

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON BODY IMAGE: A REVIEW STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century is referred to as the "Digital Age." Through the internet, people can quickly access information, keep up with developments worldwide, have fun, and chat with loved ones. The concept of social media, which includes social networks, has become one of the most important parts of the internet today. While the internet provides countless benefits to individuals, it can also bring various harms. One of the primary concerns is body image. The filters provided by social media, flawless-looking photos, and idealized bodies that are far from reality affect individuals' perceptions of their bodies and create a negative impact. These filters and idealized bodies may lead individuals to struggle with accepting their physical characteristics and attempting to conform to the standards portrayed on social media. The "**ideal**" body images presented in the media can lead to issues such as disordered eating behavior, body image dissatisfaction, feelings of guilt and shame, unhappiness, anxiety, and depression, especially in women.

This study addresses the negative effects of social media networks on body image.

Keywords: Social media, body image, filters, idealized bodies, standards, disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, guilt, shame, unhappiness, anxiety, depression.

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Introduction

With the rapid development of communication technologies, the Internet has become one of the most crucial elements of modern communication systems. Especially since the 1990s, the widespread adoption of the Internet has accelerated, capturing the interest of large audiences alongside the rise in popularity of social media. (Vural & Bat, 2010)

The Internet offers advantages such as fast access to information, the ability to follow global developments, options for having a pleasant time, and the ease of communicating with loved ones, which have been decisive factors in people's preference for the online environment (Selimi, Saracevic, & Useini, 2020).

Social media is shaped by tools enabling users to share information, opinions, interests, and interact. These tools include social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and facilitate communication over the Internet (Selimi & Useini, 2019). Especially prevalent among young people, social media platforms accelerate communication and allow them to expand their social circles. These opportunities provided by the Internet make life easier and communication more accessible (Selim & Ali, 2023). Social media has become a fundamental tool in daily communication, enabling people to connect with individuals from different places, cultures, and lifestyles.

However, although the Internet provides numerous benefits to individuals, it can also cause various harms. The most important of these is body perception. The "ideal" body images presented in the media can lead to eating behavior and body image problems in women, as well as body/self-confidence, feelings of guilt and shame, unhappiness, anxiety, and depression.

Research indicates that individuals often feel envious of the lives of users they follow on social media platforms and experience significant despair and sadness when comparing their lives to theirs. This situation leads individuals into psychological turmoil and triggers feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence. (Tezci & İçen, 2017).

1. Social Media

Social media are forms of electronic communication that include applications and websites used to share content such as information, ideas, blogs, personal messages, photos, articles, and videos and to create online communities. (Derenne & Beresin, 2018)

Many people use social media to meet their friends, look at their friends' photos and messages, send and receive messages, have fun, spend their free time, access information, and follow the current agenda.

Users who watch videos, share photos, or listen to music on social media platforms also communicate with other users, play games, and acquire information on various topics. (Dalkıran, 2016)

Social media offers people a wide space to share their thoughts and experiences. "For young people, the 'likes' they receive in the virtual world can provide a strong sense of accomplishment and community acceptance."

The purposes of using social media vary from person to person. While some people prefer to be alone, remain passive, or avoid face-to-face social environments, for others, it is a platform to be followed by others, approved by virtual communities, and socialize. (Hazar, 2011)

According to the 2023 data from We Are Social and Hootsuite institutions, 64.4% of the world's population actively uses the internet, and 59.4% use social media. While social media platforms provide users with emotional

satisfaction from various perspectives, uncontrolled usage can lead to addiction. (Çat, Koçat, & Toprak, 2021)

According to Savcı, in addition to its many benefits, excessive internet use can trigger problems such as distancing from real social environments, loneliness, and impairment in psychosocial functioning. (Savcı, 2017)

In general, excessive internet usage can result in the inability to control the desire for excessive internet use, diminishing the importance of time spent offline, extreme irritability and aggression when deprived of internet access, and the deterioration of one's work, social, and family life.

Users' addiction to social media brings some problems. Face-to-face meetings have been replaced by virtual environments. Studies have observed that social media addiction leads to spending leisure time, which results in academic failure. (Cabral, 2011; Menayes, 2015; Kırık ve diğerleri, 2015; Hawi & Samaha, 2017; Akt (Baz, 2018)

Internet addiction in students is associated with problems such as loss of interpersonal communication, anger, aggression, and irritability. In addition, this situation can cause various harms to the person, including mental health problems (anxiety, depression, and loneliness), physical (sleep disorders, nutrition), familial (decrease in family relationships and increased distance between family members), work (decrease in work productivity, layoffs) and education (decrease in school grades). (Mohammadkhani, Alkasi, Pourshahbaz, Dehkordi, & Sefat, 2017)

In a study conducted by Lepik and Mengel (2019) with the participation of 42 volunteer university students, they asked the students to apply social media detox for five days. Students recorded their social media detox experiences during these five days. As a result of the research, despite the temporary disconnection from social media for these five days,

participants expressed anxiety and negative emotions brought about by exposure to social media. At the same time, participants stated that time slowed down, and they experienced boredom and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), which refers to the fear of missing out on developments on social media. (Diker, 2020)

The rapid rise of social media platforms has changed how we present and perceive the normal form of our social relationships. The social media environment has become an area where people who cannot express their emotions daily or want to attract attention can share to reflect their emotional states. While individuals have difficulty expressing themselves daily, thanks to social media environments, they can express themselves whenever and however they want. (Ünlü, 2018)

1.1. Duck Syndrome

People who use social media excessively and are addicted to it, no matter how challenging their daily lives are, present themselves very differently on social media and try to prove that they are perfect. They are shown as if they effortlessly achieved their desired emotions and successes. However, this causes some psychological effects. For example, people distract themselves from reality by projecting a perfect life on social media. This condition is called 'duck syndrome'.

The disorder in which people behave differently between their real and social media experiences is called 'duck syndrome.'

The definition of Duck Syndrome emerged from watching ducks swim in the water. For outside observers, ducks appear to be floating very calmly. However, looking from under the water, their legs are working quickly. Calmness is only on the surface; underwater, there is much more effort to move forward. (Sun, 2018)

Experts explain this situation's psychology: *no one wants to show their bad sides and failures. People like to present themselves as perfect on social media, no matter how bad their lives are.*

Even if you feel good when your social media posts receive a high number of "likes," you may hide symptoms of anxiety and depression from yourself and others. Similarly, such posts on social media can negatively affect followers and cause them to question themselves, thinking, "Am I the only one feeling anxious? Am I a failure?" (Atar & Ulusoy, 2020)

2. Body Image

Paul Schilder (1920), who first used the concept of body image, defined it as "the picture of our own body that we create in our minds, that is, the picture of how the body appears to ourselves." (1950, p.11) (Gleeson & Frith, 2006)

Body image is defined as individuals' "inner views" about their bodies (Cash 2004), their attitudes about the size, shape, and aesthetics of their bodies (Cash et al., 1997), and their thoughts about the attractiveness of their bodies (Muth & Cash, 1997). It is a multidimensional concept that includes attitudinal (e.g., body dissatisfaction), perceptual (e.g., distorted beliefs about body size), and behavioral (e.g., trying to lose weight with certain supplements) features. (Verplanken ve Velsvik, 2008; Akt. (Çakıcı, Mercan, & Nazlıgül, 2021)

All the positive or negative evaluations a person has about his body constitute his body perception. Although it is thought that body perception and body dissatisfaction in individuals generally begin in adolescence, research conducted in recent years indicates that body perception starts in the preschool period.

Most empirical research on body dissatisfaction in the body image and social comparison literature has investigated the impact of exposure to idealized bodies in traditional media types such as magazines, television, and music video clips on young women's body dissatisfaction (Myers & Crowther, 2009). This research revealed that exposure to the slim-ideal body was associated with more negative body image among girls and women. Akt. (Bayköse & Esin, 2019)

People desire to be liked by their environment to exist or feel good and beautiful.

According to what beauty expresses in society, people try to put their bodies into this idealized body shape (Aslan D., 2004)

2.1. Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory was first developed by psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954. According to Festinger (1954), humans have an inherent drive to evaluate themselves. Individuals seek objective conditions to assess their abilities in line with this drive. Without these conditions, individuals' resort to comparing themselves with others to evaluate themselves. (Kaya & Tıraş, 2021)

According to the theory, known as the "social comparison theory," this process occurs automatically when individuals encounter images of themselves or their relatives whom they aspire to emulate. Consequently, individuals become motivated to achieve those goals. (Aslan S. H., 2001)

Similarly, although social comparison is based on self-development motives (Wills, 1981), comparisons made on social media are associated with anxiety and depression (Feinstein et al., 2013; Lee, 2014), body image concerns (Powell et al., 2018), low self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2015)

and negative mood (Lee, 2014; Lim & Yang, 2015) are associated with results. (Büyükmumcu & Ceyhan, 2020)

The theory of Festinger and Katz (1954), which is still applicable today, states that people will evaluate themselves by comparing them with one another. In particular, Bessenoff (2006) says that people who experience body dissatisfaction or internalize the media's thin-ideal body image are particularly open to social comparison.

A study conducted in 2021 on participants between the ages of 15 and 35 found that the more they compared themselves with the people they follow on social media, the more dissatisfied they were with their bodies. The researchers also noted that if subjects were dissatisfied with their bodies, this could increase their urge to compare themselves to others on social media. (Jiotsa, Naccache, Duval, Rocher, & Bronnec, 2021)

In adolescent girls who compare themselves to the excessively thin images presented in the media and perceive these images as real ideals, body dissatisfaction, excessive preoccupation with thinness, and eating disorders may develop. (Botta, 1999)

The "ideal" body images presented in the media can lead to eating behavior and body image problems in women, as well as body/self-confidence, feelings of guilt and shame, unhappiness, anxiety, and depression. It is reported that these negative emotions are especially related to bulimic symptoms. (Aslan S.H.,2001)

Award-winning author and body image, leadership, and media literacy expert *Claire Mysko* explains: "Social media do not cause poor self-esteem, but social media has the power to contribute to the current situation. Social media creates an environment where disordered thoughts and behaviors truly come to life and thrive." (Weiner, 2016)

Literature has discussed the effect of the media on body image, mostly in connection with the socio-cultural approach. This approach points to a triple family, friends, and media model.

3.Negative Effects of Social Media on Body Image

In the media, thinness is generally idealized, and being thin is associated with attractiveness, social acceptance, success, and self-control in women.

In today's world, where screens and social networks are the most watched things, it is becoming increasingly common for individuals to have a distorted perception of reality and the emergence of various mental problems. Television programs, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and social media platforms are among the many factors that affect body perception.

Negative body image can have a strong impact on a person's well-being. It can affect a person's social life, self-confidence, and mood. In severe cases, negative body image can lead to eating disorders or body dysmorphia.

Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a condition in which a person is excessively preoccupied with a body defect that does not exist, but that he thinks exists, or, even if there is a body defect, he exaggerates it. This preoccupation causes significant distress or impairment in functioning. (Ray, Demirkol, & Tamam, 2012)

One of the things that individuals with symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder look at most is the mirror. Therefore, screens and mirrors looked at unusually frequently can be considered key points in this problem.

Many studies have shown a positive relationship between social media use and negative body image. (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016) Findings of

studies have shown that negative body image significantly predicts suicidal imagination in adolescents. (Brausch & Muehhlenkamp, 2007)

Studies have shown that familial factors contribute to increased body image problems. In addition, the family's frequent cynicism about appearance-related issues during adolescence may cause body dissatisfaction to persist. (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007) Similarly, negative family relationships are closely associated with developing eating disorders. (Erriu, Cimino, & Cerniglia, 2020)

Bayköse and Esin (2019) state that women frequently make comparisons about their appearance on Facebook, and therefore, body image concerns among women may increase (Bayköse & Esin, 2019).

Similarly, Mabeet et al. (2014) found that people who care about getting more comments on their photos and using “social media hashtags” more frequently in their posts were associated with negative body image.

Köklü (2019) examined the desire to be liked and the purposes of sharing on social media in his study with university students. The results obtained determined that the desire to attract attention, the desire to be known and recognized by others, the desire to be liked by the participants who share on social media, and the aim of getting comments and likes are at a high level. (Köklü, 2019).

Most studies have focused on young women, as they are traditionally the age group most affected by body image concerns.

However, there are also studies involving men. For example, one study found that men who reported looking at men's #fitspo content more often compared their appearance to others and cared more about having muscle. (Fatt, Fardouly, & Rapee, 2019)

Social networking networks, which are rapidly growing and have become an integral part of daily life, increase the focus on consumer society's perception of perfection, emphasizing the importance of looking attractive to comply with rigid and often unattainable ideals. Therefore, social networks, which enable reaching ideal standards, have become a standard method for the individual to build himself. (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018)

The person realizes the ideal body experience through the perfect bodies he encounters on social media. It is believed that young women and men invest more and more in their appearance and **that unfulfilled desires lie** behind women's ideals of being young, firm, and slim and men's efforts to have muscular and low body fat. (Taşdelen, 2020)

A study of 100 girls and adolescents aged 13-18 shows that increased social media use causes anxiety related to unhealthy body image, increased image comparison, and negative appearance perception. In addition, it is revealed that body image is negatively affected by the increase in the time spent on the screen, independent of the use of social media. (Yang, Wang, Tng, & Yang, 2020)

The "#" (hashtag) symbol in a photograph's description allows posts to reach wider audiences. An examination of the #fitspiration (fitness inspiration) tag frequently used by influencers on Instagram revealed that most of the 600 photos analyzed contained images of a uniform slim and muscular body. (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015) In another study investigating the effect of this tag on the body perception of 130 female university students, it was observed that individuals exposed to photos with this tag experienced a significant increase in body dissatisfaction. No difference was detected in the control group, as shown in the travel photos. (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015)

Studies show that among teenagers, selfies are seen as the reason for seeking plastic surgery. Compared to previous years, it was determined that there was a 10% increase in rhinoplasty procedures, a 7% increase in hair transplants, and a 6% increase in eyelid aesthetic procedures in 2013. The research also found that girls who spent more time on Facebook were more likely to have physical self-image issues and had an increased desire to lose weight. (Vats, 2015)

In a study published in 2017, researchers found that spending too much time perfecting selfies may be a sign that a person is struggling with body dissatisfaction. (Cohen, John, & Slater, 2018)

Women can also approach the bodies, sizes, looks, and images they see in advertisements in line with the opportunities provided by social networks (filters, photoshop applications) and thus adapt to new lifestyles and consumption styles. (Uğurlu, 2015)

Photographic filters and editing software are playing a new and key role in young women's lives, with 90% reporting using a filter to edit their photos before posting to even out skin tone, reshape jaw or nose, shave off weight, brighten or bronze skin, and whiten teeth. According to the research, 90% of women think that they are under pressure to look beautiful, 75% of them believe that they can never achieve photoshopped or filtered looks, and they sometimes feel "depressed" because of this situation. (Grill, 2020)

Because digital retouching applications are within reach of everyone, the increasing number of 'perfect bodies' has created and continues to create masses more dissatisfied with their bodies than ever before. (Atar & Şener, 2018) As the gap between ideal and reality created by advertisements increases, women lose self-confidence. (Wolf, 1991)

Social media can trigger feelings of inadequacy in people.

The Journal of the American Medical Association has identified a new disorder called "Snapchat dysmorphia. The term generally refers to young women resorting to plastic surgery to resemble their appearance, which has been altered by filters on platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram via social media apps. (Rajanala, Maymone, & Vashi, 2016)

Researchers suggest that the focus of social media on unrealistic beauty standards can lead to depression, narcissism, and self-esteem issues, and now, it leads to Snapchat dysmorphia. Essentially, teens with Snapchat dysmorphia feel a disconnect between their actual appearance and the images they share with the world. (Ramphul & Mejias, 2018).

A study of one hundred seventh-grade girls found that those who regularly shared selfies had more dissatisfaction with their bodies. Moreover, those who manipulated the photos using filters were found to have higher levels of body and eating-related concerns. (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, & Masters, 2015)

According to a new study, reducing social media use helps teenagers and young adults feel better about their weight and appearance. (Thai, ve diğerleri, 2023)

CONCLUSION

People desire to be liked by their environment, to exist in life, or to feel good and beautiful. In the media, thinness is often idealized; being thin is associated with attractiveness, social acceptance, success, and self-control in women.

The "ideal" body images presented in the media can lead to eating behavior and body image problems in women, as well as body/self-

confidence, feelings of guilt and shame, unhappiness, anxiety, and depression.

Various studies show that body image issues are increasing with the increase in social media use, especially among young people. Studies reveal that frequent selfie sharing and editing photos with filters are associated with body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. It is also stated that exposure to idealized beauty standards on social media can lead to psychological problems such as a lack of self-esteem, depression, and narcissistic tendencies in individuals.

All positive or negative evaluations a person has about his body constitute his body perception. Although it is thought that body perception and body dissatisfaction in individuals generally begin in adolescence, research conducted in recent years indicates that body perception starts in the preschool period.

If body dissatisfaction is not addressed at an early age, low self-confidence, unhealthy eating habits, or substance addiction may occur in middle childhood and adolescence. Therefore, examining children's body perception in preschool is crucial for early intervention. (Kale, Hurşidi, & Karaboğa, 2021)

Recommendation

- ❖ Parents, teachers, and healthcare professionals should educate adolescents about the potential impacts of social media use and promote healthy attitudes toward body image. Awareness-raising campaigns and educational seminars held in schools can help adolescents become more aware of their social media use.
- ❖ Implement school-based programs or workshops focused on media literacy and body positivity. These programs can educate

teenagers about the unrealistic beauty standards perpetuated by social media and provide strategies for building resilience against negative body image messages.

- ❖ Educating individuals, especially adolescents and young adults, about media literacy to help them critically analyze and understand the manipulative nature of images and messages portrayed on social media.
- ❖ Encourage adults to practice self-compassion and self-care strategies to cultivate a positive body image. This may include mindfulness meditation, journaling, engaging in activities that bring joy, and seeking professional support if needed.
- ❖ Encourage individuals to limit their exposure to social media, especially if it negatively affects their body image and mental health. Encouraging breaks from social media and engaging in offline activities can promote a healthier relationship with body image and self-esteem.
- ❖ Social media platforms should support content that reflects diverse body types and beauty standards and emphasize positive role models. Exposing adolescents to individuals who are represented more diversely and realistically can help reduce negative body image perceptions.

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