

Social Media and Its Influence on Body Shape Satisfaction

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Abstract: In the past studies, researchers have shown that people's body shape satisfaction would be reduced by exposure to social media on thin and beautiful body figures or strong and muscular body figures. Using a posttest-only control group experimental design, the degree of influence of social media on body image satisfaction of 43 college students was examined. The results showed that in this experiment, while both male experimental group, female experimental group, and control groups perceived the intervention differently, there was a significant difference in the degree of media influence and body self-satisfaction among groups. The results of this experiment implicate the importance that should be given to and the educational measures that need to be taken regarding the impact of body image on women.

Keywords: Social Media Exposure Effects; Body Shape Satisfaction; Intervention

Introduction

It is necessary to study people's body shape satisfaction. Poor body shape satisfaction may have negative effects such as eating disorders, depression, and anxiety (Moretti, 2010). The media is a vital channel for influencing people's perception of beauty in terms of body shape and appearance. However, today's media often promotes the "ideal thin" body type, making people unconsciously and passively accept this limited view of beauty (Mills, Shannon, & Hogue, 2016). Many people believe that being thin is beautiful and that it will attract others, gain their favor and increase their self-esteem (Mills, Shannon, & Hogue, 2016).

It has been shown that reducing the number of "ideal thin" body types advertised in the media can have an impact on women's self-body satisfaction. In this experiment, participants who were exposed to images of the "ideal thin" body type for only five minutes received lower body shape satisfaction than those exposed to neutral images (Yamamiya, 2005). Men suffer from the same problem. In the experiment, male participants exposed to images of male model advertisements had significantly lower body satisfaction than men exposed to images of product advertisements. This tends to lead men to blindly improve their body shape, use chemical drugs, muscle deformation, or have eating disorders (Baird & Grieve, 2006).

Based on past research on the relationship between social media and body self-satisfaction, this study sought to explore three main questions: first, to examine whether participants' perceptions of the intervention videos differed significantly from those of the control group. Second, to compare whether there were differences between participants' levels of media influence. Third, to examine participants' body self-satisfaction with different types of stimuli.

1. Method

1.1 Research Design

In this study, the intervention utilized thin and attractive or solid body images appearing in the video given by the researcher that the participants had to watch. The body images appearing in the video are defined as the number of relevant images that participants are exposed to during the experiment. Body self-satisfaction is defined as the feedback participants

received by filling in Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3, a scale about an individual's agreement with societal appearance ideals (SATAQ-3; Thompson et al., 2004), and Body Shape Questionnaire-8C (BSQ-8C; Cooper et al, 1987), a scale about people's satisfaction with their body shape. The gender difference is defined as males' and females' body satisfaction levels influenced by the intervention.

1.2 Participants

In the study, the research has recruited 43 undergraduate students from all majors and levels in a Sino-American University by utilizing convenience sampling, which includes 22 males and 21 females. Table 1 gave a simple analysis of the demographic profile.

Table 1-Table of age and gender distribution of participants

Dimensions	Groups		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-20 years old		33	76.74%
	21-23 years old		8	18.60%
	>23 years old		2	4.65%

1.3 Materials

The stimuli for the female group were two videos of thin and attractive female celebrities of five minutes and 52 seconds in length. The stimulus for the male group was a four-minute, 36-second video about several strong and handsome male models. The stimuli for the control group were a video of a woman playing the Guzheng, a Chinese traditional musical instrument, showing only the female upper body without emphasizing its curves, for a total of four minutes and 55 seconds.

1.4 Intervention

The abbreviations for the female experimental group is FE, the male experimental group is ME, and the control group is C. Participants were randomly assigned to FE (n = 10), ME (n = 12), and C (n = 21). All the participants signed on the informed consent first and completed the demographic information before the intervention. They watched the different videos for different groups. Then, they would finish 18 questions in Likert scale form about social media influence and body shape satisfaction. Finally, a manipulate check question also in Likert scale form will be asked.

1.5 Data analysis

All the data was put into SPSS 18 to analyze. After the preliminary analysis of the data, there were no outliers or missing data. The abbreviation for the dependent variable of media influence is Total Influence, and for body self-satisfaction is Total BSS.

2. Results

Table 2- A one-way MANOVA for the manipulation question in ME, FE, and C groups

	N	M	SD	F	p
ME	12	3.75	1.14	7.10	.00
FE	10	4.70	.68		
C	21	3.19	1.12		

A one-way MANOVA test of the manipulated variables revealed that there was a significant difference, $F = 7.10$, $p = .00 < .01$. Further post hoc tests revealed that the score of FE ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .68$) was significantly higher than the score of ME ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.14$), $p < 0.05$, and also, significantly higher than the score of C ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.12$), $p < 0.05$. There was no significant difference between the scores of ME ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.14$) and C ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.12$), $p > 0.05$.

Table 3-A one-way MANOVA for influenced by social media and body shape satisfaction in ME, FE, and C

	N	Total Influence		Total BSS	
		M	SD	M	SD
ME	12	2.40	1.03	2.81	1.36
FE	10	3.06	.91	4.06	1.59
C	21	3.18	.86	3.15	1.32
F		2.89		2.32	
p		.07		.11	

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to examine the different groups on how people's body shape satisfaction is influenced by social media. The results of the one-way MANOVA on the independent variables are shown in Table 3, which shows that Total Influence was not significantly different on the independent variables ($F = 2.89, p = .07 > 0.05$), and further post hoc tests revealed that the score of ME ($M = 2.40, SD = 1.03$) was significantly lower than the score of C ($M = 3.18, SD = 0.86, p < .05$). Total BSS was not significantly different on the independent variables ($F = 2.32, p = 0.11 > .05$) and further post hoc tests revealed that the score of ME ($M = 2.81, SD = 1.36$) was significantly lower than that of FE ($M = 4.06, SD = 1.59, p < 0.05$).

3. Discussion

The results of the experiment, can be concluded that, first, the intervention video can produce stimuli for the participants that produce significant differences in feelings between the experimental and control groups. Second, the degree to which participants in the male experimental group were influenced by the media produced significant differences between the control group. Third, there was a significant difference in body self-satisfaction between participants in the male and female experimental groups. The results revealed that body image on social media does have a negative impact on people's self-body satisfaction, especially for the male experimental group. In addition, it showed that the male experimental group had a significantly lower degree than the control group on body shape satisfaction.

The results of the present experimental intervention were not identical to those of previous experiments. In Yamamiya's experiment (2005), women were affected by even just 5 minutes of exposure to media about thinness and attractiveness. In Najam's experiment (2012), women were less satisfied with their body image compared to men. However, consistent with In Lorenzen's experiment (2004), men's body satisfaction was reduced by exposure to just six advertising images of strong male models.

The fact that males in this experiment were significantly more dissatisfied with their body image and also more susceptible to social media is related to that social media starts to on males' body attractiveness. The result that female experimental group was not influenced by social media and had no difference from the control group, it may be because the sample size was only 43 and the intervention duration was not long enough. Another reason may be that females have been exposed to such social media for a long time and are numbed and not easily stimulated.

The media should increase the use of models with diverse bodies since it has an invisible and profound influence on people. At the same time, the media can also criticize this socially undesirable trend of thinness as beauty and guide people to develop a correct body concept. And universities and even junior and senior high schools should set up relevant body shape and diet education courses to understand the importance of proper reminders and healthy eating. Media critical thinking courses can also be set up to promote college students to reflect on the content promoted by the media instead of blindly following the trend. For those who have developed incorrect body perceptions, counselors and social workers can play a role in channeling their inner stress.

Shortcomings and limitations remain in this study. Given the constraints of objective factors, only 43 participants were recruited for this study and this may be the reason why the results are not the same as previous experiments. In the future, the researchers could recruit more participants to expand the sample size and reduce the error. This study used only five minutes of video and was a cross-sectional study. However, the fact that people are influenced by media for a long period, how people's body self-perception and self-body satisfaction will change under the influence of media for a long period is unknown to the

researcher, so longitudinal studies can be added in the future.

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