Full length article

Self-schema and self-discrepancy mediate the influence of Instagram usage on body image satisfaction among youth

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the direct effect of Instagram usage on body satisfaction, whether this effect is mediated by appearance self-schema and self-discrepancy, and whether self-esteem moderates this effect. A total of 273 university students using Instagram were conveniently recruited to do the online survey on demographic characteristics, Instagram usage, self-schema, self-discrepancy, body satisfaction and self-esteem. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was used to test the research hypotheses. As predicted, the results revealed that appearance self-schema and self-discrepancy mediated the effect of Instagram usage on body satisfaction. Moreover, this mediation effect varied depending on the Instagram users' self-esteem level, such that the negative effect of Instagram usage on body satisfaction through self-schema and self-discrepancy became stronger for those with a lower level of self-esteem.

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1. Introduction

The proliferation and the popularity of Social Networking Sites (SNS), in particular Instagram has changed people's social life. Instagram is being used primarily for sharing of photos and images and it has redefined individuals' evaluation of what is aesthetic which often results in social comparisons. While Instagram has gained popularity among people, research in the link between the use of Instagram and how it influences people's perception of body image is scarce even though some pioneering studies regarding the association between other SNSs usage and body image have provided the initial understanding on the role of SNSs in body image. To date, research results show the direct and negative influence of SNSs such as Facebook on body image (Bair, Kelly, Serdar, & Mazzeo, 2012; Smith, Hames, & Joiner, 2013; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013; Vartanian & Dey, 2013). Among the studies, Bair et al. (2012) and Kim and Chock (2015) scrutinized the underlying processes that may explain the influence of Facebook usage on negative body image. Drawing upon social comparison theory, Kim and Chock

(2015) found that social comparison shows the mechanism which explains the influence of Facebook usage for social grooming on body image concern. Body dissatisfaction can be developed when one frequently compares one's own physical appearance to the physical appearance of others (Vartanian & Dey, 2013). Visiting, checking other users' profile photos, liking, sharing or commenting on their photos on SNSs cause individuals to frequently engage in social comparisons related to physical appearance, thus leading to negative feeling towards their body (Kim & Chock, 2015). In addition to social comparison, the extant literature reveals that thin-ideal internalization also translates the image-focused Internet use to negative body image (Bair et al., 2012). The ideal created can lead to the intensification of body image evaluation. In situations where the ideal image is felt unattainable, negative body image may result.

Apart from social comparison theory and internalization, there are two theories anchored on cognitive approach that could be used to explain the behavior towards body satisfaction: self-schema theory (Markus, 1977) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). We propose that these two theories provide the link between Instagram usage and body satisfaction such that individuals who place importance on saliency of appearance may become concerned about the discrepancy between their actual and ideal image. Through the use of Instagram, appearance becomes an

important aspect of life. When differences between actual and ideal self-image become apparent, cognitive incongruence results in negative image and unhappiness with their body. This cognitive incongruence that has not been studied previously could provide the much needed reasons behind Instagram usage and body satisfaction assessment.

In this study, we attempt to develop the link between Instagram usage and body satisfaction by examining the mediating role of self-schema and self-discrepancy. We further tested the influence of self-esteem as a moderator such that the mediated effect of self-schema and self-discrepancy is a function of self-esteem. We hypothesize that people who have high self-esteem would be less likely to be influenced by self-schema and would have reduced level of appearance self-discrepancy. The aim of the current study is five-fold: 1) to test the influence of Instagram usage on body satisfaction; 2) to examine the influence of self-schema on self-discrepancy; 3) to test whether appearance self-discrepancy and self-schema mediate the influence of Instagram usage on body satisfaction sequentially; 4) to test whether self-esteem moderates the influence of Instagram usage on self-schema and 5) to test whether self-esteem moderates the influence of Instagram usage on body satisfaction which is mediated by appearance self-schema and self-discrepancy.

2. Background of the study

2.1. Self-presentation on social networking sites

SNSs such as Instagram provides a platform for self-presentation which is defined as any behavior "to create, modify, or maintain an impression of ourselves in the minds of others" (Brown, 2007, p.160). SNSs provide an interactive online environment facilitating real-self (aspects that are authentic), ideal-self (who one wishes/desires to be) and false self (aspects that are not fully truthful) presentations (Michikyan, Dennis, & Subrahmanyam, 2014). These presentations are commonly done through implicit self-descriptions, such as showcasing oneself through photos posted (Hum et al., 2011; Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008).

Users' photos on SNSs become a source of other users' impression (Ivcevic & Ambady, 2012). Additionally, profile photos have practical implications since their appeal can raise the response rate to the friendship requests (Tifferet, Gaziel, & Baram, 2012). Users tend to show rather than tell their identities through the use of photographs. SNSs such as Facebook is highly used for viewing, posting and tagging photos (Junco, 2012). Individuals present photographs that focus on their face as well as full body images (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011). The majority of the profile pictures are posed photos rather than candid photos (Hum et al., 2011). Toma and Hancock (2010) found that Facebook users tend to post their favorable photos and airbrush their undesirable images to increase their appearance attractiveness. Meanwhile, they limit or eliminate their unflattering images to manage their self-presentation (Lang & Barton, 2015).

These results imply that SNS users have a selective self-presentation through which they display their best and most attractive photos including idealized body. Indeed, SNSs have provided an interactive environment through which not only users are allowed to selectively present their own physical images, but also experience an increased perceived social pressure to do so. This leads to the likelihood that users portray idealized images of their physical appearance on their profiles, hoping that others are impressed by their aesthetically display of photos (Manago et al., 2008).

2.2. Body image

Body image is defined as one's attitudinal disposition toward the physical self which includes evaluative, cognitive, and behavioral components (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). The existing literature widely documents the pervasive influence that mass media exposure has on individuals' negative body image (Ata, Thompson, & Small, 2013; Boyce & Kuijer, 2014; Bruns & Carter, 2015; Halliwell, 2013; Myers & Crowther, 2009; Tiggemann, Slater, & Smyth, 2014). Media content mainly include images portraying the thinness for women and muscular body for men as physical beauty, desirable and ideal traits (Wasylkiw, Emms, Meuse, & Poirier, 2009). The proliferation of these images in conventional media such as glossy magazines and television programmes are portrayed as standard and attainable. However, since it is practically tough to achieve the ideal body, the internalization of its respective norms might lead to negative body image (Harrison, 2009).

While the literature has an abundance of studies on the linkage between mass media exposure such as magazine images and negative body image (Bair et al., 2012; Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002), empirical research that investigates the links between web-based media usage and unfavourable body image is limited. A few studies are found to investigate the exposure to various Internet sites in general (Rodgers, Melioli, Laconi, Bui, & Chabrol, 2013; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). For instance, surveying 8 and 9 year old girls and adolescent girls (aged 13–15 years) about the relationship between Internet consumption and body image concerns, Tiggemann and Slater (2013) found that Internet exposure was significantly correlated distinctively with internalization, body surveillance, and drive for thinness. Young adults who are heavy users of the Internet were also found to exhibit Internet addiction symptoms. They showed symptoms of body image avoidance and disordered eating (Bair et al., 2012; Rodgers et al., 2013). Likewise, exposure to online fashion magazine websites led to more weight and shape discrepancy in women (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). Additionally, the correlation between the usage of some forms of social media (such as social networking sites) and negative body image has been documented in the literature (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). In Vartanian and Dey (2013)'s study, individuals tended to compare their appearance (e.g., face, hair and skin-related appearance) to those appearance they like after visiting Facebook.

Furthermore, results of the longitudinal research about female students also revealed that maladaptive usage of Facebook was associated with increased body dissatisfaction four weeks later (Smith et al., 2013). While most studies show a negative effect of Facebook on body satisfaction, Fardouly et al. (2015) did not find any direct effect of Facebook exposure on dissatisfaction with body and willingness to change weight and shape in an experimental setting.

More recent studies focused on the nature of the influence of social media on body dissatisfaction (Kim & Chock, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014). For example, Kim and Chock (2015) found that Facebook usage for social grooming behaviors such as "browsing around, visiting, checking other users' profiles, liking, messaging, or commenting on others' profiles" have a positive effect on concern about body. Another study found that the time specifically devoted to the Facebook photo activities (i.e., posting and sharing photos of oneself and friends) resulted in elevated self-objectification, internalization of the thin ideal, and drive for thinness, but lower level of weight satisfaction after controlling for BMI (Meier & Gray, 2014).

In summary, most of the studies show strong support for the negative impact of exposure to ideal photos (in both traditional and