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SOCIAL MEDIA AND BODY IMAGE[2]

Abstract: *Social media is a communication channel that is becoming increasingly widespread. Its impact on people is gaining significance. Numerous studies have shown that social media activity can negatively affect people's emotional states. The aim of this paper is to review the literature to examine the influence of social media on body image, which is viewed as the perception of one's own body and the feelings and thoughts associated with it. Research review suggests that Facebook and Instagram use is associated with greater body image dissatisfaction. However, as the use of social media is not homogeneous and not all users are exposed to the same content, a more nuanced approach to measuring its use is required. If an individual follows physical appearance-based accounts on social networking platforms, their home pages will be filled with idealized representations of a human body, leading to more intense and frequent comparisons with other people. Such use unmistakably leads to negative body image, and the solution that stands out is education in media literacy which should develop critical and analytical skills in people.*

Keywords*: body image, media, social networks, Facebook, Instagram*

1. Introduction

Social media is a communication channel that is becoming increasingly widespread. Its impact on people is gaining significance. The correlation between social media and the mental state of users is still inexplicit, but a large number of studies illustrate their negative effect on mental well-being. It is believed that social media activity can have a negative effect on people's emotional state (Sagioglou, Greitemeyer, 2014; Fardouly et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017). Studies show that the longer people are active on Facebook, the more negative their mood later is. This effect is caused by the feeling that the user has not done anything meaningful, but nevertheless, they do not stop using social networking platforms (Sagioglou, Greitemeyer, 2014: 359).

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The effect of social media on one's own body image appears as an issue related to self-confidence and self-evaluation. This is shown by the results of longitudinal research by Shakya and Christakis, which suggests that the use of Facebook does not promote mental well-being and that, on the contrary, face-to-face social interactions have a positive effect. At time intervals of three years (2013, 2014 and 2015), the authors compared the association between several subjective measures of well-being with social media interaction and face-to-face interaction. Self-assessment of physical and mental health, general life satisfaction, and body mass index of 5208 subjects showed that Facebook use did not contribute to their well-being. This is supported by the fact that the results were consistent in all three waves of research (Shakya, Christakis, 2017). Other studies also show that Facebook use, especially passive, is correlated with different degrees of social comparison and envy (Appel, Gerlach, Crusius, 2016: 44). The social comparison theory suggests that humans have an innate tendency to assess their own progress and position in various aspects of their life. In the absence of objective standards, they compare themselves to others in order to know where they stand. According to sociocultural models of body image, people can develop dissatisfaction by constantly comparing their appearance with the appearance of others (Fardouly et al., 2015: 38). In social media, social comparison is ever-present, considering that comparison information, such as friend or follower count, is more pronounced than offline information (Appel, Gerlach, Crusius, 2016: 44).

Therefore, social media platforms tend to intensify comparison procedures due to constant exposure to idealized images of others. Thus, social media users create negative self-images, which are defined as a way of thinking and feeling about one's own body that negatively affects self-esteem, body esteem, and body satisfaction. This definition includes three constructs that are significantly associated with negative self-images. The first is self-esteem, defined as an individual's overall evaluation of themselves. The second is body satisfaction, which is defined as how one thinks about their body. The third construct is body esteem, defined as a feeling about one's own body (Barlett, Vowels & Saucier, 2008: 279).

Since the subject of this paper is the effect of social media on body image, it is first necessary to define it. Body image refers to a person's perception, feelings, and thoughts about their own body. It usually includes an assessment of body size, an assessment of body attractiveness, and emotions related to body shape and size (Grogan, 2006: 524). This definition indicates that people observe themselves through the prism of physical appearance and that this image affects them in everyday activities. Of course, there are many causes of particular physical appearances, such as health, physical activity, and lifestyle. Still, it is indisputable that the media representation of the models deviates from the "usual." Idealized human body images fill the pages of newspapers and television content and advertisements. However, media images mainly refer to celebrities who count on their physical appearance, as opposed to social media where individuals are commonly surrounded by photos of people of similar age with whom they compare themselves. This is why the forming of such attitudes by social networks is significant.

2. The Impact of Traditional Media and Social Media
on Body Image: Research Review

The impact of traditional media on human lives and all its aspects is the subject of research in various sciences and disciplines. However, long-term effects remain vague. To reach the consumer, the media and advertising contents are packaged to exude perfection. Previous research on the effects of the media on body image has shown that the mass media strongly contribute to an individual's body dissatisfaction (Franchina, Coco, 2018: 5). Similarly, the objectification theory suggests that sexual objectification of women in the media leads to self-objectification, which implies continuous examination of one's own body (McKinley, Hide, 1996: 185). The area in which the media influence causes concern is the likely consequences of certain body types on the healthy eating habits of media users. Constant focusing on slim female models, celebrities and muscular male figures leads to people becoming dissatisfied with their bodies and engaging in unhealthy behaviors in an attempt to imitate the "ideals." Giles realizes that the problem with this research is that few researchers try to determine what actually happens in subjects' minds during exposure to media images and how it leads to changes in behavior (Giles, 2011: 96).

Research from as late as the past century, such as the study of factors affecting body image carried out by Jaffee and Mahle Lutter, shows that the "ideal" beauty endorsed in the media is what young women and girls use to compare themselves with (Jaffee, Mahle Lutter, 1995: 21). Apart from idealized models, the most significant contribution to low body esteem and body dissatisfaction is social comparison, which is easily achieved through media use (Franchina, Coco, 2018: 9). Various studies focus on the role of images offered by magazines, television and music videos in relation to body dissatisfaction. Given that social media is a recent, rapidly evolving phenomenon, its impact on body image has been less explored compared to the effects of traditional media. However, there is a reason to believe that social media could have substantial effects, especially among the younger population (Burnette, Kwitowski & Mazzeo, 2017: 115). As social media are quite different in nature from traditional media, their effects on body image and how users feel about their physical appearance are also different. Compared to traditional media showing models and celebrities, social media represent the users themselves. Moreover, people on social networks often show an idealized version of themselves and remove all photos they consider unattractive. In addition, these networks are most often used to interact with people of similar age, and comparing looks with peers can especially influence the feelings about one's own body. Finally, apart from images, people often publish other appearance-related content, which could also affect body image (Fardouly, Vartanian, 2016: 1).

When it comes to body image, social media differ from traditional media in that they allow individuals to communicate with their friends within their networks (Franchina, Coco, 2018: 5). Research results document the significance of idealized models on Facebook and Instagram in shaping the body perceptions of adolescents

(Franchina, Coco, 2018; Fardouly, Willburger, Vartanian, 2018). Correlation studies consistently show that the use of social media is associated with concerns about body appearance among young women and men, and longitudinal studies conclude that this correlation could increase over time (Fardouly, Vartanian, 2016: 1).

In an experimental study, Fardouly et al. investigated the impact of using Facebook on women's mood and body image and whether these effects differ from the effects of an online fashion magazine. As their research focuses on women, Fardouly et al. point out that research has shown that women regularly assess their appearance by comparing themselves with others and that comparisons are more likely to be associated with high levels of physical dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2015: 38).

3. Social Media and Body Image: Facebook and Instagram

Awareness of the impact of modern communication channels on mental well-being in society has been growing in recent years. An example of this is the term "Facebook depression" found in the mass media, suggesting the harmful effects of social networks. The correlation between Facebook and depressed mood has recently appeared in the literature (Appel, Gerlach, Crusius, 2016: 44). The results of Tromholt's one-week experiment with 1,095 subjects also support this correlation. This study provides causal evidence that the use of Facebook negatively affects the well-being of individuals. A comparison of two experimental groups, one using Facebook and the other not using it, showed that pausing from Facebook positively affects two well-being dimensions: life satisfaction increases and emotions become more positive. Moreover, these effects have been shown to be significantly greater for heavy Facebook users, passive Facebook users, and users who tend to envy others (Tromholt, 2016: 661).

Cohen and Blaszczynski found that the use of Facebook is correlated with greater body image dissatisfaction. In their research, they compared the effects of Facebook and conventional media on body image dissatisfaction. They reported that Facebook contributes to users' comparing their physical appearance with others; whereas social media users compare themselves with peers, in conventional media, they compare themselves with models. The authors further illustrated the association between the degree of Facebook use and the risk of eating disorders and pointed out that, although platforms like Facebook did not cause eating disorders, they could be one of many factors in maintaining them by overestimating body weight and shape. Although their study did not show that the relationship between comparison with others and body image is stronger in the short term when using Facebook compared to conventional media, they conclude that effects of exposure to this social network are at least equal to the effects of exposure to conventional media. (Cohen, Blaszczynski, 2015: 9). Another important fact is that using Facebook can put women in a negative mood. The results of research by Fardouly et al. show that spending time on Facebook has led to a greater desire to change the appearance of

the face, hair, and skin in women who tend to compare their appearance with the appearance of others (Fardouly et al., 2015: 44).

Here it is necessary to point to the nature of social media and the approaches of users to using them, which seem to have been neglected in previous research. Since the use of social media is not homogeneous, and not all users are exposed to the same content, research requires a more nuanced approach to measuring its use. Thus, using Facebook includes various activities such as posting photos, sending private messages to friends, reading news and watching posts, interacting with and reacting to published content, as well as updating friends lists. If users spend most of their time on Facebook looking at attractive friends' photos, this activity can increase the degree of users' comparison in relation to their physical appearance and thus have a more significant impact on body satisfaction. However, if a Facebook user spends time reading the news, there will likely be no comparison. Similarly, on Instagram, users who follow accounts primarily focused on appearance, such as those of models and fitness bloggers, may be more preoccupied with their physical appearance than users who follow accounts that are neutral when it comes to appearance, such as travel and architecture accounts. (Cohen, Newton-John, Slater, 2017: 183). Therefore, the virtual environment the users themselves set up must be allowed for when researching the correlation between Facebook and Instagram use and appearance dissatisfaction. If an individual follows physical appearance-based social media accounts, their starting pages will be filled with idealized human body representations. Modern technologies offer the possibility of photo manipulation, and any user can intervene to change their physical appearance using free applications. Social networks (Instagram) offer filters that enhance the appearance of an individual's face, even in a video. These filters are mainly built on similar bases: pronounced cheekbones, slanted eyes, full lips, and a pronounced jawline. These characteristics are recognized as the modern ideal of beauty. In this way, people compare their physical appearance with the illusory representations of others, and beautifying changes in photographs are not always easy to notice.

A study by Kleemans et al. investigated the impact of manipulated Instagram photos on adolescent girls' body image. As with previous studies, the results of this research showed that exposure to manipulated Instagram photos directly led to a negative body image. Adolescents with higher tendencies of social comparison were especially susceptible to this. Subjects were randomly exposed to original or manipulated (retouched and edited) selfies, and, interestingly, the manipulated photos were rated more positively than the originals. In that sense, manipulated photos brought about higher body satisfaction than unedited photos. Also, the subjects recognized the use of filters and effects but did not notice body reshaping, and in both cases assessed the photos as realistic (Kleemans et al., 2018: 93).

Negative impacts on both body image and mental health appear to be stronger than the effects linked to the use of Facebook compared to Instagram. Users express significantly greater dissatisfaction when using social media focusing on visual content. Those effects appear to be stronger when use is frequent (Marengo et al, 2018: 67). Research found that users who used this network, as opposed to

those who did not, surveyed their bodies more often and compared themselves to other users (Cohen, Newton-John, Slater, 2017: 186). These effects are especially pronounced in teenage girls. The behavior of teenagers on this social network is based on posting photos and selfies and peer feedback in the form of "likes," "followers," and comments, and results in feelings of low self-esteem and insecurity. Investing efforts in self-presentation and the need to be accepted by peers who simultaneously hold the roles of audience, judge, and comparison benchmark negatively affect the self-confidence of teenage girls (Chua, Chang, 2016: 190). Such results are expected considering that Instagram is a social network based on photos that are in the foreground, while the text is very often ignored or skipped. Users attach great importance to self-presentation on Instagram, and this is shown by the fact that they make an effort when posting a photo and take care of the number of likes and comments received. In addition, when posting their photos, participants take the audience's perspective, expressing concern about how others perceive their appearance (Baker, Ferszt, Breines, 2019: 277).

Sherlock and Wagstaff explore the relationship between frequency of Instagram use, exposure to idealized images, and psychological well-being in women. In their research, they conclude that excessive Instagram use may contribute to negative psychological outcomes and poor appearance-related self-perception. The frequency of Instagram use is correlated with depressive symptoms, self-esteem, general and physical appearance anxiety, and body dissatisfaction. The relationship between Instagram use and each of these variables is mediated by social comparison orientation (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).

This topic is also dealt with by Alkadhimi who analyzes whether exposure to 'ideal' facial images on Instagram influences facial and bodily satisfaction. Research results show that exposure to 'ideal' facial images on Instagram resulted in significantly lower facial satisfaction scores (Alkadhimi, 2021). Similar to that, Skowronski, Busching and Krahé investigate links between exposure to sexualized Instagram images and body image concerns in girls and boys. Their results suggest that sexualization on Instagram might contribute to adolescents' body image concerns (Skowronski et al, 2022: 60). Exploring the effects of active social media engagement with peers on body image in young women, Hogue's and Mills's conclude that active social media engagement with attractive peers' appearance-based social media resulted in worsened body image in young women, whereas interacting with that of family had no effect on the state of body image (Hogue & Mills, 2019: 3).

Furthermore, the results obtained by Saiphoo and Vahedi indicate that body image disturbance is associated with social media use. On the other hand, their meta-analysis is more nuanced than those previously given and it provides an estimate of the strength of the relationship between social media use and body image disturbance. Wherefore they conclude that "the magnitude of this effect was not as large as might have been predicted based on previous research and common views among the public, which suggests that general social media use may not be as harmful as predicted for users in general" (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019).

Governments also recognize the pressure social media create on young people. Thus, a new law came into force in Norway this year stipulating that influential social media people cannot post edited photos without stating what they have changed in the photo. These rules will apply to all paid posts on all social media platforms and were created as part of an effort to reduce the body image pressure among young people (BBC). In addition, the Norwegian Parliament has amended the Marketing Act and the contract terms to require that the advertiser and the ad designer further ensure the ad in which the body shape, size, or skin has been changed by retouching or other manipulation is designated as such (Stortinget.no).

Instagram itself is changing its policy in that direction. To reduce the pressure on users, it introduced the option of hiding the number of likes on their own and other peoples' photos. The basic intention is to provide the user with more choice and control. The fact that the company seeks research proposals from world academics and non-profit organizations to improve its policies and products (Instagram) speaks of this.

Most of the above-mentioned authors conclude that existing research fails to thoroughly expound on the relationship between social networks and body image. Further longitudinal and experimental research is needed to determine which social media aspects are most detrimental to the human body image (Fardouly, Vartanian, 2016: 1). Although more experimental evidence is needed, available evidence suggests that media literacy programs should address the potential impact of social media on their users (Fardouly, Vartanian, 2016: 4). Media literacy is also seen as a solution by Andsager, who believes that body dissatisfaction caused by media images can be controlled by learning critical and analytical skills (Andsager, 2014: 407).

4. Conclusion

Social media platforms play a significant role in the life of a modern man. However, when it comes to mental well-being, research in recent years has reported that social media often do not bring about positive emotions. Literature review in this paper leads us to conclude that the impact of social network use and daily exposure to various idealized models and manipulated photos of celebrities and peers negatively affects one's own body image. This particularly affects women, who often experience sexual objectification in the media, resulting in self-objectification and physical appearance dissatisfaction.

A review of the available research shows that the impact of social media use on body dissatisfaction primarily depends on the nature of the social media itself. Image-based social media lead to a worse impact on users compared to those based on text. In addition, when it comes to the way of using these platforms, users' behavior determines how social networks will affect their body image. If the user interacts with content based on physical appearance, dissatisfaction and negative performance increase. Negative effects such as a negative impact on mental health and body image are amplified when the use of social media is more frequent. These

effects are also amplified when the use of social media is passive because it leads to comparison and envy. Additionally, it can be especially harmful for certain users (younger users).

Although the social media influence on concerns about body appearance is undeniable, further research is needed to determine the causes more precisely. As the time and frequency of exposure to unrealistic body images increases, the issue of developing a more negative body image may have more substantial consequences in the future.

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DRUŠTVENE MREŽE I SLIKA TELA

Apstrakt*: Društvene mreže su komunikacioni kanali koji postaju sve zastupljeniji i njihov uticaj na pojedince je sve značajniji. Brojne studije ukazuju da aktivnost na društvenim mrežama može negativno uticati na emocionalno stanje ljudi. Cilj ovog rada je pregledom literature ispitati uticaj društvenih mreža na sliku tela koja se posmatra kao percepcija sopstvenog tela i osećanja i misli u vezi sa njim. Pregled istraživanja pokazuje da upotreba Fejsbuka i Instagrama dovodi do nezadovoljstva korisnika kada je u pitanju slika tela. Međutim, kako korišćenje društvenih mreža nije homogeno i korisnici se ne izlažu istovetnim sadržajima, potreban je nijansiraniji pristup merenju njihove upotrebe. Ukoliko pojedinac na društvenim mrežama prati naloge koji se baziraju na fizičkom izgledu, njegove će početne strane biti ispunjene idealizovanim predstavama ljudskog tela što dovodi do intenzivnijeg i učestalijeg poređenja sa drugima. Takva upotreba nedvosmisleno vodi ka negativnim osećanjima u vezi sa slikom sopstvenog tela, a kao rešenje izdvaja se obrazovanje u oblasti medijske pismenosti koja bi trebalo da razvije kritičke i analitičke veštine pojedinaca.*

Ključne reči: *telesna slika, mediji, društvene mreže, Fejsbuk, Instagram*