


PRETEENS' BODY IMAGE: HOW THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AFFECTS BODY SATISFACTION

L'IMMAGINE CORPOREA NEI PREADOLESCENTI: COME L'USO DEI SOCIAL NETWORK INFLUENZA LA SODDISFAZIONE CORPOREA

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ABSTRACT

Social networks propose beauty standards that have dangerous implications on users' body satisfaction. This study examines the impact of social networks on body image in a sample of 92 preteens. An anonymous questionnaire was used to investigate the time spent on social networks and the role of sociocultural influences on body image. Results suggest the need to strengthen the capacity of the schoolteachers to implement didactic proposals based on positive development of body image.

I canoni di bellezza stereotipati veicolati dai social media hanno conseguenze negative sulla soddisfazione corporea degli utenti. Questo studio esamina l'impatto dei social network sull'immagine corporea in 92 preadolescenti attraverso un questionario che analizza il tempo speso sui social network e l'influenza dei fattori socioculturali sull'immagine corporea. I risultati evidenziano la necessità di interventi educativi che favoriscano uno sviluppo positivo dell'immagine corporea.

KEYWORDS

social networks; body image; preteens.
social network; immagine corporea; preadolescenti.

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Introduction

Body image is a multi-dimensional construct and consists of three main domains: perception of our body, emotions related to our body, the thoughts and beliefs we have about our body (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2015). Disturbance in body image perception might affect individuals' mental health (Tomas-Aragones & Marron, 2014). Literature shows that socio-cultural factors might play a leading role in the development of body dissatisfaction (Cafri et al., 2005). A negative body image might develop from many different sources, including family, peer group, media and social pressure (Shen et al., 2022) influencing self-esteem, competence and social functioning (Hosseini & Padhy, 2023). In recent years, the use of social networks has seen exponential growth, exposing an increasing number of users to content based on beauty standards, thinness and absence of imperfections. In this light, body dissatisfaction is the result of the internalization of appearance ideals and the inability to reach the beauty standards proposed by the media (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Adolescents who spend more time on social media receive more feedback about their appearance (de Vries et al., 2016). Social media use expose young people to be informed about their physical appearance in the form of comments and "likes" (de Vries et al., 2019). Although the voluminous literature on social media effects on adolescents' body image, little has been investigated in the age group of the youngest. Preadolescence is considered a period of vulnerability that increases the risk of the emergence of problems, such as eating disorders, social anxiety, depression etc. (Khan & Avan, 2020). The building of preteens' body image starts from this stage of life and the comparison with the beauty ideals proposed by social networks might have an impact on their body satisfaction. Despite the age restrictions settled by many platforms, preadolescents are able to access to social networks anyway, in this perspective, implement didactic proposal based on positive development of body image and safe use of social networks might be the solution. The present paper shows and comments the results of a survey aimed at investigating the association among time spent on social networks and body image in 10- to 14-year-old preteens. The proposition is that the time spent online is linked with body dissatisfaction and addiction to social media. In addition, a reflection on the need to promote positive body image starting from school and family will be explored.

1. Methods

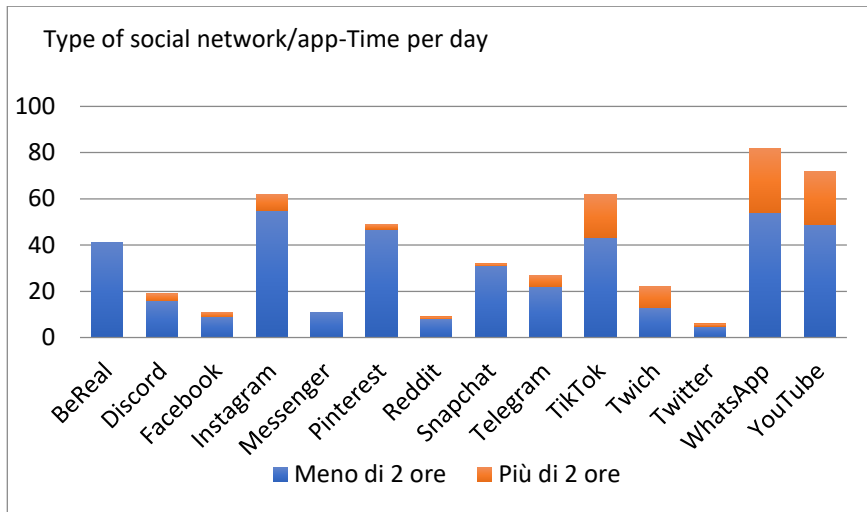
A sample of 92 preteens aged 10-14 (55% female; 45% male; mean age 12-years old) was analyzed through an anonymous and self-administrated questionnaire aimed at investigate: the use of social networks including the type, the average daily time of social media exposure, the addiction to social networks and the body satisfaction. Participants indicated the amount of time spent on each social network per day (15 min to 4+ h). Five items were developed with the amount of time spent online daily (tab.1). The amount of time spent online was calculated by multiplying the average of the items relating to the usage time and the average of the number of social networks used. Addiction to social networks was assessed with the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) (Andreassen et al., 2017) a six-item self-report scale that are rated on a 5-point scale from 0 (very rarely) to 5 (very often). Finally, body dissatisfaction was assessed with the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4- Revised (SATAQ-4R) (Stefanile et al., 2019) which is composed of 31 items for the female version and 28 items for the male version, rated on a 5-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 1 (definitely disagree) to 5 (definitely agree). Both versions are divided into two main sections: Internalization and Pressures. Regarding the Internalization there are questions about thinness, body fat, muscularity and general attractiveness. For the Pressures section there are questions related to the influence of family, peers, significant others and media. The mean score for each section was reported.

Table 1. Indexes describing the daily time spent on social networks

<i>Index</i>	<i>Range</i>
1	15-29 min
2	30-59 min
3	1-1:59 h
4	2-4 h
5	+4 h

2. Result

The 80,4% of the respondents (n= 74; mean age 12-years old) declared to use social networks. The percentage rises to 93,5% for messaging apps (n=86) (Graph 1) . The most used platforms reported are WhatsApp (89%) , YouTube (78%) , TikTok (67%) and Instagram (67%), with an average number of social networks used of 5.52 (SD 3.16), the average daily usage time was 2.21 (SD 0.68) for each social network. Boys reported a higher mean daily use time (mean 2.37; SD 1.32) than girls (mean 2.13; SD 1.25).



Graph 1. Type of social media and app use: time per day

BSMAS and SATAQ-4R descriptive statistics for the entire sample and both gender groups are shown in Table 2 and 3. In the overall sample, the range of means for the BSMAS item scores ranged from 1.68 to 2.57. In the female group, the means ranged from 1.66 to 2.56. In the male group, the means ranged from 1.70 to 2.59. The range of means for the SATAQ-4R, in the female group ranged from 1.67 to 3.49, in the male group ranged from 1.90 to 3.80.

In the female group, media pressure score (2.23) is higher compared with the influence of family (2.00), peers (1.67) and significant others (1.78). In the male group the average of the scores is uniformly distributed (1.90-1.99)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the BSMAS

Sample	Item	Mean (SD)
Total (n=92)	1	2.38 (1.38)
	2	2.24 (1.28)
	3	2.57 (1.40)
	4	2.08 (1.47)
	5	1.97 (1.32)
	6	1.68 (1.00)
Female (n=51)	1	2.40 (1.37)
	2	2.32 (1.30)
	3	2.56 (1.43)
	4	2.22 (1.58)
	5	1.98 (1.38)
	6	1.66 (0.98)
Male (n=41)	1	2.35 (1.42)
	2	2.14 (1.25)
	3	2.59 (1.37)
	4	1.89 (1.30)
	5	1.95 (1.27)
	6	1.70 (1.05)

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of SATAQ-4R

		Mean (SD) Female	Mean (SD) Male
	Thin/Low Body Fat	2.70 (1.31)	2.40 (1.12)
Internalization	Muscular	1.80 (1.20)	2.26 (1.16)
	General attractiveness	3.49 (1.35)	3.80 (1.21)
	Family	2.00 (1.23)	1.99 (1.28)
Pressures	Peers	1.67 (1.09)	1.92 (1.14)
	Significant Others	1.78 (1.17)	1.95 (1.27)
	Media	2.23 (1.40)	1.90 (1.22)

Data screening suggested that data were normally distributed. Correlational analysis between body image (SATAQ-4R), amount of time spent on social networks and addiction to social media (BSMAS) are shown in Table 4. Body image showed a positive correlation with time spent on social media ($r=0,417$) and addiction to social network ($r=0,537$). Furthermore, there is also a positive correlation between time spent on platforms and addiction to social media ($r=0,374$)

Table 4. Correlation table SATAQ-4R-Time per day- BSMAS

		SATAQ-4R DAY	TIME PER DAY	BSMAS
SATAQ-4R	Pearson's Correlation	1	,417**	,537**
	p value		<,001	<,001
	N	92	88	87
TIME PER DAY	Pearson's Correlation	,417**	1	,374**
	p value	<,001		<,001
	N	88	88	84
BSMAS	Pearson's Correlation	,537**	,374**	1
	p value	<,001	<,001	
	N	87	84	87

3. Discussion

The main aim of the present study was to verify the relationship between the time spent on social networks and body satisfaction. The hypothesis that body dissatisfaction is influenced by the time spent on social media was supported. Furthermore, higher score for social network addiction negatively impact body image regardless of usage time. Our finding suggests that social networks impact males' body image to the same extent as females' body image.

Not surprisingly, the use of social networks is detrimental to body satisfaction at this stage of life and as shown by the SATAQ-4R results, in the female group, the media have a greater impact on body image when compared to the family, peer and significant others. The study has a number of practical implications, the most important is the need to implement didactic proposal based on positive

development of body image and safe use of social networks. Schools have been positioned as a place to encourage positive health behaviors including body image development (Yager et al., 2013). In addition, media literacy programs can counter unrealistic media representation of bodies. It has been proven that media education is one of the most successful strategies for dealing with body dissatisfaction (Levine & Murnen, 2009). Media literacy to be effective, it must be long-term. Focus on critical thinking, questioning and discussion, encourage active participation through activities rather than direct instructions, communicate key concepts of media competence (Conard, 2019).

It is necessary to develop intervention strategies based on the main domains that influence body image. One of the main areas concerns the feelings and emotions related to our body. Recent research has shown that children who were satisfied with their body image reported higher interpersonal intelligence, greater adaptability, and better mood (Amado Alonso et al., 2020). A collaborative approach to promote positive body image which includes schools, teachers and parents might be the solution. School is the ideal place for media education and the development of a positive body image. It is recognized that physical education as a body-focused subject can increase body dissatisfaction (Kerner et al., 2018) but if properly targeted it can be used to explore the qualities of one's own body. It is also necessary to start education at home. It is well known how important it is for parents to treat their children positively and supportively, both in terms of their appearance and personal qualities, and in terms of setting a good example of body shape and fitness (de Vries et al., 2019).

Conclusions

The current study revealed that the time spent online is linked to body dissatisfaction and addiction to social media. Preadolescents use social networks regardless the age restrictions settled by social media platforms. Social media companies must consider this aspect and develop strategies that limit exposure risks for young people. A new research area to explore might be related to the content and activities on social networks that most afflict the body image of preteens. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop interventions to promote positive body image in young people with the support of educators and parents.

The limitations of this study can be stated as follows. The sample analyzed were small, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Further, we were unable

to model all the factors that lead to body image dissatisfaction. Measurements for social network use were self-reported and time spent on the platform might be underestimated or overestimated.

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Conceptualization, A.T. and L.P.; Methodology, A.T. and L.P.; Formal Analysis, A.T.; Writing-Original Draft Preparation, A.T.; Writing-Review & Editing, A.T. and L.P.; Supervision, A.T. and L.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of manuscript.

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