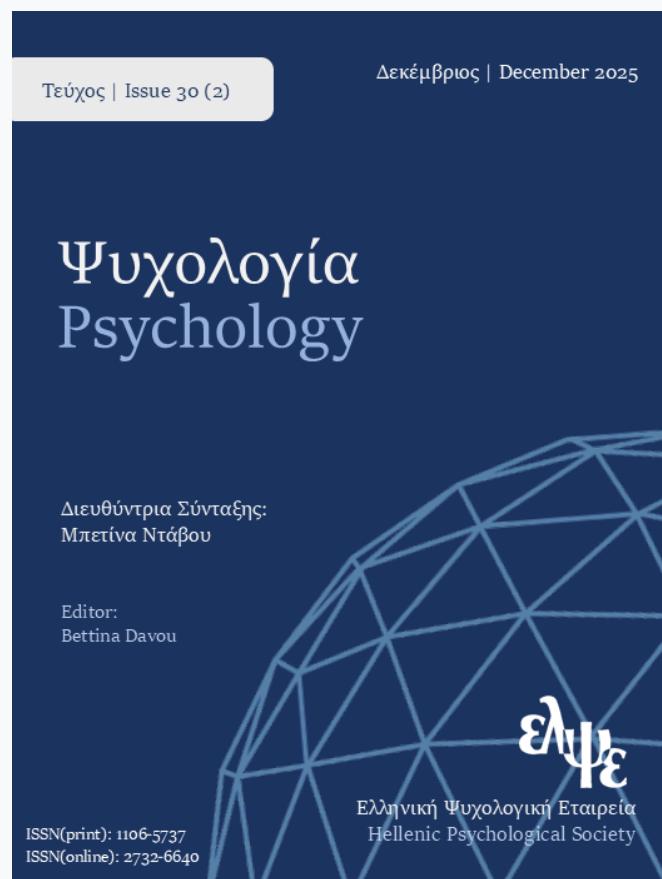


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# Virtual mirrors: Social media's role in body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits in Cyprus

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## KEYWORDS

Social media  
Body dissatisfaction  
Disordered eating habits  
Gender differences

## ABSTRACT

Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) have become an integral part of daily life, shaping perceptions, behaviours, and social norms with positive and negative effects. This study aimed to examine the correlation of passive and active social media use on body satisfaction and disordered eating habits. Passive use refers to content consumption without interaction (e.g., viewing celebrities' posts), while active use involves direct and/or indirect user interaction (e.g., posting, manipulation photos). Gender differences in passive and active social media use and body image were also explored. The study involved 3,504 Cypriot participants (mean age = 36.87, 66.8% female) who responded to multiple measures on social media use, body satisfaction and disordered eating and employed stepwise linear regression and independent samples t-tests for data analysis. The results revealed that, for men, the factors associated with body dissatisfaction included the consumption of fitness posts, posting, manipulation, and investing in photos. Conversely, for women, associated factors were viewing celebrities/fashion/beauty posts, friends', and peers' posts, posting, manipulation, investing in photos, as well as the importance of likes and comments. Regarding disordered eating, men's associated factors were viewing celebrities/fashion/grooming posts, manipulation, investing in photos, and the importance of likes and comments. In contrast, women's associated factors included viewing fitness posts, manipulation, investing in photos, and the importance of likes and comments. Gender differences were observed in all variables, except for taking and posting photos. These findings underscore the complex relationships between passive and active social media use and body image in Cyprus. The results emphasize the need for targeted interventions and prevention strategies to promote positive body image and mitigate the risk of disordered eating habits, considering the gender-specific correlations integral to engagement.

Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) have become an integral part of daily life, shaping perceptions, behaviours, and social norms. Broadly defined, social media encompass a range of online platforms and technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing, and exchange of information, ideas, and various forms of expression (e.g., photographs) among individuals. According to statistical data, as of January 2022, there were 4.62 billion registered social media users worldwide, representing 58.4% of the global population (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2019; Pryde & Prichard, 2022).

The pervasive influence of social media significantly extends to the realm of body image, a topic of increasing concern within the research community. Existing literature has extensively documented the impact of mass media on body image; however, the rapid evolution of social media platforms introduces new dimensions of interaction that require deeper investigation (Kleemans et al., 2018; Perloff, 2014; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). Given the continuous rise in social media usage rates, the research community has turned its focus to examining the impact of social media on body image. Initial studies concentrated on exploring the

association of overall social media usage time on body image. The results of these studies showed that when individuals spend more time on social media, they score higher on appearance comparison variables (Engeln et al., 2020; Fardouly et al., 2018; Jiotsa et al., 2021), internalization of ideals (Flannery et al., 2021), self-objectification (Caso et al., 2020), and drive for thinness (Jiotsa et al., 2021; Mabe et al., 2014). However, there was significant disagreement among the findings regarding the correlation of total social media usage time with body dissatisfaction. More specifically, some researchers found that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between social media usage time and body dissatisfaction (Ahadzadeh et al., 2017; Dumas & Desroches, 2019; Engeln et al., 2020; Jiotsa et al., 2021), others found a negative correlation (Chae, 2017; Ridgway & Clayton, 2016), and some other researchers did not find any statistically significant correlation between the two variables (Cohen et al., 2017; Xiaojing, 2017). For this disagreement, some researchers (e.g., Cohen et al., 2017; 2018; Meier & Gray, 2014) have argued that it is not the total time spent on social media that affects body image, but specific activities. Consequently, interest has shifted towards studying the association of passive and active social media use.

### ***Passive social media use***

Passive social media use refers to viewing content without interacting with other users. Specifically, during passive social media use, individuals do not communicate with others but consume content that has been posted. Typical examples of passive use include reading status updates and viewing photos (Jarman et al., 2022). The content of posts on social media has recently attracted the interest of the research community. Initially, emphasis was placed on the association of photographs in general (appearance-related photos on social media) on body image. Subsequently, the content of posts was categorized into three types: a) celebrity, fashion, and beauty/grooming posts, b) fitness posts, and c) posts from peers and friends (Seekis et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Numerous studies support that continuous exposure to these three categories of posts is positively correlated with body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Cohen et al., 2017; Fardouly et al., 2018; Lonergan et al., 2020; Seekis et al., 2020a, 2020b; Yee et al., 2020). These correlations appear to be explained by three theories/conceptual models: the sociocultural model (Thompson et al., 1999), social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), and self-objectification theory (Fredrickson, & Roberts, 1997). Specifically, when viewing posts, individuals internalize ideal body standards and tend to make upward comparisons to self-evaluate (i.e., assess how well one matches these standards that are perceived as more attractive than the self, thus the upward comparison). When individuals perceive a disparity between their actual and ideal body images, they often develop negative emotions and thoughts about their bodies. This psychological distress can lead to various unhealthy behaviors aimed at narrowing this perceived gap. Examples of such behaviors include engaging in excessive dieting, undertaking intense exercise routines, and resorting to harmful measures such as self-induced vomiting. These actions are often attempts to conform to their ideal body standards rapidly and can jeopardize their health (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Seekis et al., 2020a, 2020b).

### ***Active social media use***

Active social media use refers to activities where the user interacts or communicates either directly or indirectly with other users. During active use, individuals are simultaneously both producers and consumers of content, as they generate content (e.g., posting photos) while also consuming it (e.g., through feedback). Typical examples of active social media use include posting photos, manipulating and investing in photos, taking photos, and engaging with feedback (Jarman et al., 2022).

Several studies have supported that active social media use is positively correlated with body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits (Butkowski et al., 2019; Lonergan et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2015; Niu et al., 2020; Seekis et al., 2020a). According to some researchers, the positive correlation between active social media use and body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits occurs through body surveillance (self-objectification theory, Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and upward comparison (social comparison theory, Festinger, 1954) (Terán et al., 2020; Seekis et al., 2020a, 2020b). During active use, individuals engage in a complex process, placing particular emphasis on their appearance with the ultimate goal of receiving favourable impressions from others when they post a photo. Specifically, individuals must find the right pose, identify flattering aspects of their body, take the photo and then manipulate it until they achieve the “perfect” picture. This entire process positions users as both producers (taking the photo) and objects (becoming the subject of the photo), leading them to objectify themselves as something to be observed, evaluated, and monitored. Active use can essentially be considered a form of body control behaviour, similar to repetitive weighing or mirror checking (Lonergan et al., 2020; Mills et al., 2014).

### ***Gender differences***

Few studies have investigated the impact of gender on passive and active social media use. Most of these studies focus on active use. In the study by Dhir et al. (2016), it was found that women tend to take, manipulate, and post photos on social media more frequently than men. Similarly, the study by Digamon et al. (2020) showed a difference in the frequency of taking photos. Specifically, women were found to take more selfies than men. Additionally, the results of Sorokowski et al. (2015) revealed that women post more types of selfies than men.

### ***Aim of the study***

Based on the above gaps in the literature, the objective of the current study was to evaluate the increased risk that aspects of social media use pose on body dissatisfaction and disordered eating as well as possible protective factors. Specifically, the study assessed predictive factors—both passive and active social media use activities, including watching celebrities/beauty and fashion posts, watching fitness-related posts, viewing posts of friends and peers, taking, posting, manipulating photos, investing in photos, and the importance of likes and comments—of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits among both men and women. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate gender differences in these variables. In line with existing research and the objectives of the study, the following research questions were assessed:

1. Are there differences in predictors of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating between males and females?
2. Are there any significant differences in passive and active social media use activities, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits, between males and females?

### ***Cultural context and significance of the study***

Investigating this issue in Cyprus was deemed necessary due to the country's cultural, historical, geographical, and epidemiological characteristics. In particular, following the end of the Turkish invasion in 1974, Cyprus experienced significant economic growth, which led to a strong emphasis on the social and personal image of its residents (e.g., housing, appearance, vehicles, etc.). Additionally, the geographical location of Cyprus greatly influences weather patterns, resulting in nearly year-round sunshine (approximately 320 days). Due to the intense heat, residents are often required to wear lighter and more revealing clothing, leading to a greater focus on appearance and body (Argyrides, 2013; Argyrides et al., 2020). Consequently, there is a higher prevalence of body dissatisfaction and symptoms of eating disorders in the Cypriot population compared to

other European countries (Argyrides et al., 2019). Additionally, this study contributes to the existing literature by including men in the sample (who are usually understudied) (Dakanalis & Riva, 2013) and a broad age range of adult participants (18-65+). More specifically, studies conducted worldwide have focused primarily on teenagers, with particular emphasis on teenage girls (Chua, & Chang, 2016; Digamon, et al., 2020; McLean, et al., 2015), and on young adult women (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Butkowski et al., 2019; Prichard et al., 2020; Wick & Keel, 2020). The study of the association of social media on men was only conducted by five studies, focusing on young adults (Fatt et al., 2019; Modica 2020; Seekis et al., 2020; Yee et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the inclusion of a mixed sample (men and women) was found only in seven studies (Barron et al., 2021; Chen, 2021; Fox & Vendemia, 2016; Hummel & Smith, 2015; Lonergan et al., 2019; Santarossa & Woodruff, 2017; Yang et al., 2020).

## Method

### Participants

The study utilized a snowball sampling method to recruit participants and comprised a sample of 3,504 adults from Cyprus (1163 (33.2%) males and 2341 (66.8%) females). The male participants ranged in age from 18 to 77 years, with a mean age of 36.87 years ( $SD = 11.98$ ). The educational profile of the male participants revealed that 44.9% were university graduates, 24.8% had completed high school or technical school, and 24.3% held postgraduate degrees. The average height of the male participants was 174.70 cm ( $SD = 9.75$ ), and their average weight was 81.02 kg ( $SD = 18.14$ ). Regarding body mass index (BMI), 43.1% of the male participants were classified as having normal weight, while 36.2% were classified as overweight or obese.

The female participants were aged between 18 and 75 years, with a mean age identical to that of the males, at 36.87 years ( $SD = 10.35$ ). Among the females, 43.9% were university graduates, 28.3% held postgraduate degrees, and 24.2% had completed high school or technical school. The average height for female participants was 164.76 cm ( $SD = 5.93$ ), with an average weight of 69.08 kg ( $SD = 16.17$ ). In terms of BMI categories, 52% of the female participants were in the normal weight range, while 23.8% were classified as overweight or obese.

### Measures

**Viewing celebrities/fashion/beauty or grooming posts and the importance of feedback.** The Social Networking Appearance Scale (SNARS) was utilized in this study (Seekis et al., 2020a for the female version; Seekis et al., 2020b for the male version) to evaluate passive social media use and the significance of feedback received. This scale comprises three subscales: the Celebrity/Fashion/Beauty or Grooming subscale (six items, e.g., "I follow fashion personalities/influencers"), the Fitspiration subscale (five items, e.g., "I follow fitness and/or health personalities/influencers"), and the Feedback Investment subscale (six items, e.g., "How important are the number of likes you receive from peers on photos of yourself?"). Responses for the Celebrity/Fashion/Beauty or Grooming and Fitspiration subscales were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represents '*almost never*' and 5 '*almost always*'. Responses for the Feedback Investment subscale were measured on a similar five-point scale, where 1 indicates '*not at all important*' and 5 '*extremely important*'. Subscale scores were calculated as the mean of the items within each subscale, with higher scores indicating more frequent engagement and perceived importance of feedback.

The reliability of the subscales, as reported by the developers, was .91 for the Celebrity/Fashion/Beauty subscale, .89 for the Fitspiration subscale, and .86 for the Feedback Investment subscale in the female version (Seekis et al., 2020a). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha values obtained were .91 for Celebrity/Fashion/Beauty, .81 for Fitspiration, and .85 for Feedback Investment. For the male version, the

reliability was reported as .91 for Celebrity/Fashion/Grooming, .87 for Fitspiration, and .85 for Feedback Investment (Seekis, Bradley, & Duffy, 2020b), with this study achieving values of .89, .86, and .86, respectively.

**Viewing friends and peers posts.** To assess passive usage specifically related to viewing posts from friends and peers, three frequency-based statements were employed, grounded in prior research (Chang et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019). These statements included: "I follow peers and friends," "I read posts and view photos from friends and peers," and "I review comments on photos of peers and friends and observe the number of comments and likes they garner." Responses were captured on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 signifies 'almost never' and 5 'almost always.' Scores were derived as the mean of responses to these items, with higher scores indicating greater frequency of interaction with content from friends and peers.

**Taking and posting photos.** The frequency of taking and posting photos was gauged using questions consistent with prior studies (Cohen et al., 2018; McLean et al., 2015; Terán et al., 2020). Participants responded to the questions, "How often do you take photos?" and "How often do you post photos on social media?" using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ('never') to 5 ('very frequently', 'several times a day'). Higher scores reflect more frequent activity. The adoption of a single-item frequency question for these activities was deemed appropriate and justified based on Modica (2020), who argued that single-item measures can effectively and reliably assess specific unidimensional behaviours, as also evidenced by their use in similar studies.

**Photo manipulation.** The Photo Manipulation Scale, developed by McLean et al. (2015), was utilized to assess modifications made to photos. This scale consists of ten items (e.g., "Highlight facial features, e.g., cheekbones or eye colour/brightness") with responses collected on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('never') to 5 ('always'). The overall score is calculated as the sum of all responses, with higher scores indicating more frequent photo manipulation. The reliability of this scale, as reported by its creators, is .85. In the present study, reliability values were .87 for women and .86 for men.

**Photo investment.** The Photo Investment Scale, also developed by McLean et al. (2015), includes eight pairs of opposing statements (e.g., "It's easy to choose the photo" vs. "It's hard to choose the photo"). Responses are elicited on a 0-100 scale, with the final score being the average of all item scores after reverse scoring where appropriate. Higher scores signify a greater investment in the manipulation and selection of photos before posting. The reliability of this scale, with a Cronbach's alpha, is .85 according to its developers. For the current study, reliability was .71 for the female sample and .74 for the male sample.

**Body satisfaction.** Body satisfaction was measured using the Appearance Evaluation Subscale from the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ-AS; Cash, 2000; Greek translation by Argyrides & Kkeli, 2013). This subscale comprises seven items (e.g., "I like my appearance the way it is") and uses a five-point Likert scale for responses, where 1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree'. The final score is the average of all items, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction with one's body. The reliability of this subscale, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, is .82 for the Greek version and ranges from .70 to .89 for the English version (Argyrides & Kkeli, 2013). In the present study, reliability was .88 for women and .85 for men.

**Disordered eating habits.** Disordered eating habits were assessed using the Drive for Thinness Subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory-3 (Garner, 2004). This subscale contains seven items (e.g., "I think about dieting") with responses rated on a five-point Likert scale from 0 ('always') to 4 ('rarely or never'). The final score is computed as the average of all item scores, where lower scores denote more pronounced disordered

eating habits. The reliability of this scale, as per its creator, is .83. In this study, the reliability was .90 for the female sample and .89 for the male sample.

It should be noted that a forward and backward translation of the English questionnaires (Social Networking Appearance-SNARS, Photo Manipulation Scale, Photo Investment Scale) was performed.

### **Procedure**

The present study received approval from the Cyprus National Bioethics Committee (Prot. Num. EEBK ΕΠ 2022.01.173). Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's objectives and provided their informed consent prior to participation. The informed consent form outlined the study's purpose, the right to voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. It also emphasized the anonymity of the data and its use exclusively for research purposes. Additionally, the email addresses of both the researcher and supervisor were provided for participants to submit any questions or concerns related to the study or their personal data. Data collection occurred between August 2022 and March 2023 using electronic questionnaires created on Google Forms and disseminated through social media platforms. Separate questionnaires were designed for male and female participants to address gender-specific variables relevant to the study. Initially, participants completed a demographic survey, which collected information on gender (male, female, other), age, height, weight, and educational level, followed by additional questionnaires. No other data were collected on participants such as being pregnant, postpartum, or had a physical illness or psychiatric diagnosis. All collected data were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 29.0 (SPSS 29), for the required statistical analyses. To account for potential issues associated with the large sample size of 3,504 participants, several measures were taken to ensure the robustness of the findings. To prevent overfitting, model selection techniques and cross-validation were employed, ensuring that the models were not excessively complex for the data. Additionally, to control for Type I errors arising from multiple comparisons, adjustments such as the Bonferroni correction were applied, reducing the likelihood of false positives and ensuring the validity of the results. Lastly, no compensation was offered to participants for their involvement in the study.

### **Results**

To assess the first research question, four stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted, two for each gender. In these analyses, the criterion variables were the total score of the Appearance Evaluation Scale (assessing levels of body image dissatisfaction) and the Drive for Thinness Scale (assessing disordered eating habits). The variables examined were Viewing Celebrities/fashion/beauty or grooming posts, viewing fitness posts, viewing friends' and peers' posts, taking photos, posting photos, photo manipulation, photo investment, and the importance one attributes to likes and comments received.

For males, the first regression analysis revealed significant associations ( $F(4,1158) = 20.47, p < .001$ ). Four out of the eight variables significantly associated with body image dissatisfaction, accounting for 25.7% of the variance. Photo investment was the most impactful associated factor, accounting for 17.2% of the variance in body image dissatisfaction ( $R = .172, R^2 = .030, R^2 \text{ adjusted} = .029$ ). Photo manipulation added 3.1% to the variance ( $R = .203, R^2 = .041, R^2 \text{ adjusted} = .040$ ), both acting as risk factors. Posting photos contributed another 3.8% ( $R = .241, R^2 = .058, R^2 \text{ adjusted} = .056$ ), and watching fitness posts added 1.6% ( $R = .257, R^2 = .066, R^2 \text{ adjusted} = .063$ ), both serving as protective factors (see Table 1).

The second regression analysis for males also showed significant results ( $F(4,1158) = 28.86, p < .001$ ), with four variables significantly associated with disordered eating habits accounting for 30.1% of the total variance (see Table 1). Photo manipulation was the most significant associated factor, which accounted for 22.8% of the variance of disordered eating habits ( $R = .228, R^2 = .052, R^2 \text{ adjusted} = .051$ ), followed by photo

investment, adding 5.5% to the total variance ( $R = .283$ ,  $R^2 = .080$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.078) and watching celebrities/fashion and grooming post (adding another 0.8%;  $R = .291$ ,  $R^2 = .084$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.082), all of which served as risk factors. The fourth significant associator was taking photos (1%;  $R = .301$ ,  $R^2 = .091$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.088), which served as a protective factor (see table 1).

**Table 1** Multiple regression values of males predicting body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits

Independent Predictor Variables	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Body Dissatisfaction</b>						
Photo Investment	-.005	.001	-.157	-5.361	< .001	.029
Photo Manipulation	-.018	.004	-.155	-5.086	< .001	.040
Posting Photos	.075	.018	.126	4.186	< .001	.056
Viewing Fitness Posts	.067	.021	.091	3.168	.002	.063
<b>Disordered Eating Habits</b>						
Photo Manipulation	-.031	.005	-.189	-6.066	<.001	.051
Photo Investment	-.008	.001	-.165	-5.681	<.001	.078
Viewing Celebrities/fashion and grooming posts	-.093	.033	-.087	-2.859	.004	.082
Taking photos	.069	.024	.085	2.813	.005	.088

\*Notes: N=1163

For females, the first regression analysis indicated significant findings ( $F(6,2334) = 23.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with six out of the eight variables significantly associated with body dissatisfaction, accounting for 23.6% of the variance. Photo investment was the most significant associated factor, which served as a risk factor and accounted for 15.5% of the variance in body dissatisfaction ( $R = .155$ ,  $R^2 = .024$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.024). This was followed by posting photos, which served as a protective factor and contributed another 3.6% to the total variance ( $R = .191$ ,  $R^2 = .036$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.036), importance of likes and comments, which served as a risk factor (adding another 2.7%,  $R = .218$ ,  $R^2 = .048$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.046) and watching celebrities/fashion and beauty posts, which served as a protective factor (.9%;  $R = .227$ ,  $R^2 = .051$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.050). The above was followed by watching friends and peers' posts (.5%;  $R = .232$ ,  $R^2 = .054$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.052) and photo manipulation (.4%;  $R = .236$ ,  $R^2 = .056$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.053), both of which served as risk factors (see Table 2).

The second regression analysis for females showed significant results ( $F(5,2335) = 79.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with five variables significantly associated with disordered eating habits and accounting for 38.2% of the total variance. More specifically, watching fitness posts was the most significant associated factor, accounting for 26.1% of the variance in disordered eating ( $R = .261$ ,  $R^2 = .068$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.068), followed by importance given to likes and comments, adding another 6.5% to the total variance ( $R = .326$ ,  $R^2 = .106$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.106), photo investment (3.2%;  $R = .358$ ,  $R^2 = .128$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.127) and photo manipulation (1.9%;  $R = .377$ ,  $R^2 = .142$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.141), all of which served as risk factors. Watching friends' and peers' posts was the fifth significant (.5%;  $R = .382$ ,  $R^2 = .146$ ,  $R^2$  adjusted=.144) (see Table 2).

**Table 2** *Multiple regression values of females predicting body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits*

Independent Predictor Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Body Dissatisfaction</b>						
Photo Investment	-.005	.001	-.134	-6.321	<.001	.024
Posting Photos	.088	.014	.136	6.248	<.001	.036
Importance of Feedback	-.093	.020	-.103	-4.518	<.001	.046
Viewing Celebrities/fashion and beauty posts	.065	.016	.090	3.986	<.001	.050
Viewing friends' and peers post	-.048	.020	-.054	-2.363	.018	.052
Photo Manipulation	-.005	.003	-.049	-2.164	.031	.053
<b>Disordered Eating Habits</b>						
Viewing Fitness Posts	-.292	.025	-.229	-11.768	<.001	.068
Importance of Feedback	-.206	.029	-.153	-7.096	<.001	.106
Photo Investment	-.007	.001	-.133	-6.609	<.001	.127
Photo Manipulation	-.022	.003	-.135	-6.616	<.001	.141
Viewing friends' and peers post	.092	.028	.069	3.317	<.001	.144

\*Notes: N=2341

To assess the second research question addressing possible differences between males and females, a series of independent sample t-tests were carried out. The results revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups in all the variables except taking and posting photos on Social Media.

Specifically, regarding passive social media use, significant differences emerged in watching celebrities/fashion/beauty or grooming posts ( $t(3502) = -24.95, p < .001$ ), watching fitness posts ( $t(3502) = -8.098, p < .001$ ), and watching friends and peers' posts ( $t(3502) = -5.063, p = .001$ ). Mean scores indicated that women more frequently watch fitness ( $M = 2.69, SD = .819$ ), celebrities/fashion and beauty ( $M = 2.971, SD = .972$ ), and friends and peers' posts ( $M = 3.51, SD = .789$ ) compared to men, who had lower mean scores for fitness posts ( $M = 2.45, SD = .901$ ), celebrities/fashion and grooming posts ( $M = 2.13, SD = .884$ ), and friends and peers' posts ( $M = 3.36, SD = .868$ ).

Regarding active social media use, statistically significant differences were also observed in photo manipulation [ $t(3502) = -6.27, p < .001$ ], photo investment [ $t(3502) = -4.65, p = <.001$ ], taking photos [ $t(3502) = -3.82, p = <.001$ ] and posting photos [ $t(3502) = -2.13, p = .03$ ]. Mean scores revealed that women engaged more extensively in photo manipulation ( $M = 16, SD = 6.26$ ), invested more in their photos ( $M = 46.08, SD = 19.56$ ), take ( $M=2.07, SD=1.19$ ) and post more photos ( $M=1.76, SD=1.09$ ) compared to men [photo manipulation ( $M = 14.63, SD = 5.77$ ), photo investment ( $M = 42.76, SD = 20.48$ ), taking photo ( $M=1.91, SD=1.18$ ), posting photos ( $M=1.67, SD=1.11$ )].

As for the variables concerning body image, results also revealed statistically significant differences in disordered eating habits [ $t(3502)=6.193, p<.001$ ]. Specifically, men scored significantly lower ( $M=2.870,$

$SD=.951$ ) in disordered eating habits than women ( $M=2.645$ ,  $SD=1.047$ ). The results indicated that men had significantly higher body satisfaction and lower disordered eating habits, than women.

## Discussion

The objective of the current study was to evaluate the increased risk that aspects of social media use pose on body dissatisfaction and disordered eating as well as possible protective factors. Specifically, the study assessed predictive factors—both passive and active social media use activities, including watching celebrities/beauty and fashion posts, watching fitness-related posts, viewing posts of friends and peers, taking, posting, manipulating photos, investing in photos, and the importance of likes and comments—of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits among both men and women. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate gender differences in these variables.

Concerning the predictive factors of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors, both differences and similarities were found between the two genders. In particular, passive social media use indicated that for women, viewing friends' and peers' posts negatively predicted body satisfaction. These results align with previous studies (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Chang et al., 2019). This finding may be interpreted through the lens of the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), which posits that individuals are more likely to compare themselves with similar and attainable targets. This comparison is more pronounced with peers than with celebrities or models, as the appearance of peers is perceived as more achievable, creating further pressure to attain an ideal body/image. Consequently, exposure to numerous attractive and potentially manipulated photos from peers, who often present an idealized version of themselves on social media, increases upward appearance comparisons and, thus, body dissatisfaction (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Chang et al., 2019). This aligns with the sociocultural model (Thompson et al., 1999) which emphasizes the impact of cultural and social pressures on body image. However, viewing friends' and peers' posts positively predicted women's eating habits, suggesting these posts may not influence women's behaviors but rather their feelings about their bodies, acknowledging that some posts are manipulated (Chua & Chang, 2016).

Additionally, viewing fitness posts in men and celebrity/fashion and beauty posts in women acted as protective factors against body dissatisfaction. These findings contradict previous research (Cohen et al., 2017; Fardouly et al., 2018; Seekis et al., 2020a, 2020b). The observed discrepancy may be attributed to the globally trending body positivity messages accompanying these posts, which emphasize diverse body types and are promoted by celebrities and athletes worldwide. These messages resonate across different cultures and have been found to serve as protective factors globally, potentially influencing Cypriots in similar ways (Cohen et al., 2021; Seekis et al., 2020b). Additionally, another potential reason might be considered: if individuals recognize that these images are digitally altered and thus do not represent reality, this awareness could potentially reduce their influence on body image concerns. However, it's important to note that this explanation is speculative and would need to be validated by future research to confirm its accuracy (Fardouly et al., 2018).

In contrast, viewing fitness posts in women and celebrity/fashion and grooming posts in men were risk factors for developing or exacerbating disordered eating habits. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Cohen et al., 2017; Fardouly et al., 2018; Seekis et al., 2020a, 2020b). Considering the impact on body dissatisfaction, these posts might affect individuals' behaviors rather than emotions, leading to increased levels of disordered eating habits. These findings are underscored by self-objectification theory, where such media exposure leads to heightened body surveillance and subsequent dissatisfaction due to internalizing unattainable beauty standards (Cohen et al., 2017; Fardouly et al., 2018; Seekis et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Regarding active social media use, it was found that in both men and women, photo manipulation and photo investment negatively predicted body satisfaction and eating habits. These results are consistent with previous research (McLean et al., 2015; Mills et al., 2018) and reflect self-objectification theory. Specifically, when manipulating and investing in photos, individuals function both as processors and as objects of processing. As they manipulate their photos, they tend to view themselves from an observer's perspective and treat themselves as an object to be evaluated by others according to idealized body standards. Due to this evaluation, they engage in appearance comparisons to verify and confirm whether they meet the standards, aiming for more positive evaluations. This process acts as a mirror, where individuals compare themselves with idealized standards, focusing on perceived flaws, ultimately leading to increased body dissatisfaction. Simultaneously, the discrepancy between the real self and the manipulated photo increases body dissatisfaction, leading to dysfunctional behaviours (e.g. food restriction) (Terán et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

For women, but not men, the importance of feedback negatively predicted body satisfaction and disordered eating habits. This result is consistent with previous research and consistent with the sociocultural model (the influence of the social environment) (Butkowski et al., 2019; Fatt & Fardouly, 2023; Hummel & Smith, 2015; Seekis et al., 2020a). Feedback on social media differs significantly from face-to-face feedback, as individuals have immediate access to feedback at any time. Others can also see and react to this feedback through likes and comments, making it public and persistent. Feedback essentially represents the reward for physical appearance, increasing objectification and, subsequently, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits (Fatt & Fardouly, 2023). According to Lonergan et al. (2020), the importance of feedback may reflect online reassurance-seeking, a symptom of eating disorders. Moreover, the feedback received on posts can influence and reshape how individuals perceive their appearance, leading to behaviors (e.g., intense exercise, food restriction, inducing vomiting) aimed at improving or maintaining their appearance for further positive feedback or reducing negative feedback. This continuous involvement with appearance and adopting an observer's perspective increases body surveillance and, consequently, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits (Fatt & Fardouly, 2023; Niu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, for both men and women, posting photos acted as a protective factor against developing or maintaining body dissatisfaction. This protective role of photo posting has been found in previous studies and it aligns with the sociocultural model and social comparison theory (Butkowski et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2019; Nesi et al., 2021; Teran et al., 2020). According to these studies, the protective role of photo posting is due to the careful selection and manipulation of photos to represent the best version of oneself. Consequently, individuals receive positive feedback, confirming that they meet the criteria of idealized body standards, potentially increasing body satisfaction and self-confidence. Lastly, photo-taking served as a protective factor against developing or maintaining disordered eating habits only in men. This finding might be due to the fact that most individuals photograph their faces rather than their entire bodies, leading to fewer behaviours aimed at improving body image (Digamon et al., 2020).

Regarding the second research question, results indicated statistically significant differences between the two groups in all variables except importance of feedback and body satisfaction. Specifically, it was found that women more frequently viewed posts from all three categories while also taking and posting more photos. Also, women engage more in photo manipulation and investment. This aligns with prior research concerning online self-representation, wherein women commonly portray themselves as attractive individuals affiliated with social groups by actively engaging in social media. To achieve this, they draw inspiration from others' positively evaluated posts (Dhir et al., 2016). Additionally, women were found to experience more disordered eating habits than men. This can be contextualized within the sociocultural model (Thompson et al., 1999),

which explains how societal expectations disproportionately emphasize physical appearance for women, thereby increasing their risk for body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. Historically and culturally, as Grogan (2008) highlights, women face more intense scrutiny and pressure regarding their appearance than men. This societal pressure is magnified by social media platforms, where continuous exposure to idealized images contributes to and exacerbates these issues.

The findings of this study highlight that both passive and active use of social media negatively impact body image among both men and women in Cyprus. These findings contribute to the existing literature by demonstrating the importance of investigating specific social media activities rather than overall usage time to understand the relationship between social media, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating habits in both genders (Cohen et al., 2018; Meier & Gray, 2014).

Professional psychologists should consider these results, as the negative impact of social media can be significant in the treatment or maintenance of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits. Specifically, these findings can be used to assess and intervene in how clients spend their time on social media, particularly those with body image concerns (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022; Cohen et al., 2017, 2018).

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of developing intervention programs aimed at adults of all ages to challenge the idealized body standards presented on social media. These programs should promote a critical perspective toward social media and aim to reduce body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits (Argyrides, 2013; Argyrides et al., 2019).

This study has several limitations that should be taken into account. First, as a correlational study, experimental and longitudinal research is needed to further clarify the relationship between passive and active social media use and body image (Fardouly et al., 2018). Additionally, this study is limited to evaluating the association of social media on Cypriots. Therefore, any generalizations should be made with caution, as certain factors specific to Cyprus, which have been found to play a role in body image, may not apply to other cultural groups, leading to differences in risk and protective factors (Argyrides et al., 2020). Furthermore, data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which always raises a concern about possible biases and fully reflects the participants' perspectives. Also, due to the use of the snowball sampling method, the findings of the study may not be representative and thus may not be generalizable to the population (Argyrides et al., 2020). Lastly, there were no data collected on variables that could potentially influence the results such as being pregnant, postpartum, or had a physical illness or psychiatric diagnosis (such as any eating disorder).

Future research should investigate the effect of passive and active social media use on adolescents and pre-adolescents, as previous studies have indicated, social media is particularly popular among adolescents and has a negative impact on their body image (Chang et al., 2019; Fatt & Fardouly, 2023; Lonergan et al., 2020; McLean et al., 2015). Moreover, considering that social media posts often feature images of faces, future research might focus on the impact of social media on facial satisfaction. Additionally, it would be beneficial to explore protective factors (e.g., self-esteem, body appreciation) to identify factors that protect against the negative impact of social media on body image. Furthermore, future studies should examine other demographic characteristics regarding the impact of social media on body image and eating habits (e.g., BMI, educational level, professional/family status). Based on the reported percentages of variance explained by the models are relatively modest, suggesting that a significant portion of the variance in body image dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits remains unaccounted for. This indicates that other potentially influential variables might not have been included in the analyses. Future studies, should consider including additional variables, such as sociodemographic factors etc, which may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing these outcomes.

Particular emphasis should be placed on studying differences due to BMI, as according to the demographic characteristics of this study, most participants fell into the Normal Weight and Overweight-Obese categories.

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the negative impact of both passive and active social media use on body image and eating behaviours among Cypriot men and women. The findings underscore the importance of examining specific social media activities rather than overall usage time to understand their effects on body dissatisfaction, disordered eating habits, and gender differences.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.08.008>

# Διαδικτυακοί καθρέφτες: Ο ρόλος των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης στη δυσαρέσκεια σώματος και στις διαταραγμένες διατροφικές συνήθειες στην Κύπρο

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## KEYWORDS IN GREEK

Μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης  
Δυσαρέσκεια σώματος  
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Διαφορές λόγω φύλου

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## ABSTRACT IN GREEK

Οι πλατφόρμες μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης (π.χ. Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) έχουν γίνει αναπόσπαστο μέρος της καθημερινής ζωής, διαμορφώνοντας αντιλήψεις, συμπεριφορές και κοινωνικούς κανόνες με θετικά και αρνητικά αποτελέσματα. Σκοπός της παρούσας μελέτης ήταν η διερεύνηση της επίδρασης της παθητικής και ενεργητικής χρήσης των Μέσων Κοινωνικής Δικτύωσης, στη δυσαρέσκεια σώματος και διαταραγμένες διατροφικές συνήθειες καθώς επίσης και η διερεύνηση διαφορών λόγω φύλου. Η παθητική χρήση, αναφέρεται στην κατανάλωση περιεχομένου χωρίς αλληλεπίδραση (π.χ. προβολή δημοσιεύσεων διασημοτήτων), ενώ η ενεργητική χρήση περιλαμβάνει άμεση ή έμμεση αλληλεπίδραση του χρήστη (π.χ. ανάρτηση, επεξεργασία φωτογραφιών). Στην παρούσα μελέτη, συμμετείχαν 3504 άτομα (μέση ηλικία: 36.87, 66.8% γυναίκες) και πραγματοποιήθηκαν αναλύσεις παλινδρόμησης και αναλύσεις σύγκρισης ανεξάρτητων δειγμάτων (t-test). Τα αποτελέσματα, κατέδειξαν ότι για τους άνδρες, η δυσαρέσκεια σώματος προβλεπόταν από την παρακολούθηση δημοσιεύσεων φυσικής κατάστασης/άθλησης, δημοσίευση, επεξεργασία και επένδυση στις φωτογραφίες. Οι διαταραγμένες διατροφικές συνήθειες, προβλέπονταν από τη λήψη, επεξεργασία και επένδυση στις φωτογραφίες καθώς επίσης και από την παρακολούθηση δημοσιεύσεων διασημοτήτων/ομορφιάς και μόδας. Για τις γυναίκες, η δυσαρέσκεια σώματος προβλεπόταν από την παρακολούθηση δημοσιεύσεων διασημοτήτων/ομορφιάς και μόδας, φίλων και συνομιλήκων καθώς επίσης και από την δημοσίευση, επεξεργασία και επένδυση στις φωτογραφίες και τη σημαντικότητα της ανατροφοδότησης. Οι διαταραγμένες διατροφικές συνήθειες, προβλέπονταν από την παρακολούθηση δημοσιεύσεων φίλων και συνομιλήκων, φυσικής κατάστασης/άθλησης, επεξεργασίας και επένδυσης στις φωτογραφίες καθώς επίσης και από την σημαντικότητα της ανατροφοδότησης. Διαφορές λόγω φύλου, προέκυψαν σε όλες τις μεταβλητές εκτός της λήψης και δημοσίευσης φωτογραφιών. Τα αποτελέσματα υπογραμμίζουν την ανάγκη δημιουργίας στοχευμένων παρεμβάσεων με σκοπό την προώθηση της θετικής εικόνας σώματος και της μείωσης/πρόληψης ανάπτυξης διαταραγμένων διατροφικών συνηθειών.