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# Social Media & Self-Perception

Social media has evolved from the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the use of telegraphs to send messages and social sites like six degrees founded by Andrew Weinreich to the creation of social media apps in the 21<sup>st</sup> century like Tinder, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and many more productions. Social media has created opportunities for people to connect with others and different innovations that surfaced the world. As time progressed, there are benefits and detriments to the amount of usage people spend on social media. Some benefits of social media are the ability to bring people together through common interests, allowing them to form a connection or strong bond. On the contrary, the detriments of social media are that it influences people to compare themselves to others making them insecure about themselves, it impacts the effects of social anxiety, and creates this persona with the false narrative that everything is perfect. Social media negatively impacts an individual's self-perception. Social media apps exert bad influence on some people as it leads to unrealistic expectations, social comparisons, and social anxiety individuals present online and in the real world.

### **Self-Perception**

Self-perception plays a huge role in social media and human behavior. Self-perception is the way people view themselves and their character traits. Self-perception has an impact on their self-worth, self-esteem and their social connections with others. Self-perception is a psychological theory that was founded by Daryl Bem in 1967, who constructed the idea that one's attitude is dictated by the way they react in a situation. (Andrea Morales, 2022). Depending

on the information people gather online it has an impact on their mentality and their outlook on society. Self-perception plays a key role in terms of social media because what some people discover online determines how they internalize the data and how they view themselves after analyzing.

## **Social Comparisons**

Social comparison is the act of an individual comparing their skillset, features, outward/inward appearance, and overall identity to another person. Social comparisons causes teens to compare themselves to others lowering their self-esteem. Instagram negatively impacts adolescent girls as they're often comparing their body types to others making them feel insecure about themselves. Georgia Wells, Jeff Horwitz and Deepa Seetharaman analyzed the impact that Instagram has on teenage girls regarding their body image and mental health. In their discussion they gathered that frequent users of social media had body insecurities than others. The authors provided an example of a young teenage girl who had health problems because she was consumed on body trainers and compared their bodies with her own. The authors shared that 32% of teen girls had body dysmorphia because they were comparing themselves to different girls living better lifestyles than them and having body goals they wished to obtain (Wells, Horwitz, & Seetharaman, 2021). Teenage girls felt neglected knowing their bodies didn't meet the standards of others online. Instagram kept teen girls engaged in the lives of others which led to them feeling more insecure about their bodies and forming body dysmorphia.

Some social media users compare their lives to others to build up their ego. Elizabeth Gallinari, graduate research assistant from the University of Toledo, expands more on the reasoning behind social comparisons in her scholarly research article, "Likes" for Self-Love? The

Effects of Social Media On Self-Perception. Gallinari expounded the idea that some people compare their lives to others like it's a competition to feel better about themselves (Gallinari, 2017). Some people often compare themselves to feel a sense of pride when it is someone not as fortunate as they're. Compared to someone who has a superior lifestyle to them, some people often feel envious (Gallinari, 2017). High usage of social media can either lead to low-self-esteem, resulting in people seeking online validation to feel more superior than people in less fortunate positions or a feeling of envy.

Social media has some people comparing their looks to others and disregarding their own beauty. Dove, an American personal care brand owned by Unilever (Wikipedia), made a video on YouTube titled, *You're more beautiful than you think*. Dove filmed this video to send a general message to the public that people should stop comparing their facial features to others and acknowledge that they're still beautiful in their own way. There is a large gap between the way people compare others to the way people compare themselves. This video depicted that by gathering women who felt insecure about their looks and a forensic artist drew how they described themselves and how other people described them. As the women saw how the outcome of the art, they saw that the way people described them was way more beautiful than the way they described themselves. The paintings allowed them to reevaluate their self-worth and the way they perceive themselves because they're more beautiful than they think (Dove, 2013). Dove is sending a message that everybody is different and unique in their own way. If people looked and acted the same, then life would be very redundant. Dove encourages people to stop comparing their appearances to others and acknowledge their beauty within.

Social Anxiety

Social Anxiety is a disorder that causes excessive anxious behavior and fear around other people. Social Anxiety causes some people to feel fearful around others and disregarded online and in real life. One of the factors that cause social anxiety is low self-esteem. Low self-esteem leads to people feeling fearful of being judged or "evaluated negatively by other people" (Richards, 2017). People with social anxiety avoid in person interactions with others because they overthink and assume that people around them are judging them. This makes some people feel inferior around others online and in real life.

Instagram filters create false narratives of how people see themselves online compared to real life. Shaohai Jiang and Annabel Ngien conducted a study with Instagram users and used factors of comparisons and low self-esteem and how they correlated to social anxiety. The authors summarized that; Instagram has a mode where people can use different effects to adjust their looks. These filters allow them to look better than they do before. Exposure to those filters can trigger the way people view themselves when the filter Iis used to when it's taken off (Jiang, & Ngien, 2020). Some people who use filters often feel a confidence boost but when the filter is removed, there is a loss of self-esteem as the way they're presented online is different from the way they look in real life.

Social anxiety can cause some people to feel alienated and in fear of being criticized by others online and in real life. Yunus Alkis, Zafer Kadirhan, and Mustafa Sat, conducted a study on Facebook users where they gathered statistical data on the social anxiety rate of users. The authors named that, Facebook users with social anxiety are hesitant about posting and revealing themselves to others in fear of being judged or presumed negatively by others (Alkis, Kadirhan, & Sat, 2017). Social anxiety is a major factor in the lives of people and the way they interact with others. Social media weakens those interactions as some people who have social anxiety are

afraid that they will be negatively evaluated by others and then question themselves and their judgement. This pertains to their self-perception as it weakens their self-worth since they have to be precautious about any interactions online and in person creating doubt within themselves.

## **Unrealistic Expectations**

Unrealistic expectations in terms of social media and self-perception is the act of some people displaying a fantasy life that they depicture online compared to their true identity in real life. Unrealistic expectations gives people the ideal that they're something they're not for online validation. Social media allows people to create a social character where they able to make their fantasy life and present it on the media. Sherry Turkle provides an example of a 16-year-old junior and her life on Facebook. in her text, No Need To Call. Turkle stated that creating a social avatar is the ideal version of who people wish to be but can't be. Social media allows people to mold into that avatar, but their real identity will not be forgotten (Turkle, 2011). Turkle then presents an example of the life of Audrey and her experience with Facebook. Turkle names that with the use of Facebook, Audrey puts on her makeup and presents her identity as if her edited life is her real life. This allows her to interact differently with people and feel that her "life is up there" (Turkle, 2011). The use of social media allows people to mold into a depiction of themselves they wish to be. Audrey's ego was uplifted as she was consuming her time on Facebook and felt like her whole life was surrounded by Facebook and living up to her social avatar's expectations. Without Facebook Audrey would have been nothing and her real identity would have made her feel like she wasn't valued the way she is online.

People are able to create a false persona of themselves online for online validation. The next article was written by Ben Stegner. He listed different reasons on how social media

negatively impacts how people view themselves and one of them were unrealistic expectations. Stegner summarized that, you never know what is real and what is fake online because social media lacks "online authenticity" (Stegner, 2022). Therefore, people can easily present a fake image of their life because some people are seeking online validation from others.

Adriana Manago wrote an article titled, *Media and The Development of Identity*. Manago researched the significance of media and online persona and analyzed whether there were negative effects or positive effects. Manago named that college students have become more dependent on how they present themselves online compared to focusing on their own self-worth. Manago emphasizes the issue that students are more engaged in social media and validating themselves to meet the expectations of others online to build up their ego and feel confident within themselves. The false persona of their identity is who they're online and doesn't resonate with the person they're in person (Manago, 2015). Students are attached to the media as if it is their identity and makes up who they're as person. Some people create a social avatar of who they desire to be which neglects their true identity with a fake persona of themselves superior to others.

## Self-Perception Depends on the Individual

Although social media discourages one's self-worth through social anxiety, unrealistic expectations and social anxiety, these factors pertain to people who have low-self-esteem or envy. Self-perception depends on the individual. Social media doesn't impact all people and there are some people who appreciate themselves for who they're and don't desire attention from others online. Khalaf, Iman Al Hashmi, and Omar Al Omari conducted a study to find a relationship between positive body appreciation and the impact it had on one's self-esteem. They found that people who had positive thoughts on their body were more satisfied with themselves

and had a high level of self-esteem. The author conveys that people who have a positive outlook on their body image are more appreciative and accepting of themselves. They tend to focus on what their body can do than their physical appearance. (Khalaf, Al Hashmi, Al Omari, 2021) The authors mentioned that people who have high self-esteem and are more likely to perceive themselves positively and focus more on the capabilities of what their body can do than their outward appearance. Social media has no impact on people who have high values on themselves so the study shows that some people aren't concerned about the lives of others and focus on how to improve themselves internally than externally.

Martin Graff a senior lecturer in Psychology at the University of South Wales (Psychology Today, 2022), named different aspects of how people present themselves on the media and the type of content they provide. He used a survey to conduct research on self-esteem and the persona that individuals portray online. He sectioned each category of different people who acted a certain way towards social media and analyzed the relationship to social media and their outside life. One of the ways some people often present themselves on the media is honest posting. People who provide honest posting don't care about online validation, likes of others or followers. Graff mentios that people who are honest posters are very social and more outgoing with people online and in real life. (Graff, 2021) Graff shows that there is a variety of people who have their own personality online and people who are online for validation. He then proceeds to name another group of people as "Positive Posting". People who produce positive posts have high levels of self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence and a low level of experiencing negative thoughts/emotions. (Graff, 2021) Graff's survey demonstrated that there are people who have love within themselves and doesn't let the media impact their relationship with their

outward or inner appearance. Graff and Khalaf show that there are some people in society who have high self-worth and doesn't let the media impact their perception and love for themselves.

Social media has created opportunities for people to connect with others anywhere in the world but has also led to cyberbullying and envy. Social media negatively impacts the self-perception of people. Social media apps exert bad influence on some people as it leads to unrealistic expectations, social comparisons, and social anxiety individuals present online and in the real world. social media also allows people to come together and create positive content for others to see to encourage people that it is okay to be themselves and that some people don't have to change who they're for online validation. Apps like Facebook and Instagram create a lot of insecurities and social anxiety which can mentally impact one's mindset and perception of themselves making them feel alienated around others. They persuade that feeling towards people by frivolously keeping people engaged in the lives of others and attached to content creators.

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