430	10.8	< .001	0.343	0.495

Note. $R = 0.419$; $R^2 = 0.176$