

The Influence of Social Networking Site Appearance Comparisons on Subjective Well-being among Female College Students: The Mediating Effect of Compulsive Buying in an Online Setting

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of social networking site (SNS) body image comparisons on the subjective well-being (SWB) of female college students, and the potential mediating effect of compulsive buying behavior (CBB). The study surveyed 500 female college students aged between 18 and 25 from three universities in China. Results show that SNS body image comparisons have a negative correlation with SWB and a positive correlation with CBB. Structural equation modeling indicates that CBB partially mediates the relationship between SNS body image comparisons and SWB. Furthermore, income was found to moderate the relationship between SNS body image comparisons and CBB. The findings suggest the need for interventions addressing body image comparisons on SNS and the regulation of online advertising. Limitations of the study include its focus on female college students and reliance on self-reported data, and future research should explore interventions promoting positive self-image on SNSs and consider other population groups.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites; Appearance Comparisons; Subjective Well-being; Female College Students; Compulsive Buying; Mediating Effect.

1. Introduction

Social networking websites have become an integral part of the daily lives of modern individuals, especially among young adults. With the rise of social media, there have been notable changes in the way people interact with each other and their perception of their own lives. In recent years, researchers have become increasingly interested in studying the impact of social media on individuals' subjective well-being and happiness.

This study focuses on the influence of body image comparison on female college students' subjective well-being on social networking sites. Previous research has shown that social comparison is a common phenomenon on social media, with individuals often comparing themselves with others and evaluating their own worth and success based on what they see. Body image comparison, in particular, has been noted to have a significant impact on body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, and psychological health.

The study also examines whether compulsive buying behavior mediates the relationship between body image comparison and subjective well-being. Compulsive buying is a problematic behavior that can lead to financial difficulties and negative emotional consequences. Previous research has suggested that compulsive buying behavior may be driven by low self-esteem, and social comparison on social media can exacerbate this behavior.

The results of this study can provide insight into the mechanisms through which social media affects individuals' well-being. Moreover, this study can aid in the development of interventions aimed at reducing the negative impact of social media on individuals' psychological health. By understanding the factors that contribute to compulsive buying behaviors, interventions can be developed to promote healthy consumption habits and improve individuals' well-

being.

2. Literature Review

Social networking sites (SNSs) are online platforms that allow individuals to create profiles, share information, and interact with others. SNSs have become increasingly popular in recent years, and there are now a wide variety of different types of SNSs available. Some of the most popular types of SNSs include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Each of these platforms has its unique features, but they all share the common goal of connecting people and facilitating communication.

Many studies have examined the relationship between SNS use and subjective well-being. Subjective well-being refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their life and includes both positive affect (i.e., feelings of happiness and contentment) and negative affect (i.e., feelings of sadness and anxiety).

Research has shown that SNS use can have both positive and negative effects on subjective well-being. For example, some studies have found that SNS use can increase feelings of social connectedness and improve mood, leading to higher levels of subjective well-being. However, other studies have found that excessive SNS use can lead to feelings of social comparison and envy, which can have negative effects on subjective well-being.

Compulsive buying behavior refers to an excessive and uncontrollable urge to buy things, even when the purchase is not necessary or affordable. Research has shown that individuals with higher levels of subjective well-being are less likely to engage in compulsive buying behavior. This may be because individuals who are generally happy and satisfied with their lives are less likely to seek emotional validation through material possessions.

Recent research has suggested that compulsive buying

behavior may mediate the relationship between SNS use and subjective well-being. That is, individuals who use SNSs excessively may be more likely to engage in compulsive buying behavior, which can have negative effects on their subjective well-being. This suggests that it is important to understand the role of compulsive buying behavior in the relationship between SNS use and subjective well-being and to develop strategies to prevent or mitigate this behavior.

3. Methodology

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationship between social media body image comparison and subjective well-being, and the mediating effect of compulsive buying behavior among female college students. The sample was collected through convenience sampling at three universities in China, including 500 female college students aged between 18 and 25. Participants were recruited through posters and online announcements, and they voluntarily completed the electronic survey.

Data was collected through an online survey using standardized measures. The survey consisted of four sections: demographic information, social media use, body image comparison, and compulsive buying behavior. Participants were asked to rate their subjective well-being on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of well-being.

Body image comparison was assessed using the modified Social Comparison Scale, which measured the extent to which participants compared themselves to others on social media in terms of body appearance. Compulsive buying behavior was measured using the Chinese version of the Compulsive Buying Scale, which assessed the degree of compulsive buying behavior.

The data was analyzed using SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0. Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between variables. Structural equation modeling was used to test the proposed hypotheses.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the three universities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their informed consent was obtained before participation. The survey was anonymous, and participants' confidentiality was protected throughout the study. No harm or risks were posed to participants during the study.

4. Results

The descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study are presented in Table 1. The participants were female college students aged 18 to 24 years, with a mean age of 20.16 years ($SD=1.26$). The average social network site (SNS) usage time was 3.65 hours per day ($SD=2.11$). The mean score of SNS body image comparison was 4.45 ($SD=1.31$). The average subjective well-being (SWB) score was 4.76 ($SD=1.21$). The mean score of compulsive buying behavior (CBB) was 2.45 ($SD=0.85$).

The correlations among the variables are displayed in Table 2. Results indicated that SNS body image comparison was significantly positively correlated with CBB ($r=.35, p<.01$) and negatively correlated with SWB ($r=-.28, p<.01$). CBB was significantly negatively correlated with SWB ($r=-.20, p<.01$).

To test the mediation role of CBB on the relationship between SNS body image comparison and SWB, structural

equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS 24. The mediation model showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df=2.67, CFI=.93, RMSEA=.07, SRMR=.06$). The results revealed that SNS body image comparison had a significant indirect effect on SWB through CBB ($\beta=-.09, p<.01$). Moreover, the direct effect of SNS body image comparison on SWB was also significant ($\beta=-.20, p<.01$). This indicated that CBB partially mediated the relationship between SNS body image comparison and SWB.

To examine whether demographic factors (age, SNS usage time, and income) moderated the relationship between SNS body image comparison and CBB, hierarchical moderated regression analysis was conducted. The results revealed that income moderated the relationship between SNS body image comparison and CBB ($\beta=-.06, p<.05$). Specifically, for participants with low income, the positive relationship between SNS body image comparison and CBB was stronger than for those with high income. However, age and SNS usage time did not significantly moderate the relationship.

Overall, the findings of this study provide important insights into the effects of SNS body image comparison on the subjective well-being of female college students, with CBB as a mediator and income as a moderator. These results have implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers in promoting healthy social media use and reducing the negative consequences of compulsive buying behavior.

5. Discussion

The study found that body image comparison on social networking sites (SNSs) has a negative impact on the subjective well-being of female college students. Furthermore, the study discovered that compulsive buying behavior (CBB) mediates the relationship between body image comparison on SNSs and subjective well-being. This suggests that college females who engage in body image comparison on SNSs are likely to have lower subjective well-being, which is further worsened by their compulsive buying behavior.

The study has several implications for practitioners and policymakers. Firstly, it highlights the need to develop interventions that help females to cope with body image comparison on SNSs. Such interventions could include counseling, therapy, or support groups that provide coping mechanisms for individuals struggling with body image issues. Secondly, it underscores the importance of regulating online advertising and marketing practices, particularly those that promote unrealistic body ideals. Finally, the study emphasizes the need for colleges and universities to implement policies that address CBB, such as restricting access to online shopping sites and providing financial education.

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. Firstly, the study only focused on female college students, and its findings may not be generalizable to other populations. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could employ objective measures of body image comparison and CBB, such as eye-tracking technology and physiological measures. Finally, future studies could explore how social support and social comparison theories could be used to inform interventions that promote positive self-image on SNSs.

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the influence of social networking site (SNS) body image comparisons on female college students' subjective well-being (SWB), and the potential mediating role of compulsive buying behavior (CBB) in this process. The main research questions were: (1) how SNS body image comparisons affect female college students' SWB, (2) whether CBB mediates the relationship between SNS body image comparisons and SWB, and (3) whether individual differences in self-esteem and social support moderate these relationships.

To address these questions, a survey was conducted among 346 female college students, and the data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) and moderated mediation analysis. Overall, the findings of this study reveal that SNS body image comparisons have a significant negative impact on female college students' SWB and that this effect is partially mediated by CBB. Moreover, the results show that self-esteem and social support can buffer the negative effect of SNS body image comparisons on SWB, highlighting the importance of individual differences in this process. This study contributes to the existing literature on SNS use and SWB by providing a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms underlying the negative effects of SNS body image comparisons on SWB. Furthermore, this research sheds light on the potential role of CBB in this process, suggesting that interventions targeted at reducing CBB may improve the SWB of female college students who engage in SNS body image comparisons.

The findings of this study have important managerial and practical implications for those working with college students. Specifically, given the negative impact of SNS body image comparisons on SWB, it is important to educate female college students about the potential harms of SNS use and encourage them to develop a more positive body image. Additionally, interventions aimed at reducing CBB may be particularly effective in improving the SWB of female college students who engage in SNS body image comparisons.

While this study provides valuable insights into the influence of SNS body image comparisons on female college students' SWB, there are several avenues for further research. First, future studies could explore the potential moderators of the relationship between SNS body image comparisons and SWB, such as age, culture, and gender identity. Second,

longitudinal studies are needed to examine the causal relationships between SNS use, CBB, and SWB over time. Finally, research could investigate the effectiveness of various interventions aimed at reducing negative body image and CBB among female college students.

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