The Impact of Social Media on Body Image and Assertiveness among Undergraduates.

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of social media on body image and assertiveness among undergraduates. Three hundred students aged 18 -23 years (M = 15.58 years, SD =1.07 years) participated in the study. Three instruments were administered for the study. They include the social comparison Behaviour Questionnaire, Body Image Questionnaire and Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS). Moderated regression statistic (MRS) result revealed that social media significantly predict body image (β= -.38, t= -7.00, p<.01). The result showed that social media has a positive relationship with assertiveness among undergraduates (β= .08, t = 6.24, p<.01). It was recommended that online measures be put in place by the government and stakeholders towards the use of social media. In addition, undergraduates should be sensitized through seminars and workshops on the need for assertiveness in the use of social media

Keywords: Social Media, Body Image, Assertiveness, Adolescents

Introduction

In recent times social media has become a way of life for people; there is no exception when it comes to social media; children, adolescents and adults are all interested in the use of social media. Social media has been defined variously by experts in different fields of endeavour. Bryer and Zavatarro (2011) posit that social media technologies facilitate social interaction; it also makes possible collaboration and enables deliberation across people. These technologies include blogs, wikis,

media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, Instagram media platforms, and virtual worlds. The term "social media," according to Andreas and Michael (2010), refers to a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

Loving and Ochoa (2010) posit that social media has helped people of different cultures communicate through blogs, websites, and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, Flicker, and YouTube 2Go, Badoo, LinkedIn. The most common social media use among undergraduates to communicate is found on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, E-mail, Instagram, Google, Yahoo, and Whatsapp.

According to McCabe, Butler and Watt (2007), body image may be described as the perceptions, attitudes, emotions and personality reactions of the individual concerning his or her own body. Simply put, body image is the picture that a person has of his or her body and is often measured by asking the person to rate their current and ideal body shape using a series of depictions, such as viewing related pictures or graphics. Disturbing body image perceptions are reflected in distorted perceptions of body size (McCabe et al., 2007). The attitudinal components reflect the effect we have on our bodies, and when disturbed, typically results in discrepancies

between one's ideal and actual body. Internalization of these distorted images is often a concern because it can lead to body dissatisfaction, which is a crucial predictor of disordered eating (Smolak & Thompson, 2009)

Bunyamin (2013) defined assertiveness as individuals' awareness of their rights and the rights of other people and their ability to reflect this awareness to daily life. It is also defined as a readiness to stand up for legitimate rights (Gorman & Sultan, 2008). Other researchers refer to it as the ability to express one's thoughts and feelings and defend one's own right to behave in specific ways without violating the rights of others (Alberti & Emmons, 2001; Galassi & Galassi, 1977). Onyeizugbo (2003) opines that social boldness is one in which individual claims his/her right and voices out true feelings in social settings in ways that would maximize reinforcement. The three aspects of human expression which assertiveness cuts across are cognition, behaviour and affect (Yong, 2010). Cognitively, assertive individuals can manage both positive and negative emotions (Gladding, 1988). Behaviourally assertive individuals possess the ability to express their emotions, defend their goals, and establish favourable interpersonal relationships (Herzberger, Chan & Katz, 1984).

Social Comparison Behaviour to Media Images: (Weeler & Sul, 2007) posit that "individuals compare themselves upwardly (someone better than them on body shapes in question) or downward target (someone worse than them on body shape in question). This theory, therefore, assumes that both upward and downward

Comparisons have similar effects". Wheeler and Suls (2007) noted that assimilation occurs when people shift their self-estimated closer to a target following the comparison, whereas contrast occurs when people shift their self-estimated away from the target. Wheeler and Sul (2007), examining the social effects of the media comparison, found that women, especially younger girls, tend to engage in upward social comparison with the target other, resulting in more negative feelings about their self-images.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1978; Galassi & Galassi, 1977) emphasized that assertiveness or non-assertiveness is learned by observing significant models rather than direct conditioning of anxiety. As a result, inhibition of assertive behaviour is as a result of observed punishment of the model's of assertiveness, whereas, expression of assertiveness as opposed to direct anxiety reduction techniques which rely primarily on the results from observed rewards of the model's behaviour (Rich & Schroeder, 1976). In other words, assertiveness is learned by observing positively reinforced assertive behaviour of role models in social settings. Hence, through socialization experiences, assertiveness is inculcated in an individual.

Social Media and Body Image

Social media now portray images that often depict women showing the 'ideal beauty; however, this 'ideal beauty is unrealistic due to photoshopping and online 'filters'. Body image is a common term that is used mainly on social media today.

Body image can be influenced by social factors, such as culture, the media and, of oneself with families, friends and others etc. It is also believed that people with negative body image and social comparison tend to have poor assertive skills (Kinjari & Raghavi, 2020).

Emma (2015) investigated the effect of social media on the body image satisfaction of Irish women with interest in particular networking sights like Facebook and Instagram. Six Irish women aged 18-25 were involved in the study; the result showed that women were dissatisfied with their body image by viewing images online through Facebook and Instagram because some images were made up through filters and photoshopping unknown to them.

Kinjari and Raghavi (2020) investigated the Influence of Body image and Social comparison on the Assertiveness level of young adults. Data were collected from 33 Young Adults using the convenience sampling method. The result of the study reveals that there is a significant relationship between social media comparison and body image. The regression analysis also showed that Body Image and Social Comparison significantly predicted the Assertiveness of Young Adults.

Amazue (2014) investigated the contributions of the media and body image concerns to female adolescents' self-esteem in Nigeria with 200 Secondary School female adolescents from the urban and rural contexts were involved in the study, and their ages ranged from 12-17 years (M= 13.5) it was predicted that social media and

body image concerns would be significantly related. The study result indicated that social media correlated significantly and positively with body image concerns among the respondents. This means that the female adolescents who use social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, 2g0) frequently are more concerned about their body image than those who do not use social media platforms.

Izydorezyk, Katarzyna, Kinga and Jolanta (2019) investigated Self-assessment of the body and social competencies in mothers and their Adult daughters with 102 participants, 51 pairs of mothers 40-60 years and biological daughters 19-25 years. The results of the study showed that these variables were significant, General self-esteem B=0.615, discrepancy real obligatory image B=0.275 among daughters, and physical condition B=0.362 in mothers. The result proves to help create high self-esteem; social competencies in women and improve assertiveness between mothers and daughters.

Marika and Ksenia (2019) explored the effect of enhancement-free Instagram on women's body images with hashtag indicating their enhancement-free. Two hundred and four (204) female undergraduate students were randomly selected for the study to check their exposure to Instagram with hashtags and exposure to Instagram with no hashtag exposure. The result showed that the addition of hashtag indicated significantly greater facial dissatisfaction than the same enhancement-free images without hashtags.

Haroon (2017) notes that most girls who have low body esteem skip meals and avoid seeing friends and family members, the girls also participate in extra-curricular activities or seeing the doctor, in his research based on interviews with 5,165 girls aged 10-17 in 14 countries, found that more than half of girls with low body esteem struggle to be assertive.

Cara, Yvonne and Amanda (2018) investigated Gender differences and associations between age trends of social media interaction and wellbeing among 10-15-year-olds in the UK. These finding indicated a gender difference and a relationship between interacting on social media and wellbeing.

Social Media and Assertiveness

Khairunnisa and Putri (2018), in their study, examined the relationship between assertive behaviour and social media addiction in adolescents with 100 adolescents who completed a measure of assertive behaviour and social media addiction behaviour. Data analysis was conducted utilizing *SPSS 21 correlation test.* The result indicates a relationship between assertive behaviour and social media addiction in adolescents (r=.01p<.05).

Abdolmajid & Khazaee (2014) evaluated the prevalence of internet use and its relation with assertiveness. This study is descriptive - correlation, 408 students (258 males and 150 females) were chosen by multi-step cluster sampling. The tools of measurement were the Young internet addiction and the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS). The data were analyzed by t-test, regression by SPSS 11.5. The

Results showed that 40/7% of the students were addicted to the internet included 2.2% of those who were severely addicted and 38.5 moderate. Also, the study found a positive relationship between internet use and assertiveness so that the score of assertiveness could anticipate the score of internet addiction to some extent.

According to Renger (2018), assertive behaviour can involve rejecting other people and their wishes and thus requires a basic trust in oneself that is independent of others' immediate approval. Assertiveness exists on a continuum, including positively assertive, non-assertive and negatively assertive (Cassell & Blackwell, 2002). The three aspects of human expression which assertiveness cuts across are cognition, behaviour and affect (Yong, 2010). Cognitively and effectively assertive individuals can manage both positive and negative emotions (Gladding, 1988). Behaviourally assertive individuals possess the ability to express their emotions, defend their goals, and establish favourable interpersonal relationships (Herzberger, Chan & Katz, 1984).

Baker and Jesker (2015) explored the extent to which self-esteem is a significant predictor of social network use, and the level of anxiety and assertiveness participants feel during traditional and online interactions. The result indicates that lower self-esteem was not associated with more intensive social network use. Also, social anxiety was a significant positive predictor of assertiveness in the traditional and online setting.

Maqbool Parray, Kumar, David, & Khare, (2020). Investigated if assertiveness predicts self-esteem, academic achievement, and stress; A study of Kashmiri Adolescents. Participant of the study comprised 120 high school students with an equal number of male and female students and an age range of 12-19years. The findings of the study exhibit that assertiveness has a minor role in predicting factors such as self-esteem and academic achievement.

Omolayo and Olajumoke (2013) examine the influence activities of facebook have on assertiveness. It aims at finding whether facebook activities will increase or decrease users' assertiveness. Participants in the study were 192 students selected from two universities, and their age ranges between 16 to 35 years. Data were collected using two standardized research instruments, namely Facebook Intensity Questionnaire (FBI) and Rathus Assertiveness Questionnaire (RAQ). The data were analyzed using a t-test for independent groups and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Four hypotheses were tested, and results show a significant favourable influence of Facebook on Assertiveness. Age was found to have a significant influence on assertiveness. Also, no significant difference exists between female and male usage of Facebook. Findings also indicated that using headphones for Face booking does not bring about greater assertiveness over those using desktop and laptop computers for Face booking. It was concluded that engaging in Facebook activities will positively influence the assertiveness of Facebook users.

Method

Participants

Three hundred undergraduates of the University of Nigeria Nsukka participated in the study(158 female and 142 male). The Participants were drawn using the probability sampling technique. There were nine Departments in the faculty of the Social Sciences at the Nsukka campus. However, four out of the nine Departments were randomly selected (Social work, Public Administration, and Sociology) using a table of random sampling techniques, two classes were selected from each of the three departments, and from the class list, fifty undergraduates were randomly selected from the six classes. Their ages ranged from 18-23 years (M=5.58, SD=1.07).

Instruments

Three instruments were administered for the study, and they include:

Social Comparison Behaviour Questionnaire

The scale was developed by Jones (2001) to evaluate social comparison behaviours to peers. Social Comparison Behaviour questionnaire assesses participants on their likeliness to engage in social comparison behaviour by how often they compare themselves to images they see in social media. Responses are based on a 5-point Likert-type ordered set of options (1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly

agree). Social Comparison Behaviour Questionnaire asked participants to respond how frequently they compare themselves with others, including friends and fashion models and celebrities, and how they compare themselves to social media images based on "likes". Like Jones, participants in this study will be evaluated on how frequently they compare themselves to peers. An example of a statement used was, "I compare my body to that of people in good shape on social media

Body Image Questionnaire

The items were adapted from Jestes (1999) questionnaire on body image. The scale was designed to assess for the presence of body image distortions. The items for measuring body image distortion in the present study will be drawn from this source. An example of an item from the body image questionnaire is: "I am satisfied with the shape of my body". The face and content validity of the items were ascertained by Cash, Alindogan, Steadman, and Whithead (2002). Body image questionnaire was standardized on males and females young adults. Also, a reliability study employing split-half reliability was done using 50 male and 50 female undergraduate students of Nigeria. A reliability coefficient Alpha of .52 and a corrected value of 0.53 was obtained using Spearman Brown. The final instrument was a Likert type questionnaire with five options: 1 = Very Dissatisfied 2 = Somewhat Dissatisfied 3 = Neutral 4 = Somewhat Satisfied 5 = Very Satisfied.

Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS)

The RAS is a standardized psychological assessment instrument developed by Rathus (1973) and validated for use with Nigerian samples by Anumba (1995). It is a 20-item inventory designed to assess assertive behaviour as a component of personality. The scale requires participants to describe themselves using a code (3 = very much like me; 2 = rather like me; 1 = slightly like me; -3 = very much unlike me; -2 = rather unlike me; -1 = slightly unlike me). Items (1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 26, 30) were reverse-scored, and a sum of the results of the direct and reverse-scored items gives the participants overall score, which could range from +90 to -90. Separate norms have been reported for male and female Nigerian samples as follows; males = 48.25, females = 48.61, (Anumba, 1995). The Nigerian norms were the basis for interpreting the scores of the participants. Scores higher than the norms indicate that the client is assertive, while scores lower than the norms indicate non-assertiveness.

Procedure

The researchers collected a letter of identification from the Head of Department of Psychology, the University of Nigeria Nsukka, that enabled them to obtain permission from the Management of the Faculties involved. The researchers met with the students in their classes during the free lecture period and introduced

themselves. The nature of the study was explained to the participants orally, and they sought their consent in completing the questionnaires. Those that agreed to partake in the study were issued three hundred (310) copies of the questionnaires individually in their classrooms with the aid of research assistants, which they completed within 25mins. The researchers collected back the 310 questionnaires immediately after completion; 300 questionnaires were valid for the study, while ten was discarded because they were not adequately filled. Those that are above 23years were excluded from the study. The researcher applauded the participants after the completion of the instruments.

Design and statistics

The research adopted a correlation design. Regression statistical analysis was used to test the hypothesis. Regression analysis allows researchers to simultaneously use several predictor variables, thereby describing the relationship and variations among the independent variable with regard to the dependent variable.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix showing the impact of social media on body image and assertiveness among undergraduates

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social Media	1				
2. Age	-.24**	1			
3. Gender	-.04	-.07	1		
4. Body Image	-.38**	.06	.14*	1	
5. Assertiveness	.34**	-.04	.02	-.10	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlation result in Table 1shows that social media negatively correlate with age (r = -.24, P< .01). Equally social media was indicated to correlate with body image (r = -.38, P< .01) and assertiveness (r = .34, P<.01) respectively. There was also a positive correlation between body image and gender (r = .14, P< .05).

Table 2 Regression Table showing the model summary, Beta (β) coefficient and significant levels of social media on body image and assertiveness among undergraduates.

Variables							Assertiveness				
	Body Image								Model summary		
				Model summary			B AR²	β	t	R	R²
	B	β	t	R	R²	AR²					
Social media	-.29	-.38	-7.00 **	.38	.14	.14	.53 .11	.08	6.24**	.34	.11

a. Dependent Variable: Body image and assertiveness **Note * P < .05, ** P <. 01**

Regression analysis in Table 2 shows that social media has a significant impact on body image (β= -.38, t = -7.00, *P*<.01) of undergraduates. It also shows that social media has a significant impact on assertiveness (β= .08, t = 6.24, *P*< .01). Meanwhile, the model summary indicated the strength of the relationship between social media and body image and likewise social media and assertiveness. It indicates that social media contributes to a 14% variance in the body image of undergraduates. It also indicates that social media contributes to an 11% variance in the level of assertiveness of undergraduates.

Discussion

The study investigated the influence of social media on body image and assertiveness amongst university undergraduates. The study results show that social media has a significant positive impact on the body image of undergraduates. This shows that the more undergraduates use social media, the more it influences the way they perceive their body image. This is because, through the interactive world of technology, the body image of university undergraduates is being shaped as it allows them to socialize, share different cultures and traditions with others (Victor & Nwoke, 2019). Through this medium, positive body image and negative body image may develop. It becomes negative when it undermines their moral values and social inclusions in life, which helps create an online image of themselves that can compensate for perceived flaws or other characteristics they consider lacking (Victor & Nwoke, 2019). This finding is in line with the finding previous by Kinjari and Raghavi (2020), who revealed a significant relationship between social media comparison and body image. The study also revealed that social media has a significant positive impact on assertiveness among undergraduates. This result indicates that those who use social media are assertive. It indicates that social media via internet usage is a powerful influence surrounding individuals' perception and evaluation of who they are, how they think, compose their thought, analyze and authentically criticize issues about their existence (Victor & Nwoke, 2019). Khairunnisa and Putri (2018) in their result indicate that there is a relationship between assertive behaviour and social media

addiction. The present finding agrees with Omolayo and Olajumoke (2013) findings that showed a significant positive correlation between Facebook use and assertiveness. The result was also consistent with Kinjari and Raghavi (2020) findings, which also revealed that Body Image and Social Comparison significantly predicted the Assertiveness of Young Adults.

Summary and Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of social media on body image and assertiveness amongst undergraduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This research was borne out of the curiosity to unravel the influence of social media on body image and assertiveness amongst undergraduates, considering the speed at which they use social media these days. Consequently, the researchers were interested in knowing whether social media influences body image and assertiveness amongst undergraduates of the University of Nigeria, of which the result was positive. However, it is apparent that among Nigerian university undergraduates, one could notice all forms of body tattoos, different hairstyles. Some may be due to what they perceive to be true in these social media. These calls for proper upbringing, parental monitoring and control of their children, especially at their early stage of life. Meanwhile, knowing the implications obtained from the findings of this study, it is expected that the knowledge gotten from this study may not only be applied to undergraduates but however can be useful and applicable to children and adults

across all age and especially among parents and developmental psychologists and

other professionals.

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