

Investigating the Effects of Social Media on Body Image Satisfaction in Young Adults

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Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Psychology

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Lindita and Skender for their unconditional love support and encouragement. Thank you for giving me the strength not to give up and reminding me all the time that dreams do come true if you believe in them. Thank you for teaching me to believe in myself, in God, and my dreams. I could have never done this without you.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social media use and body image satisfaction in young adults and whether this relationship between these variables is different among gender. A convenience sampling was used to recruit participants via social media platforms. A total of 152 participants took part in the study consisting of 110 (72.4%) females and 42 (27.6%) males between the ages of 18 and 29. Participants completed an anonymous online survey including demographics and two questionnaires; the Body Image States Scale and Social Media Use Integration scale. A Pearson's correlation and a two-way between groups ANOVA were performed to determine the results of this study. A significant, small, negative correlation was found between social media use and body image satisfaction with a p value = .018. There was no interaction effect found between gender and social media use ($p = .078$) and the main effect for gender was non-significant ($p = .056$). Gender was not a moderating factor. The main effect for social media use was statistically significant ($p = .018$). The findings of this study are important because high levels of social media use are associated with body dissatisfaction in both males and females. Therefore, media literacy interventions could be very effective to prevent body image dissatisfaction and educate young people on how to use social media appropriately.

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Literature Review

Body Image Satisfaction and Social Comparison

Body image refers to perceptions, feelings and thoughts that individuals may have about their body. Body image is also conceptualized as incorporating body size estimation, perceived body attractiveness and emotions related to body shape and size (Grogan, 2006). Even though body image is considered as a broad construct, most of the studies in this area have predominantly focused on body weight dissatisfaction and the desire of becoming thin (Grogan, 2006). Nordqvist (2012) also describes body image as how attractive a person perceives themselves. Body image is important because having a negative body image can lead to body dissatisfaction which in turn can have a major impact on other areas of life. Body satisfaction is not only associated with physical and psychological health but also with low body satisfaction that can predict poorer health outcomes including lower self-esteem, depression and eating disorders (Paxton et al., 2006). Longitudinal studies have demonstrated that the negative impact on body dissatisfaction strongly predicts increased dieting and eating disorders, however less attention has focused on whether body satisfaction is a predictor of depressive mood and low self-esteem. Only studies on adolescent girls have demonstrated that body dissatisfaction can predict a depressive mood (Holsen et al., 2001; Johnson & Wardle, 2005) and only one study found that body dissatisfaction can decrease self-esteem (Johnson & Wardle, 2005).

The existing literature suggests that comparison between our own body and others' bodies may have an important influence on our body image. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) proposes that humans have an innate drive to compare themselves to others, which determines our evaluation of our abilities, quantities and self-worth. According to Social Comparison Theory, people tend to compare themselves to others to know where they stand. Festinger (1954) defined two types of social comparison: upward and downward social

comparison. Upward social comparison is when we compare ourselves with those who we believe are better than us. These upward comparisons can lead to negative consequences and are believed to decrease well-being (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). On the other hand, downward social comparison is when people compare themselves to others who are worse off than themselves. This comparison can lead to positive consequences and enhance subjective well-being. Even though upward comparison can produce negative outcomes such as higher body dissatisfaction and downward comparison can produce positive outcomes such as lower body dissatisfaction, research has shown that the tendency of comparing one's appearance to others overall, regardless the direction of comparison can lead to negative outcomes (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Females and thin-ideal body image

The media represents an important source of social comparison in relation to body image. It has been noted that individuals are exposed to a vast array of images through print, television and online media, which typically portray sociocultural ideals of attractiveness (Yamamiya et al., 2005). A large number of studies have been conducted to explore the impact of media exposure on body satisfaction, however the majority of this research has focused especially on female populations. Previous studies have extensively explored the way media portrays the thin woman as an ideal body shape (Holmstrom, 2004). Research suggests that exposure to ideal thin body in media is linked with body image dissatisfaction among women (Grabe et al., 2008). The ideal body image is mainly influenced by society's expectations to achieve their goal of having the thin ideal body shape (Tiwari & Kumar, 2015). The exposure to traditional ideals of beauty through the media may lead to negative thoughts about oneself, if an individual negatively compares themselves with these ideal images. For example, Richins (1991) conducted a study on female college students'

satisfaction and their own levels of physical attractiveness, in order to identify the effect of idealized images (e.g. attractive models) on fashion magazines. The evidence suggests that individuals who compared their levels of physical attractiveness to models in advertisement were found and indicated that exposure to these unrealistic images increased the comparison level for physical attractiveness, resulting in lower levels of satisfaction with their own physical attractiveness (Martin & Kennedy, 1993). Therefore, exposure to ads with idealized images increased the levels of comparison between female college students for their own physical attractiveness. Moreover, the thin ideal body is constantly rewarded for women with an ideal body image (Grabe et al., 2008). These ideal images have been overrepresented in movies, magazines and tv programmes compared other individuals. Exposure to media images portraying the thin ideal body is associated with body dissatisfaction among young women (Grabe et al., 2008). Therefore, women aim to meet the unrealistic thin ideal beauty standards as portrayed in media representing extreme thin models as idealized images (Levine & Harrison, 2004) which in turn can be unattainable and can lead to greater levels of body dissatisfaction.

It has been found that ideal images represented in fashion magazines often promote unattainable beauty standards of photo-shopped women in order to look ideal, thin and young (Holland and Tiggemann, 2016). A number of correlational and experimental studies have also supported the relationship between media exposure and body image satisfaction and disordered eating among young women. According to Strasburger et al. (2010) media and in particular advertising can influence our attitudes, behaviours and decision making resulting in various harmful consequences such as violent and aggressive behaviour (Gentile et al., 2011), consumption of unhealthy food (Harris et al., 2009) and the use of alcohol and tobacco (Nunez-Smith et al., 2010) which increases the risk of developing body and eating concerns (Harrison et al., 2000). Several meta-analyses have shown that greater media exposure of

appearance focused images in experimental and correlational studies is linked with increased levels of body dissatisfaction, disordered eating attitudes and beliefs among vulnerable individuals (Ferguson, 2013; Grabe et al., 2008; Groesz et al., 2002; Want, 2009). Media literacy (ML) interventions promoted an approach to prevent body image dissatisfaction and disordered eating in order to reduce negative media influences. Following the media literacy intervention improvements were found in body-related outcomes but not in disordered eating (McLean et al., 2016).

Males and Muscularity

While the majority of studies on body image have been focused on young women, the research has increased focus on male body shape and exposure to media. The media represents an ideal body image as thin and skinny for women, and for men the ideal body is often represented as a muscular and toned body (Furnham et al., 2002). Mass media has an important role in determining the ideal body image and often illustrates that ideal male body image is considered as muscular and tall. This representation of media's ideal male body has shown to increase the desire of men to achieve the same body shape and muscularity. A number of studies have measured men's body shape preferences and they were presented with ideal male bodies as muscular and were asked to indicate their current and ideal body image. In all of the studies, the results found that men preferred their body more muscular than their own body as an ideal body (Frederick et al., 2005; Leit et al., 2002).

Sociocultural theories of attractiveness suggest that not only women experience social and cultural pressure towards thin ideal women as portrayed in the media but also men are experiencing social and cultural pressure towards ideal male body (Swami et al., 2007). Lynch and Zellner (1999) conducted a study on male college students and found that 84% of individuals reported decreased body satisfaction and poor self-image about their own body.

The influence of television, magazines and advertising may have a negative impact on the way males perceive themselves. A survey also found that men are also influenced by celebrities on television and fashion magazines. The survey results showed that 13% of men were influenced by fashion magazines, celebrities or television (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). Moreover, Leit et al. (2001) examined male centrefold models in Playgirl magazine over three decades. They measured the reported muscle size of Playgirl of centrefolds magazine over three decades and found that over time males are growing in muscularity (Leit et al., 2001). Several studies found that not only women experience body dissatisfaction, but men are also experiencing body dissatisfaction which are associated with eating disorders (Prybock, 2000) low self-esteem and depression (McCreary & Sasse, 2000). Therefore, media exposure may be a strong predictor of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction in males and females (Morry & Staska, 2001).

Social Media, Social Networking Sites (SNS) and Body Image Satisfaction

In recent years, research in this area has expanded to accommodate the increasingly popular forms of 'new' internet-based media, and particularly to consider the impact of social media on body image. Social networking sites are defined as an online communication tool that involves a large amount of interaction with each other which allows users to create and view public profiles of their own and others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The number of social media users worldwide has increased to 3.5 billion at the beginning of 2019, with 288 million new users in 2018 (Kemp, 2020). The world's population is 7.8 billion people and the internet have 4.5 billion users. Social media allows individuals to decide how they interact on social networking sites. For example, online users can look for things or other users they are interested in and can also share, photos, videos, comment on other users' profile and share information about themselves (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Statistics show that young

adults (90%) between the ages of 18 to 29 report the highest rates of using social media platforms compared to teenagers and older adults (Perrin, 2015).

Research shows that social media may be a potential source of body image concerns such as body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness that may be associated with images exposed on social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Hendrickse et al., 2017).

While mass media exposes individuals to ideal body images of models and celebrities, social media exposes the users to images of family, friends, strangers and also themselves which are often highly edited and filtered. This may result in a tendency to engage in constant social comparison between the individual and other social media users (Fardouly et al., 2018)

Research suggests that women who compare their appearance with others on social networking sites are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction, which is a risk factor for engaging in eating disorders (Fardouly et al., 2015). Even though social media can be an excellent tool for sharing ideas and keeping up with friends there is a lot of debate about the impact social media has on body image satisfaction.

On social media people are constantly exposed to various images of individuals, online friends and numerous thin-idealized images shared online by adolescent girls and young women (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014). The 24/7 availability of social networking sites allow individuals to view, edit and create content anywhere and anytime on their mobile devices. Social networking sites are providing young people more opportunities for social comparison and dysfunctional surveillance of disliked body parts (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014). Recently researchers have become more interested in understanding body image concerns and exposure to thin-ideal images on social networking sites. Existing research demonstrates that self-presentation may be a key factor for individuals to engage on social networking sites (Manago et al., 2008). Individuals represent an idealized and unrealistic version of themselves as they wish to be seen by others on social media. For example, a study

conducted by Mendelson and Papacharisiis (2010) on college students, analysed their photos on Facebook and they found that female students are more likely to pose flirtatious and sexy in their photos by sharing similar photos as their same-sex friends. Stronge et al. (2015) conducted a cross-sectional study to compare Facebook users and non-users. They found that people who had Facebook profile reported increased body dissatisfaction than people who didn't have a Facebook account. The relationship between Facebook use and body dissatisfaction was stronger among young women (Stronge et al., 2015). Similarly, Meier and Gray (2014) found that engaging in photo-based activities on Facebook such as sharing photos or liking someone's photo were positively correlated with body image dissatisfaction in female students.

Social Media and Gender Differences

Most of the studies on body image and social media use have been conducted on female samples however research has shown that men and adolescent boys also experience body image dissatisfaction. A systematic review by Holland and Tiggemann (2016) looked at five articles to examine gender differences. These studies showed that the use of social networking sites is linked to body image. Only one study found a significant gender difference and showed that females are more likely than males to experience body dissatisfaction and that photos on Facebook cause them negative body image (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012). Other studies found no significant difference between social networking sites and body image when looking at gender differences. A study found that men and women had greater body dissatisfaction after being exposed to Facebook profiles of beautiful users (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011). Therefore, viewing attractive users on Facebook leads to negative body image than viewing less attractive users on their Facebook profile (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011). Likewise, De Vries et al. (2014) found that social media use was linked

with desire for cosmetic surgery and appearance investment in adolescent boys and girls with no difference. De Vries et al. (2016) also found that using social media sites predicts decreased body satisfaction for both adolescent boys and girls. Similarly, another study found that for both young men and women, Facebook involvement significantly predicts objectified body consciousness and body shame (Manago et al., 2015).

Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) also looked at social media and body image concerns among young men and women. He divided studies into correlational, longitudinal and experimental research. Correlational studies have found a link between body image dissatisfaction and social media use among male and female undergraduate students, and this association was mediated by how much one tends to compare to others on social media platforms (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2016). One longitudinal study found that increased social media use leads to increased body dissatisfaction among male and female undergraduate students. Experimental studies also found that “fitspiration” videos lead to negative mood and body dissatisfaction (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2016). For example, one study found that exposure to attractive images of same sex strangers is associated with body dissatisfaction and negative mood in male and female undergraduate students. However, this relationship was not the same among people who were exposed with unattractive images.

Previous studies have also looked at the relationship between Instagram usage and body image. Ahadzadeh et al. (2017) found a negative relationship between Instagram use and body satisfaction in college students, however this relationship was stronger for individuals with low self-esteem. In an experimental study, participants were shown ideal images of celebrities and famous Instagram users from public profiles (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). The results indicated that participants who were exposed to ideal thin images on Instagram were significantly more likely to experience greater body dissatisfaction than participants who were exposed to travel images (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016).

Instagram not only allows people to upload the most flattering images of themselves but also allows them to transform their photos by editing and enhancing them by using filters to illustrate their best features. This type of manipulation is used to represent the ideal version of others on Instagram (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). They use different photo editing applications such as MakeUp Plus, Beauty Plus or YouCam Makeup to enhance their best features in photos (Chae, 2017). These applications provide a large range of options to edit their photos; for example, on Instagram people can edit their photos by changing their skin tone, removing blemishes and wrinkles, slimming the face and changing the shape of nose and lips. Recent studies found that about 70% of women aged 18 to 34 edit their photos before posting them on social networks (Chae, 2017). This online virtual makeover allows users to edit their photos through computer or smartphone and increases social media use. Users edit their photos because they engage in social comparison for a better online self-presentation. Therefore, individuals engage in social comparison not because they are dissatisfied with how they look but because they want to show an ideal self-representation online (Chae, 2017).

Instagram also promotes “fitspiration” images and the main focus is to inspire people to eat healthy foods, exercise and maintain a healthy diet. Young women are constantly sharing fitspiration images to motivate people towards a healthy lifestyle, by primarily focusing on their physical appearance and exposing their thin-ideal and toned bodies on Instagram (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015). Research shows that being exposed to societal beauty ideals may be unattainable for many women therefore it can lead to upward appearance comparison and decreased body satisfaction (Boepple et al., 2016). Similarly, experimental studies also suggest that exposure to fitspiration images may lead to increased body dissatisfaction and negative mood in young women (Boepple et al., 2016). This association between exposure to fitspiration images and body dissatisfaction was

mediated by how often women compared their appearance with other individuals on fitspiration images. Therefore, being frequently exposed to fitspiration images can lead to increased body dissatisfaction and self-objectivation among young women (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015).

The Current Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of social media on body image satisfaction in young adults. In particular, this study explores whether young adults who spend more time on social media report lower levels of body dissatisfaction, and if this relationship between these variables is different for male and female participants. Many previous studies have focused only on female samples, but the current study will include both males and females, to understand whether the relationship between social media and body image is different among males and females. Previous research has shown an association between social media use and body image satisfaction (Ahadzadeh et al., 2017; Brown and Tiggemann, 2016; Hendrickse et al., 2017)) and therefore this study is conducted with young adults because they are the largest group of social media use and body image concerns are more prevalent among this age group (Cohen et al., 2017). It is hypothesised that there will be a significant relationship between time spent on social media and self-reported levels of body image satisfaction and whether the relationship between time on social media and body image satisfaction scores will be moderated by gender.

Methods

Participants

A total of 152 participants took part in the online survey. Participants included 110 (72.4%) females and 42 (27.6%) males between the ages of 18 and 29. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. The inclusion criteria for this study was that only males and females between the ages of 18 to 29 and had social media accounts were eligible for the study. Previous studies have shown that young adults between this age group (18-29) are the highest users of social networking sites therefore this would help to examine the relationship between social media use and body image satisfaction in this age group (Cohen et al., 2017). Previous studies have only focused on female population and this study has also focused on gender differences in terms of social media use and body image satisfaction. Participants were recruited through various social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram). The recruitment of participants was conducted via convenience sampling method because it is the easiest method to recruit participants and also one of the most common approaches in psychology. Following a link on Instagram and Facebook participants were asked to complete the online survey. Sample size was calculated using survey monkey sample size calculator and recommended a sample size of 152 participants at alpha level .05 and effect size up above .08. Once this target was reached the survey was closed.

Measures

Participants completed an online questionnaire which contained demographic items with two scales to measure Body Image Satisfaction and Social Media use.

Body Image States Scale (BISS) (Cash et al., 2002) consists of a six-items and is used to measure individual's evaluation of current body experience. The domains include: levels of satisfaction with overall physical appearance, body size, shape and weight; current feelings about one's looks relative to how one usually feels; and the evaluation of one's appearance relative to how the average person looks. Participants rated the responses on a 9-point

bipolar Likert scale semantically anchored at each point. BISS scores were the mean of the six items after reverse-scoring the three positive-to-negative items. The higher BISS scores indicate more favourable body image states.

The scale has been found to have acceptable internal consistency, test-retest reliability and construct validity (Cash et al., 2002). Other body image scales have been validated only for women, whereas BISS can be used for both men and women (Cash et al., 2002). The value of BISS is evident in its brevity (six items), bipolarity (positive and negative experiences) and content (not a specific affect about discrete body parts). The BISS can be applied to a wide range of contexts which it has been shown to be useful in both experimental research and clinical work. Cronbach's alpha in the current sample was .82 and .76 for women and .80 and .76 for men. Cronbach's alpha in this study was .787.

Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS): is used to measure the integration of social behaviour around social media in their daily routine and their emotional connection to social media use (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). This scale consists of 10 -items assessing the emotional value of social media in participants. Most research on social media has used weak psychometric measures and also recent research published in peer-reviewed journals have used weak measures to assess Facebook use (DeVellis, 2003). This measure has been recommended for use to address limitations of previous research in terms of measurements of social media use. For example, previous research has been criticized for using single item measures such as duration and frequency.

For example, researchers use a single item to assess social media use such as the frequency and duration of Facebook use. The use of a single item is often poorly in measuring complex constructs because social media is difficult to measure and needs to be measured in a standardised way, rather than a single item. Previous research has focused on the behavioural frequency of social media use; however, the use of social media can also play

an important part in their emotional connection and integration of use in their daily routine (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Social Media Use Integration Scale was partially based on Boyd and Ellison's (2007) measures. In order to develop a more methodologically rigorous measurement, Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013) created the Social Media Use Integration Scale. This scale was created to measure other social media platforms and it measures the engagement in social media use, as well as the emotional attachment and integration of social media into daily routine of users. Jenkins-Guarnieri et al. (2013) argued that previous scales have not proved appropriate rigor in measuring the integration and the use of social media in people's daily routine. Therefore, they used exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory analysis to measure the frequency of social media use and how integrated is social media into people's lives as well as the emotional attachment of social media use. This scale has shown to have strong reliability and validity (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013).

Social Media Use Integration Scale resulted in a 10-item Likert scale which measures two dimensions with higher scores indicating more engaged use and integration of social media. Participants rated their agreement such as "Right now I feel mostly dissatisfied with my weight" on a Likert-scale to show whether they agree or disagree with each statement, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha in current sample was .914. Cronbach's alpha in this study was .895

Procedure

After receiving approval from National College of Ireland Psychology Ethics Filter Committee, data were collected through google forms. The researcher shared a link on Facebook and Instagram to fill out a questionnaire on Google Forms. The link directed participants in the first page of the questionnaire being the information sheet (see appendix A). After reading the information sheet and providing informed consent, participants

completed the online survey which included demographic questions, followed by body image and social media questions (see appendix B, C). The questions on body image satisfaction were presented before the social media questions. Prior to this, participants were also asked to report their gender. All participants were fully anonymous and their participation in the study was completely voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time by closing the survey. They were also told that once their questionnaires were submitted it would not be possible to withdraw their data from the study because data was collected anonymously. When participants hit “submit” their data was automatically saved and stored in Google Forms and was stored in a password protected file in researcher’s laptop. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete and all participants were deidentified.

Helplines and contact of support agencies were listed below at the end of the questionnaire if their participation in this study might have caused worry or distress to participants. They were also aware about the risks and benefits of the study. The research included questions about body image, which might have caused worry or distress to participants, contact of support agencies were listed below at the end of the questionnaire in debriefing sheet (see appendix D).

Design

The current study used a non-experimental cross-sectional design to investigate whether there is a relationship between time spent on social media and self-report levels of body image satisfaction and if the relationship between time on social media and body image satisfaction will be different from males and females. The dependent variable in this study was body image satisfaction and independent variables were social media use and gender.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The majority of participants were female (N=110, 72.4%), with a total of 42 males (27.6%) also participating in the study.

Table 1

Displays the descriptive statistics Body Image Satisfaction and Social Media Use

| Variable | Mean | SD | Median | Range |
|--------------------|-------|-------|--------|-----------|
| Body Image Total | 5.25 | 1.49 | 5.33 | 1.33-8.67 |
| Social Media Total | 37.13 | 11.77 | 37.5 | 10-60 |

Inferential statistics

The relationship between body image satisfaction and social media use was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. There was a significant, small, negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -.19$ [95% CI= $-.33, -.04$], $n = 152$, $p = .018$). This indicates that the two variables share approximately 4% of variance in common. The results suggest that lower levels of body image satisfaction are associated with higher levels of social media use.

A two-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of gender and social media use on levels of body image satisfaction. Participants were divided into two groups according to their social media use representing low and high social media use median split. The interaction effect between gender and social media use was not significant $F(1, 148) = 5.69$, $p = .078$). There was a statistically significant main effect for social media use, $F(1, 148) = 5.49$, $p = .018$; however, the effect size was small (partial eta squared = $.04$).

Levels of body image satisfaction were higher among low social media users ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 1.46$) compared to high social media users ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.46$). The main effect for gender did not reach statistical significance, $F(1, 148) = 3.71$, $p = .056$.

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the effects of social media on body image satisfaction in young adults. This study also investigated whether the relationship between body image and social media use would be different among males and females. The first hypothesis was that there is a relationship between social media and body image satisfaction in young adults. The second hypothesis was that the relationship between social media and body image satisfaction would be moderated by gender. Consistent with our first hypothesis, we found a significant, small, negative correlation between body image satisfaction and social media use. This indicates that lower levels of body image satisfaction are associated with higher levels of social media use. In contrast, the second hypothesis was not supported because there was no interaction effect between gender and social media use. We were interested to find if there is an interaction effect between the two independent variables on the independent variable. We used 2-way ANOVA to understand if there is an interaction effect between gender and social media use on body image satisfaction. In this study the interaction effect between gender and social media use on body image satisfaction was not significant. This indicates that the effects of social media use do not depend on gender. We also looked at the main effect for gender and social media use. Participants were divided into 2 groups according their social media use, low and high social media users. The results showed that the main effect for gender (male vs female) also did not reach the statistical significance however looking at the eta square would suggest that differences in gender are very small. This indicates that gender is not a moderating factor, however there might exist a small difference between males and females. The p value for gender was almost significant but it didn't reach the statistical significance. One explanation for our findings might be the gender imbalance in the sample. Gender did not reach the statistical significance because there was an unequal sample size in this study and was an under-representation of males in the sample.

We also looked at the main effect for social media use we found a statistically significant result. This indicates that levels of body image satisfaction are higher among low social media users compared to high social media users. Individuals who spend more time on social media platforms have greater body dissatisfaction than individuals who spend less time on social media platforms.

The overall results of this study suggest that there is a relationship between social media and body image satisfaction in young adults and the relationship between social media and body image satisfaction is not moderated by gender. Our results support the previous research suggesting that social media is associated with body image satisfaction. Previous research has shown that social media is associated with greater body dissatisfaction among young adults (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). As hypothesized based on previous research, social media was correlated with body image satisfaction in young adults. Similarly, correlational studies also found an association between body image satisfaction and social media use among young men and women, however this association was mediated by comparing one's appearance to others on social networking sites (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Body image concerns were associated with images exposed on social networking sites (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016), as similar results have been found in traditional media forms suggesting that both males and females experience body image dissatisfaction (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

Over the last decade, social media has evolved to become a modern-day living necessity and the time spent on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook has increased drastically among young males and females. This study found no difference among males and females in relationship to social media use and body image satisfaction which is also consistent with previous research. A number of studies have found that both men and women reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction when using social media. For example:

a study found that men and women reported greater levels of body dissatisfaction after viewing attractive profiles of Facebook users (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011). Another study found that social media use was linked with desire for cosmetic surgery and appearance investment in both males and females (De Vries et al., 2014). Using social media sites predicts decreased body satisfaction for males and females (De Vries et al., 2016). Facebook involvement significantly predicts objectified body consciousness and body shame for both males and females (Manago et al., 2015). Only one study was not similar to our findings indicating that there was a significant difference between males and females and that females experience higher levels of body dissatisfaction when exposed to photos on Facebook than males (Thompson & Lougheed., 2012).

Earlier studies included in the literature review have provided evidence that shows how social media use is associated with greater body dissatisfaction. Social media exposes users to images of family, friends and strangers and also themselves which are often highly edited and filtered. Our findings suggest that higher levels of social media use are associated with lower levels of body image satisfaction in young adults. Similar to this, a lot of previous research has found that increased social media use leads to increased body dissatisfaction in young male and female students (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Spending a lot of time on social media can have an impact on body image and a greater tendency for appearance comparison with others on social media (Fardouly et al., 2015). Overall use of social networking sites is associated with body image dissatisfaction (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016), overall SNS use results in increased levels of body image dissatisfaction (De Vries et al., 2014; De Vries et al., 2016). Being exposed to attractive Facebook profiles is also associated with greater body dissatisfaction (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011) and Instagram use has also been associated with greater levels of body image dissatisfaction (Ahadzadeh et al., 2017). As it was mentioned above, our findings tend to be similar with previous research which

suggests that increased social media is associated with increased body dissatisfaction in young adults (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Spending a lot of time on social media can have an impact on body image and a greater tendency for appearance comparison with others on social media (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Future Implications

Our study suggests that social media use was associated with body image satisfaction among young adults and levels of body image satisfaction were higher among low social media users compared to high social media users. Young adults spend a lot of time on social media and research has shown that (90%) of young adults between the ages of 18 to 29 report the highest rates of using social media platforms compared to teenagers and older adults (Perrin, 2015). Young adults are at a high risk for developing body image concerns, therefore it is crucial to investigate ways to reduce the negative impact that social media use has on our body image satisfaction. Interventions could be very effective in decreasing the negative effects of exposure to thin-ideal body for females and muscular and toned body for males on social media among young adults. Because social media is a part of people's everyday lives, it may not be effective to suggest users not to engage in social media at all because social media helps people to connect with others. On the other hand, it is recommended that less time spend on social media platforms may be very effective in reducing negative body concerns because our results also suggest that individuals who spend less time on social media have higher levels of body image satisfaction. Instead, it is important to educate young people how to use social media in an appropriate way. Media literacy (ML) interventions have shown to be very effective to prevent body image dissatisfaction and these programs are needed to increase awareness about idealized and edited images shared on social media.

Our findings also suggest that females do not differ from males in terms of social media use and body image satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to provide support for both males and females because males are also dissatisfied with their body image and interventions would be very beneficial for both.

Limitations and Future Research

There were multiple strengths and limitations in the present study. This study included an appropriate sample size to determine the relationship between social media use and body image satisfaction in young adults. A power analysis indicated that there would need to be 152 participants and this target was achieved. This study also included standardized scales that are validated and have been used in previous research. The body image states scale and social media integration scale have shown good reliability (Cash et al., 2002; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). As in all research, this study has also a few limitations. The second hypothesis was not supported. The reason for this may have been because there was a limited number of male participants in the research. Even though we found no significant difference between males and females in this study, another study has found a gender difference in relationship between social media use and body image satisfaction (Thompson & Loughheed, 2012). Therefore, more research is needed to examine the gender differences in terms of social media use and body image. A second limitation of this study is the sampling method. It was only possible to use convenience sampling because there was a timescale for the project and there was insufficient time to employ a different sampling method. Therefore, future research should consider replicating the present study with a different sampling method. Another limitation of this study is focusing only on young adults (18-29) who are the highest users of social media and report higher levels of body image dissatisfaction, but it is also important to look at other age groups, for example middle age

groups in future research. A final limitation of this study is the recruiting process. Participants were recruited through social media only and future research should consider recruiting across different ways including emails, flyers and posters.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates a correlation between social media use and body image satisfaction in young adults, and it also shows that high levels of social media use can have a negative impact on body image. This suggests that social media use may be a key factor in influencing users' satisfaction with their body image and physical appearance. Given the popularity of social media, it is important to reduce the negative effects that social media has on body image satisfaction in both men and women. It is important to note that no gender difference between social media and body satisfaction was found in this study. Research has shown that not only females, but males are influenced by ideal images on social media and males should also receive support to overcome negative body image concerns. Continued exposure to ideal images on social media may have negative impact on body dissatisfaction, therefore developing effective interventions such as media literacy (ML) programmes to educate young people how to use social media appropriately and also increase awareness that not everything shared on social media reflects reality.

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Appendix A

Information sheet

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between social media usage and body image satisfaction in young adults. You are invited to take part in this study because you are between the age of 18- 29 years old. I am conducting this study as part of my final year project. Before you take part in the study, you are required to read and understand the information sheet.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntarily and anonymous. You can withdraw from the study at any time by closing the survey. Any information you provide will be treated in a confidential manner.

The online questionnaire will take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to complete demographic information (age, gender), body image questionnaire and social media scale. The research will ask questions about body image which may be uncomfortable for some participants. If any of participants will experience any distress during the study, contact details are provided at the end of this questionnaire. At the end of the study, you will also be provided with a link to seek guidance if you experience distress with body image issues. If you have any question in regard to the study, feel free to contact me on information provided below.

There are no benefits provided by taking part in this study, however your participation in this study will help the researcher to examine the relationship between social media usage and body image satisfaction in young adults, as not much research has been done in young adults. Your personal data will be stored in a password protected file and secured in my personal laptop. Your data will be kept anonymous and completely confidential. I will be the only person to have access to this file.

It is very important to understand that once you agree to complete and submit the survey, you consent to participate in the study.

If you require further information about the study, please feel free to contact me:

Sara Isufaj Email address: x17518836@student.ncirl.ie

I would like to thank you for your time and participation in this study.

Appendix B

Consent form

What is this study about?

You are being invited to take part in a research study, which aims to investigate the relationship between social media usage and body image satisfaction in young adults. My name is Sara Isufaj and I am a psychology student at National College of Ireland (NCI). I am conducting this study as part of my final year project. This project is supervised by Dr Caoimhe Hannigan, Lecturer in Psychology at NCI. Before you decide whether to take part in the study, please take the time to read and understand this information, which explains why the research is being done and what it would involve for you.

What does taking part involve?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire, which will ask you your age and gender, followed by some questions about your social media

use and your feelings about your physical appearance. The online questionnaire will take about 10 minutes to complete.

Who can take part?

You can take part in this study if you are between the age of 18- 29 years old, and you use social media. Your participation in this study is completely voluntarily and anonymous. You can withdraw from the study at any time by closing the survey. Any information you provide will be treated in a confidential manner. Once you have submitted your questionnaire, it will not be possible to withdraw your data from the study, because data is collected anonymously and cannot be linked back to you.

What are the possible risks and benefits?

There are no direct benefits provided by taking part in this study, however your participation in this study will help the researcher to examine the relationship between social media usage and body image satisfaction in young adults. The research will ask questions about body image, which may be uncomfortable for some participants. If you experience any distress during the study, you are free to discontinue participation and exit the questionnaire. If any part of this experience has caused you worry or distress, you may also wish to contact one of the support agencies listed below and at the end of the questionnaire. If you have any question in regard to the study, feel free to contact me, or my supervisor, using the information provided below.

Will taking part be confidential?

The questionnaire responses are completely anonymous – it will not be possible to identify any participant based on their responses to the questionnaire. All data collected for this study will be strictly confidential. The questionnaire responses will be stored securely in a password protected file and secured in my personal laptop. Only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to the data collected. Data will be retained for 5 years in accordance with the NCI data retention policy.

Contact Information

If you require further information about the study, please feel free to contact me:

Sara Isufaj

Email address: x17518836@student.ncirl.ie

Research Supervisor: [Dr Caoimhe Hannigan](#)

Email address: Caoimhe.hannigan@ncirl.ie

Support services

BODYWHYS helpline: 1890 200 444

BODY IMAGE helpline: 1-800-931-2237

BODY IMAGE INTERNATIONAL helpline: 1-866-219-9669

I would like to thank you for your time and participation in this study.

Please tick the box below to confirm that:

You are 18 years of age or over

You have read the information above agree to take part in this research.

Appendix C

Questionnaire part 1: Demographics

Please provide your gender:

Male

Female

Questionnaire part 2: Body Image Questionnaire

For each of the items below, check the box beside the one statement that best describes how you feel RIGHT NOW AT THIS VERY MOMENT. Read the items carefully to be sure the statement you choose accurately and honestly describes how you feel right now.

Right now I feel...

1. Extremely dissatisfied with my physical appearance
2. Mostly dissatisfied with my physical appearance
3. Moderately dissatisfied with my physical appearance
4. Slightly dissatisfied with my physical appearance
5. Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with my physical appearance
6. Slightly satisfied with my physical appearance
7. Moderately satisfied with my physical appearance
8. Mostly satisfied with my physical appearance
9. Extremely satisfied with my physical appearance

2. Right now I feel . . .

1. Extremely satisfied with my body size and shape
2. Mostly satisfied with my body size and shape
3. Moderately satisfied with my body size and shape
4. Slightly satisfied with my body size and shape
5. Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with my body size and shape
6. Slightly dissatisfied with my body size and shape
7. Moderately dissatisfied with my body size and shape
8. Mostly dissatisfied with my body size and shape
9. Extremely dissatisfied with my body size and shape

3. Right now I feel . . .

1. Extremely satisfied with my weight
2. Mostly dissatisfied with my weight
3. Moderately dissatisfied with my weight
4. Slightly dissatisfied with my weight
5. Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with my weight
6. Slightly satisfied with my weight
7. Moderately satisfied with my weight
8. Mostly satisfied with my weight
9. Extremely satisfied with my weight

4. Right now I feel . . .

1. Extremely physically attractive
2. Very physically attractive
3. Moderately physically attractive

4. Slightly physically attractive
 5. Neither attractive nor unattractive
 6. Slightly physically unattractive
 7. Moderately physically unattractive
 8. Very physically unattractive
 9. Extremely physically unattractive
5. Right now I feel . . .
1. A great deal worse about my looks than I usually feel
 2. Much worse about my looks than I usually feel
 3. Somewhat worse about my looks than I usually feel
 4. Just slightly worse about my looks than I usually feel
 5. About the same about my looks as usual
 6. Just slightly better about my looks than I usually feel
 7. Somewhat better about my looks than I usually feel
 8. Much better about my looks than I usually feel
 9. A great deal better about my looks than I usually feel
6. Right now I feel that I look . . .
1. A great deal better than the average person looks
 2. Much better than the average person looks
 3. Somewhat better than the average person looks
 4. Just slightly better than the average person looks
 5. About the same as the average person looks
 6. Just slightly worse than the average person looks
 7. Somewhat worse than the average person looks
 8. Much worse than the average person looks
 9. A great deal worse than the average person looks

Questionnaire part 3: Social Media Use Scale

1. I feel disconnected from friends when I have not logged into Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram).
2. I would like it if everyone used Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram) to communicate.
3. I would be disappointed if I could not use Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram) at all.
4. I get upset when I can't log on to Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram).
5. I prefer to communicate with others mainly through Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram).
6. Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram) play an important role in my social relationships
7. I enjoy checking my Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram) accounts.
8. I don't like to use Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram).
9. Using Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram) is part of my everyday routine.
10. I respond to content that others share using Social Media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram).

Appendix D

Debriefing Sheet

If you have experienced any difficult feeling during the study, please contact some of the helplines below:

BODYWHYS helpline: 1890 200 444

BODY IMAGE helpline: 1-800-931-2237

BODY IMAGE INTERNATIONAL helpline: 1-866-219-9669

REACH OUT- Understanding your own body image.

This organization can help you if you want to:

- you want to know more about body image
- you feel you have a negative body image
- you want to better understand the causes of negative body image
- you want to learn how to improve your body image.

Please click on the link provided: <https://au.reachout.com/articles/what-is-body-image>