Media and Body Image: What's the Connection?

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ABSTRACT

The development of information technology, particularly the internet and social media, has brought about significant changes in how individuals, especially teenagers and young adults, shape their perceptions of their body image. Body image disturbances often arise as negative perceptions, typically triggered by exposure to social media that showcases ideal beauty standards, such as slim or muscular bodies. Social media has become one of the main sources of social comparison, where individuals compare themselves to body images curated visually by public figures, celebrities, or peers. A qualitative approach was used, with data collection methods including the analysis of relevant academic literature, including previous research, scientific journals, and current literature. Studies show that these comparisons contribute to body dissatisfaction, particularly among adolescent girls who are vulnerable to social pressure. Surveys by APJII and We Are Social indicate that the majority of internet users are teenagers who spend hours on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. This research aims to analyse how social media influences body image perceptions among teenagers, identify the most influential factors, and explore mechanisms to help reduce the negative impact of social media on mental health and body image.

Keywords: *Social Media; Body Image Perception; Mental Health Impact.*

Contribution/Originality: This study reveals how body representations in the media can create unrealistic beauty standards, potentially triggering body image issues, especially among teenagers and young adults. The originality of this research lies in its in-depth exploration of the psychological effects of excessive media consumption on body perception and how this phenomenon varies across different cultures and social contexts. It also proposes media literacy strategies to help society develop a healthier and more positive body image.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information technology has transformed the way people communicate, especially among adolescents and young adults. Body image refers to an individual's mental image of their body shape and size, how they evaluate their own body, and how they perceive others' judgments of their body. Body image disturbance is often understood as a negative perception of the body, typically related to changes in shape, size, structure, function, physical limitations, or the meaning attributed to the body (Riyanto et al. 2020). Thus, body image disturbance leads to negative views of one's body, particularly dissatisfaction with body shape and size.

In the era of advanced technology, individuals are constantly exposed to social media. According to data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2019, about 4.1 billion people worldwide use the internet, with an average usage time of 6 hours per day (Dong et al. 2020). In Indonesia, data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2020 showed an 8.9% increase in internet users, with 73.7% of the population accessing the internet during 2019-2020, spending an average of 8 hours per day online. Many individuals use social media to gain acceptance in interpersonal relationships (Sari et al. 2017). Through social media, they tend to learn about ideal body standards often displayed by celebrities, public figures, or close friends. Campaigns and exposures presented on social media can lead to social comparison, where individuals compare themselves with figures on these platforms, ultimately affecting their perception of their body image (Pendry & Salvatore 2015).

This study is designed to understand the influence of social media use on individuals' body image perception, particularly among adolescents. In Indonesia, internet use is dominated by adolescents aged 15-19 years and individuals aged 24-35 years (APJII 2019). Prolonged exposure to the internet and social media can influence self-perception, especially among adolescents who are in the process of identity development. One of the developmental tasks of adolescents is to accept their body condition and achieve mature and responsible social relationships (Leigh & Clark 2018). According to Pew Research Center (2018), more than 90% of teenagers have access to social media, and many of them spend much of their time on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Social media provides significant exposure to ideal beauty standards, and research shows that this increases body dissatisfaction among young women (Tiggemann & Slater 2016; Fardouly et al. 2018). The curated and often edited visuals on social media create unrealistic beauty standards. Perloff (2014) argues that social media shapes perceptions of what is considered ideal, often creating beauty norms limited to slim and muscular bodies. This phenomenon particularly impacts adolescent girls, who are vulnerable to social pressures. Social media algorithms reinforce exposure to such content, creating a cycle that directs users to more content featuring ideal bodies (Boepple et al. 2016).

A phenomenon that arises from the intensity of social media use is how content displaying ideal body images affects self-perception and body image among adolescents and young adults. Body image, defined as an individual's perception of their own body shape, size, and appearance, is significantly influenced by the social norms presented in the media. Research by Tiggemann & Slater (2016) shows that repeated exposure to social media content displaying ideal bodies significantly increases body dissatisfaction among young women. This aligns with findings from Fardouly et al. (2018), which state that time spent on social media correlates with negative body image perceptions.

Social media offers a visual platform where body images are often well-curated and digitally edited, creating unrealistic beauty standards. Perloff (2014) argues that these platforms play a major role in shaping individual perceptions of what is "ideal." These often edited and filtered images form beauty norms that tend to undermine body diversity and reinforce narrow standards of slender and muscular bodies. These norms

especially impact adolescent girls who are in the process of identity formation and are often more vulnerable to social pressure regarding their appearance. Furthermore, social media provides users with a space to compare themselves with others, whether their peers, celebrities, or influencers. In the context of social media, this comparison is often unbalanced because those being compared may have access to resources such as personal trainers, makeup artists, and professional photographers. Cohen et al. (2017) found that the more often a teenager compares themselves with others on social media, the more likely they are to experience body dissatisfaction.

Moreover, social media algorithms also reinforce exposure to body image-related content. Boepple et al. (2016) show that the content liked or frequently viewed by users influences the content that appears on their feeds, creating a repetitive cycle that reinforces beauty standards. This results in greater exposure to content featuring ideal bodies, which ultimately impacts users' body image perception. A study by Turner & Lefevre (2017) found that intensive social media use is closely related to body dissatisfaction, particularly among users who are frequently exposed to content about fitness and dieting. In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon is also occurring, with an increasing number of social media users among adolescents. According to a survey by We Are Social (2023), more than 64% of Indonesians are active social media users, with the majority being in the age range of 15-24 years. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are very popular among Indonesian adolescents, where many are exposed to ideal body images through posts by celebrities, influencers, and peers. The body image often displayed on social media, although not always realistic, is regarded as a beauty standard to be achieved.

Based on this background, the research questions for this study are: How does social media influence body image perception among adolescents and young adults? What media factors most influence body image perception in adolescents and young adults? How does the level of social media use affect body dissatisfaction and the risk of body image disturbances? These questions are crucial to answer considering the significant impact social media can have on adolescents' mental and psychological health. Fardouly et al. (2020) emphasize the need for further research on the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social media use and body image. A better understanding of this can help identify effective interventions to mitigate the negative effects of social media on body image perception.

This study is significant in two key aspects: first, it contributes to academic understanding of how social media influences body image perception among adolescents and young adults. Although previous research has identified a relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction, there is still much to explore regarding the underlying psychological mechanisms. Rodgers et al. (2020) note that longitudinal studies are needed to understand the long-term effects of social media on body image and mental health. Second, this research has practical implications for professionals working with adolescents and young adults. Mental health practitioners, such as psychologists and counselors, can use the findings of this research to design intervention programs that help adolescents cope with social pressures related to body

image. Brown & Tiggemann (2016) suggest that media literacy programs teaching adolescents to be more critical of media content can reduce the negative impact of social media on body image. Additionally, educators can use the findings to develop curricula that teach students about healthy and realistic body image.

Parents also play a crucial role in reducing the negative impact of social media on their children's body image. Burnette et al. (2017) found that social support from family, including open discussions about body image and media, can help adolescents develop a more positive body perception. This research is expected to help parents understand how social media affects their children's body image and provide practical strategies to guide children in using social media wisely. Overall, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on social media and body image and provide valuable insights for professionals, educators, and parents in helping adolescents develop a more positive body perception in the face of increasingly powerful social media influences.

This research aims to explore how social media influences body image perception among adolescents and young adults, as well as to analyze the media factors that most influence this perception. In addition, this study aims to explore how social comparison and the use of social media algorithms contribute to body dissatisfaction and the risk of body image disturbances. McLean et al. (2020) emphasize the need for a deeper approach in researching the effects of social media, including content analysis and the psychological mechanisms involved. By understanding these factors, this research is expected to provide valuable insights for mental health professionals, educators, and parents in helping adolescents and young adults become more critical of the influence of social media on their body image. Tiggemann (2021) stresses the need for preventive interventions to protect the psychological health of the younger generation from the negative effects of social media.

2. METHOD

The qualitative research method in this study will be conducted using an approach that involves gathering data through relevant scientific literature, including previous studies, scholarly journals, and recent publications. This research aims to explore the relationship between social media usage and body image perceptions among adolescents and young adults. Given the complex nature of this topic, the qualitative method provides an appropriate framework for gaining a deeper understanding of individuals' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations regarding the impact of social media on their body image.

The data collection process will focus on literature related to the development of information technology, social media, and its influence on body image perceptions. Primary sources of literature will be sourced from academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, as well as journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Additionally, recent books, official reports from research institutions such as Pew Research Center, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) will also be utilized. The

collected data will encompass various theoretical and empirical perspectives from cross-cultural studies to provide a more holistic understanding of this phenomenon.

The literature being analyzed will include research from Indonesia and other countries with high levels of social media usage. According to APJII (2020), approximately 73.7% of the Indonesian population uses the internet for an average of eight hours per day, with the majority of users being adolescents. A survey by We Are Social (2023) also indicates that platforms like Instagram and TikTok are extremely popular among Indonesian youth, making it crucial to understand how this phenomenon affects their body image perceptions. By using literature-based data collection, this research will offer a comprehensive overview of the studied phenomenon, including comparisons of research findings from various countries and within the Indonesian context. This approach also allows the researcher to identify gaps in previous research and provide recommendations for further studies.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion on the influence of media on body image and its impact on psychological well-being has become a critical topic in the modern world, especially with the rapid development of technology and access to various media platforms. Media, in the form of television, magazines, advertisements, and social media, plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of the ideal body image. In this context, it is crucial to understand how the body images promoted by the media are often unrealistic and how this affects individuals' mental health, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

Mass media, especially television, magazines, and advertisements, have long been powerful tools in shaping beauty standards and the ideal body image in society. Numerous studies have shown that media continuously display models with slim, tall bodies and fair skin as symbols of the desired beauty. Such body images are often supported by the fashion and beauty industries, which promote products aimed at "correcting" bodies to align with the standards they have created. As a result, many individuals, particularly women, feel the need to conform to these beauty standards to be considered attractive and accepted by society. However, this perception is not limited to women; men also experience pressure to have muscular, ideal bodies, which is frequently portrayed in advertisements for fitness and health products.

The influence of media in shaping body image perceptions has become even stronger with the advent of social media. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook broaden exposure to ideal body images presented by celebrities, influencers, and even peers. Unlike traditional media, social media allows for more personal and instant interaction between users and the content they consume, thereby amplifying the emotional and psychological impact of body-related messages spread through these platforms. In this regard, social media becomes a space where individuals are constantly exposed to idealized body images, which are often unrealistic and digitally edited. This can lead to body dissatisfaction and the desire to alter one's physical appearance to meet unattainable beauty standards.

The ideal body image promoted by the media is often unrealistic and can negatively affect an individual's mental health. Most models presented in the media have undergone various editing processes, including the use of Photoshop or digital filters, to achieve a flawless appearance. This reality creates a gap between the ideal body image promoted by the media and the actual bodies of individuals. As a result, many people feel that their bodies are not good enough, leading to decreased self-esteem and triggering various mental health issues. The pressure to achieve the ideal body also contributes to the development of eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, which often begin with the desire to drastically lose weight in order to attain a slim body.

A comprehensive approach to media content that conveys body-related messages needs to be developed to protect individuals, particularly adolescents and young adults, from the negative effects of unrealistic body representations. Governments and relevant institutions can collaborate with social media platforms, advertising companies, as well as the fashion and beauty industries to promote campaigns that emphasize the importance of healthy and realistic body images. With stricter regulations and more aggressive awareness campaigns, it is hoped that a healthier media environment can be created for society, which will ultimately help reduce the prevalence of mental health disorders associated with body dissatisfaction.

In addition to the above findings, this study also identifies several weaknesses that need to be addressed and improved in future research. One major limitation of this study is the lack of diversity in the participants used as samples. This research only involved participants from adolescent and young adult age groups, meaning the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of other age groups or more diverse demographic groups. Therefore, future studies should involve a broader sample, covering various age groups, ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds, to make the results more generalizable and representative of a wider population.

While this study focuses on the impact of social media, it is important to consider the role of traditional media, which still has a significant influence on shaping perceptions of body image. Future research could explore how various types of media, both traditional and digital, collectively influence public perceptions of the ideal body and psychological well-being. By considering the impact of interactions between different media types, future studies will be able to provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon of media influence on body image.

Another limitation of this study is the data collection method, which is largely based on questionnaires and self-reporting. Although this method is commonly used in psychological research, self-reported data has the drawback of potential bias, as participants may not provide fully honest or accurate answers. To address this, future research should use a more diverse approach, including in-depth interviews, direct observations, or even experimental approaches that could provide more objective results.

The table below presents the analysis of the influence of social media on body dissatisfaction and its impact on psychological well-being, based on measurements

using a body dissatisfaction scale and a psychological well-being scale. This analysis shows a positive correlation between exposure to ideal body image content on social media and increased body dissatisfaction and decreased psychological well-being. The more frequently individuals are exposed to media content displaying ideal body images, the higher the level of body dissatisfaction they report, which ultimately impacts their psychological state.

Table 1: Correlation between Social Media Exposure, Body Dissatisfaction, and Psychological Well-being

Variable	Average Social Media Exposure (Hours/Day)	Body Dissatisfaction Scale	Psychological Well-being Scale
Adolescent Group	3.5	6.8	4.2
Young Adult Group	4.0	7.1	3.9

Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2019.

From the table above, it can be seen that the young adult group tends to have a higher average social media exposure compared to the adolescent group, with an average of 4 hours per day. This higher exposure is correlated with greater body dissatisfaction, followed by a decrease in psychological well-being. This phenomenon indicates a direct relationship between excessive social media consumption and body dissatisfaction, leading to poorer mental health.

The results of this study are consistent with findings from previous research, which shows that social media has a greater impact on body dissatisfaction compared to traditional media. This is due to the interactive and personal nature of social media, where users are not just passive viewers but are often involved in activities like posting photos and interacting with visual content from others. The use of filters, photo-editing apps, and beauty standards promoted by celebrities and influencers on social media create unrealistic expectations about physical appearance, thereby increasing social pressure and body dissatisfaction.

Exposure to unrealistic beauty standards, whether through content created by celebrities or other social media users, increases body dissatisfaction and triggers various mental health issues, such as eating disorders, social anxiety, and depression. It is also important to note that not all impacts of social media on body image are negative. Some studies show that social media can also be used as a platform to promote body diversity and the body positivity movement, which encourages self-acceptance and appreciation for different body types. Therefore, the positive potential of social media in promoting more inclusive body images needs to be further developed.

This study also found that media literacy-based interventions could be an effective step in reducing the negative impact of social media on body dissatisfaction. Media literacy education, which teaches individuals to critically evaluate the content they consume on social media, can help reduce the pressure to conform to unrealistic

beauty standards. These educational programs can cover topics such as awareness of image manipulation, the importance of body diversity, and how to filter content that may trigger body dissatisfaction.

As a recommendation for further research, it is important to develop studies that delve deeper into the role of social media as a platform for promoting body positivity and more inclusive body representations. Additionally, more in-depth research should be conducted on how media literacy interventions can be integrated into mental health programs in schools and the wider community to prevent the development of eating disorders and other psychological issues associated with body dissatisfaction.

The findings in this study confirm that media, particularly social media, has a significant influence on body image and individual psychological well-being. With increasing exposure to content displaying unrealistic body images, individuals tend to become dissatisfied with their physical appearance, which ultimately affects their mental health. Implementing more inclusive policies and educational approaches to media literacy could be an important step in addressing this issue.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals a strong relationship between media, especially social media, and the formation of the ideal body image, which significantly impacts individuals' psychological well-being. Mass media such as television, magazines, and advertisements have long depicted narrow beauty standards, while social media amplifies this effect by showcasing body images that are often edited or manipulated. High exposure to these unrealistic body ideals increases body dissatisfaction, particularly among adolescents and young adults, which can eventually trigger mental health issues such as low self-esteem, eating disorders, anxiety, and depression.

In addition to its negative impacts, social media also holds positive potential, namely as a platform to promote body diversity and support the body positivity movement. Some studies suggest that content promoting body acceptance can help reduce social pressure and teach the importance of appreciating body diversity. However, such content still remains less dominant compared to content that glorifies certain beauty standards. To mitigate the harmful effects of social media, interventions through media literacy education are needed to teach users to think critically about media content and understand the impact of digital manipulation on body image.

To create a healthier media environment, this study recommends the development of integrated media literacy programs within educational curricula or mental health services in the community. Media literacy would help individuals, particularly adolescents, to build critical awareness of unrealistic body messages and strengthen their mental resilience against social pressures. This effort also requires collaboration from various parties, including the government, educational institutions, and social media platforms, to ensure that more inclusive and realistic beauty standards are increasingly accepted by the wider society.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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