Social Media And Its Impact On Women Body Dissatisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Media play an important role in community development. Mass media has saturated the developed world. The television in the living room, the newspaper on the doorstep, the radio in the computer at work and the fliers in the mailbox, face book are just a few of the media channels daily delivering advertisements, news, opinion, music and other forms of mass communication. While discussing the role of women in media sector, it is no women difficult to ignore the contribution of social media, modern tool of citizen journalism, in improving the representation of women.

Social networks may not create new problems for women, but they do certainly intensify existing ones. Social media has made constant the ability to critique and analyze bodies in such a way that promotes body dissatisfaction, constant body surveillance, and disordered thoughts. Body dissatisfaction, which is similar to body image, refers to a discontentment with the shape and size of one's body and appearance. Specifically, it is the "experience of negative thoughts and esteem about one's body" (Dittmar, et al. 2009). When there is a high prevalence of body dissatisfaction, women are more likely to suffer from "a range of physical and mental health problems," which includes both eating disorders and discorded eating.

Keywords : Social Media, Body Dissatisfaction, Physical and Mental Health

Introduction

Times have changed and present time is reflective of Social Media playing an instrumental role in changing the mindset of the people in various ways. It has been a major force behind many social changes, debates, mass movements and creating activist groups. The Internet and social media provide a platform for women to seek out images of what they want to look like, a place for women to search for diet and exercise advice, as well as a an outlet through which women can perform outward comparisons with their peers and celebrities. People tend to judge their body dissatisfaction on "the difference between an ideal body shape/size and perceived own body shape/size" (Rumsey, et al. 2012).

Social Media and Body Dissatisfaction

Rumsey states that the body dissatisfaction is "so pervasive that more than 25 years ago it was labeled 'normative discontent,'" according to *The Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Appearance*. That is, so many people, especially women, are dissatisfied with their appearances, that it is considered *normal* to feel that way. Media "helps to shape beauty ideals by showing certain body sizes [as…] beautiful and desirable". Now, it can perpetuate images through a variety of distribution vehicles and can more easily set the cultural standard for appearance in society. Today, female Internet users can scroll through their Instagram news feed and look at "thinspirational" images of girls, or click through Pinterest to look for fashion, exercise, and diet tips, or even read the gossip site, TMZ, to learn about the new celebrity that gained–god forbid–ten pounds.

The word "thinspiration" stems from a new trend among women who post pictures of models and peers whose looks they admire and want to mimic – pictures that they consider inspirational, that embody some type of idealized body image. Now, more than ever, women are surrounded by constant reminders of what they should look like, as well as what and how much they should eat, and how much they should exercise.
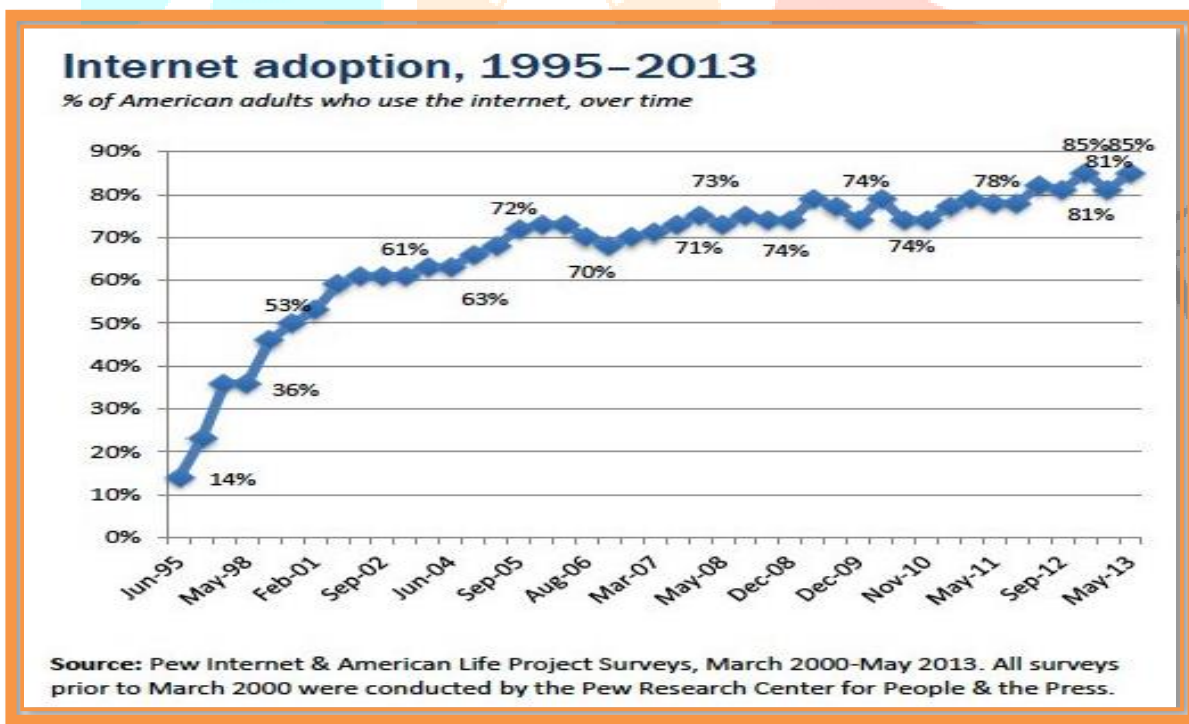
Although the socio cultural model originally focused on face-to-face communication and traditional media (e.g., magazines and TV) (Thompson et al. 1999), messages about appearance ideals are now also communicated through social media. On social media, adolescents post photographs of themselves and view photos of others (Espinoza & Juvonen 2011). Physical appearance plays an important role in these activities (Siibak, 2009). Adolescents report that they experience pressure to "look perfect" on social media and carefully selects and edits their posts to do so (Chua & Chang 2016). Most research on the relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction has exclusively focused on females (Holland & Tiggemann 2016).

Women were also more health conscious and exercise obsessed during this decade. Additionally, possibly because of the new "dollybird" trend and promotion of a rail-thin image, there was in an increase in eating disorders, especially anorexia (Mulvey, et al. 1998). The cause of this was speculated to be in an effort

"to maintain a pre-pubescent body shape". What was called the image of the waif, was an extremely skinny, almost androgynous, fragile woman.

In today's technologically driven and information heavy world, everyone has a variety of digital resources at their fingertips. Informational needs of all types can be answered on the computer and on smartphones – literally, at their fingertips. More important, the Internet and social media are changing the way in which people interact, spend their time, and understand themselves and the world around them. Since 1995, the percentage of adults who use the Internet has increased from 14% to 85% according to one Pew Research Survey (Pew Internet and American Life Project Surveys).

The Internet's universal nature is one critical reason why it has the ability to change society and life for good. Figure one shows the dramatic increase of Internet use and demonstrates it' near ubiquity among Americans. With relatively low barriers to entry, people of all demographics can, in one way or another, involve themselves online. Young women have been identified as being considerably more vulnerable to media's effects on body image (Groesz et al. 2002), one could consider the potential negative impacts of social-networking-site exposure, given the information already known about other kinds of interactive media (i.e., television and magazines).

Internet adoption, 1995–2013
% of American adults who use the internet, over time

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys, March 2000-May 2013. All surveys prior to March 2000 were conducted by the Pew Research Center for People & the Press.

(Figure - 1)

Figure one demonstrates both the increased use and the increased accessibility of the Internet since June of 1995. It suggests that we have become a networked and plugged in society. We are society of online consumption. These effects have been confirmed in other studies. A meta-analysis of 156 studies concluded that appearance-focused social comparisons are significantly associated with body dissatisfaction (Myers & Crowther 2009).

Thus, comparing oneself to others unfavorably in terms of appearance may lead to dissatisfaction with one's own appearance. This meta analysis produced a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.77$), although the researchers concluded that this effect was stronger when social comparison was directly measured in studies, as opposed to being inferred. One must consider that directly measuring social comparison in studies can result in heightened sensitivity to the comparison process and ultimately produce greater body dissatisfaction. In fact, a study by Mills, Polivy, Herman, and Tiggemann (2002) revealed that the negative impact of social comparison was increased by implicit demand characteristics.

Conclusion : The current study suggests that advantageous social environmental factors may attenuate the relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction. New media forms are creating an alternative culture. Greater mobility and acceptance of women in public spaces is a necessary condition of a healthy and modern democracy. A free flow of information is an essential ingredient of open and democratic societies. There can be no full freedom of the press until women have an equal voice in the news gathering and news dissemination processes.

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