

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APPEARANCE CONCERNS AND SELFIE SHARING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Developments in communication technologies change not only communication habits but also life styles of people. Particularly, communication applications which can be integrated into social media can rapidly center on the social life. Selfie applications whose popularity have been increasing each passing day in the recent years also started to affect status of people in social life as well. Researching sub-factors of the topic has become an obligation with the increasing popularity of these applications especially among youth as days pass. This study aims to analyze the relationship between appearance concerns which pertain to psychological and social development of individuals, and selfie sharing on social media. What makes this study stand out among the other studies regarding appearance concerns is that this study analyzes appearance orientation and appearance evaluation from the perspective of social media. Within the context of the study, attitudes of appearance orientation and evaluation from the perspective of social media were measured by using a questionnaire that was completed by 294 graduate and undergraduate students. To determine the appearance orientation and evaluation differences between the students who share and do not share selfies on social media, normality and reliability tests were performed, and to explain the relationship between the parameters within the framework of the results, an independent samples t-test was employed. The results show the students who share selfies on social media have higher appearance orientation and evaluation scores compared to the students who do not share. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Appearance Orientation, Appearance Evaluation, Selfie

GÖRÜNÜŞ KAYGISI İLE SOSYAL MEDYADA ÖZÇEKİM PAYLAŞIMI ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

Öz

İletişim teknolojilerindeki gelişmeler sadece insanların iletişim alışkanlıklarını değil aynı zamanda yaşam biçimlerinde de değiştirmektedir. Özellikle sosyal medya ile entegre olabilen iletişim uygulamaları çok hızlı bir şekilde toplumsal yaşamın merkezine oturabilmektedir. Son yıllarda her geçen gün popüleritesi artan özçekim uygulamalarında insanların toplumsal yaşam içerisindeki konumlarını doğrudan etkilemeye başlamıştır. Özellikle gençler arasında her geçen gün popüleritesinin artması ile birlikte konunun alt faktörlerinin araştırılması bir zorunluluk haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı bireylerin psikolojik ve sosyal gelişimleri ile ilgili olan görünüş kaygısı ile, sosyal medyada özçekim paylaşımı arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Görünüş yönelimi ve görünüş değerlendirme'nin sosyal medya perspektifinde incelenmesi bu çalışmayı diğer görünüş kaygısı ile ilgili çalışmalardan ayırmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında sosyal medya kullanımı perspektifinde Görünüş yönelimi ve değerlendirme davranışları 294 lisans ve yüksek lisans öğrencisinin katılımıyla gerçekleştirilen bir anket çalışması ile ölçülmüştür. Sosyal medyada özçekim paylaşanlar ile paylaşmayanlar arasındaki görünüş yönelimi ve değerlendirme farklılıklarını tespit etmek için normallik ve güvenilir testleri yapılmış olup, elde edilen sonuçlar çerçevesinde değişkenler arasındaki ilişkiyi açıklamak için bağımsız örneklem t testi kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, sosyal medyada özçekim paylaşanların paylaşmayanlara nispeten daha yüksek görünüş yönelimi ve değerlendirmesi puanına sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Araştırma sonuçları ve sınırlılıkları tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Görünüş Yönelimi, Görünüş Değerlendirme, Özçekim

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INTRODUCTION

With rapid developments and fast changes in communication technologies, life styles and socialization processes of individuals within the society have also changed. The saying that “the medium is message” (McLuhan, 1964), puts forward how deeply the tools we use influence our messages and our messages influence the social life. McLuhan (1964) argued that each new communication technology creates a new life space and that the flow of things change in this life space. In other words, communication technologies constitute the basis of all segments of life in schools, classrooms, workplaces, and even homes. That is to say technological factors play a vital role in the configuration of the cultural system and squeeze us into their own world.

The popularization of social media within the last 10 years gave rise to an incredible amount of time dedicated by people to this type of media. Products of the new media have merely become indispensable elements of our lives. One of these elements is the selfie. A function all of us were already using without noticing, which suddenly conquered the whole world as an American dream, now the selfie has become merely the fundamental part of our lives. It turned into the most frequently used communication application in commercials, political propaganda, family relations, in perceiving the other and making yourself be understood. We could even say that it constitutes the fundamental structure of the 21st century culture. Andy Warhol’s expression “In the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes” has become real with selfie applications. Because the comments made on selfies and the sharing of selfies suddenly place the individuals in a position talked by everyone. For this reason, individuals see the selfie as an important venue where they will place themselves within life, beyond being just a photograph. The study of the influences of this application, which seems to be in our lives for good, to the socialization of man is essential.

Perception of appearance is a vital element of self-confidence and the concept of self. It is highly important for individuals who see themselves physically satisfactory or are seen as such by the others to appreciate his/her own body and to think that s/he is physically self-sufficient for them to develop self-esteem. These kind of personality developments are directly related to physical perceptions. When people are evaluating themselves, they use primitive norms which they acquired from the society. Individuals integrate their self by uniting primitive, simple, subjective experiences that they acquired directly. Through developments in communication technologies, self-evaluating processes of people have changed and developed. People now started to integrate their self with likings coming from the society to their selfie sharing on social media. There have been many psychological and sociological studies made on appearance orientation. However, evaluating the topic from the perspective of use of a communication device differs this study from the others. The importance of this study is that it puts forward processes of matching psychological and sociological concerns that are faced by the youth in life with communication devices. Thus, the role of social media and communication applications is revealed in development of self-perception. The purpose of this study is therefore

to examine the relationship between individuals' appearance concerns and their selfie sharing practice on social media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although people's taking their own photographs or painting self-portraits date back to very old times within the historical process, the selfie word used in our day was defined in the year 2013 by Oxford dictionary editor Judy Pearsall, as "a phenomenal upward trend - a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smart-phone or webcam and shared via social media". There are many different opinions about its first use in mobile technologies; however, before it was well-recognized in the United States, it was identified as "Selca" in South Korea in the year 2011. Selca is a compound word that combines "self" and "camera," signifying one's self-portrait. (Kwon & Kwon, 2011: 660). According to Gómez Cruz and Meyer (2012), "it is necessary to understand the product of social mobile photography not as representation, technology, or object, but as the agency that takes place when a set of technologies, meanings, uses and practices align" to produce "the materialization of a series of assemblages" in which "the photographic object also enables or constrains other assemblages with its use and distribution" (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012: 2).

On the other hand, Goffman and Mezirow focus on the behavioral origin of the phenomenon. Having been influenced by the Moral Foundations Theory, Goffman (1959) focuses on how we present ourselves in everyday life, while Mezirow (1991) insists on how we self-rate ourselves from peer feedback, due to our desire to be part of a community of our peers. These ideas are suitable for the modern link of today's individuals who engage in social communication through the "selfie," wanting others to see them virtually (Duver Miclot, 2015). For now, it is quite difficult to fit the selfie concept into one definition, because its intended purposes and manners are continuously changing. However, it can be defined in general a term as people's photographs of themselves taken by themselves.

Selfie and Perception of Self

The concept of self has been a subject for many sciences such as psychology, sociology and educational sciences. Especially with the developments in communication technologies in the recent years, it has gained an important place in communication sciences as well. According to Oyserman (2004), the concept of self seeks answers to questions like "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" The self has a very significant role in the decision-making, motivation and behaviors of the individuals (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2005: 71). As for Purkey (1970) who defines the concept of self as "a complex and dynamic system of an individual's beliefs about himself." The concept of self, is the way an individual perceives himself, his idea of who and what he is, his identity. The self does not only consist of the individual's own perceptions and expectations, but also the opin-

ions of other important people in his life, his friends, family, teachers etc., about him and their behaviors towards him. As the self-image, in other words the self that is perceived (how he sees himself) gets closer to his ideal self (how he wants to be) the self-esteem increases (Yavuzer, 2001: 17).

The self is a force within us, observing, judging, assessing us and managing us by regulating our behaviors (Baymur, 1994: 265-266). However, with the selfie, the internal force observing us has now opened to external influences and become easier to manipulate. Here, a chaos is formed between the individual's real perception of self and his ideal perception of self, because the sharing of selfies via social media and their being liked and commented on directly influences the self-assessment of the person.

It is obvious that communication tools change and direct people's perception of self. According to the study by Deniz (2012) for determining the relationship between social media and perception of self of secondary school students; students somehow share some information regarding the things they value and give importance to, with other members in the information section of their social media accounts, giving people hints about what they value and what they attach importance to. Being liked by others means that they look good in the photographs, their friends allocate time for following, like, and comment on them. The study shows that the participants' perception of self in social networks is positive. The students display their real-life physical profiles in social networks without hesitation. They can easily share their true information and own photographs. While sharing their photographs, most students pay attention for the photograph to be good and for themselves to look good in it; and are pleased when their photograph is liked by their friends.

Selfie and Socialization

According to Carroll (2001), technological applications are directly related to social dependency being a group, creating social influence. Within socialization driven by technology, not a lot of technological information is needed. That is because social media applications come into people's lives somehow, whether directly or indirectly (Carroll, 2001: 301). Being one of the most popular elements of social media in recent years, the selfie is a rapidly spreading, short-lived, vaporizing, and disappearing sharing. On the other hand, it has a structure which accelerates socialization, simply explains complex situations and characterizes communication as a life style (Wiley, Becerra & Sutko, 2012: 189-190). This creates a balance within social relations. With its rapid and flexible structure, the selfie creates a communication and socialization balance between people and the others.

Particularly young people frequently use the new media for socializing and share their lives with each other through this channel. The social media has become a very important tool for the socialization of young people and for them to be able to express themselves within communities (Gabriel, 2014: 104). The selfie is an important element of online culture and an instrument both criticized and supported by various groups. Crit-

icisms generally refer to inessentiality, causing loss of time, turning into a sexual object and losing control, while supporters focus on the fact that it strengthens the perception of self. Additionally, they have stressed the importance of it for enabling people to exhibit themselves within society according to their own limits and wants, and to change their behaviors according to comments received (Souza et al., 2015: 222). When we examine the selfie within socialization on moral grounds, we face with the concept of “moral panic.” According to Cohen (2002), moral panic tends to escalate when a particular form or practice of media is adopted by young people, women, or people of color (Senft & Baym, 2015: 1592). The frequent use of selfie also caused the prominence of its moral dimension. It has been especially used by performers to put themselves forth as sexual objects or as a tool for the racial discourse of certain people.

The dimensions of the use of selfie within social life have been increasing day by day. In situations of disasters, funerals and wars people share their selfies. According to Ibrahim (2015), “the disaster selfie,” where people put themselves together with a share-event disaster site, raises new moral challenges in the politics of self-representation and ethics of visually online. Insertion of the self in a site of human tragedy reconfigures our relationship with death, through the virtual world. The disaster selfie, as an immortality strategy available for everyone, claims historicity through the media coverage and its resonance with the population (Ibrahim, 2015: 224).

Appearance Concerns

Appearance concern is nervousness and anxiety faced by people who are being evaluated for their physical appearance by the other people (Cash, Santos and Williams, 2005). People’s desire to be satisfied with their own bodies make them struggle for reaching the body sizes that they think is suitable and right for them. An individual’s level of being satisfied with his/her own body is defined as being satisfied with the image of body. What lies behind all these concerns and efforts is that people’s tendency to generally communicate with attractive people. Therefore, individuals try to make a strong impression on the other people and struggle for having a more attractive look (Yousefi, Hassani & Shokri, 2009). Image of body’s being positive or negative is a parameter that effects individuals’ eating habits, levels of social-phobia, sexual behaviors, social relationships and emotional life as well as self-esteem of the individuals (Cash & Fleming, 2002). The relationship between appearance concerns and media dates back to very old times. Especially with women’s being described as slim and well-groomed in American televisions, people face media oriented appearance concerns beginning from the childhood (Borzekowski et al., 2008) Appearance concerns has been moved to a new dimension with the use of social media. Now, concerns, which are formed by unilateral messages coming from the televisions, started to be formed by comments and likings coming from friends and close social environment. Selfies which started like taking a simple picture in daily life enabled gathering the opinions about appearance by being shared on social media. Thus, appearance concerns gained a new place and a new memory.

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

Aim

Aim of this study is that it puts forward processes of matching psychological and sociological concerns that are faced by the youth in life with communication devices. In accordance with the arguments proposed in literature which is presented in the previous section, this study aims to test the following hypotheses;

Appearance orientation is a behavioral indicator of the importance an individual places in his/her physical appearance (Cash, 1994). For example, "It is important that I always look good". High scorers give more importance in appearance, grooming, and presentation than low scorers who are "apathetic with regard to appearance and do not spend much time to look good" (Brown et al., 1990). This implies that the higher the individuals' appearance orientation is, the greater their intention to share selfies on social media will be. Therefore, we hypothesized that individuals who share selfies on social media would have a higher appearance orientation compared to individuals who do not share (H1).

Appearance evaluation is a measure of an individual's attractiveness and satisfaction with his/her overall physical appearance (Pickett et al., 2005). For example, "Most people would consider me good looking". High scorers "feel positive and satisfied with their appearance and low scorers are unhappy with their physical appearance" (Brown et al., 1990). This suggests that the higher the individuals' appearance evaluation is and the greater the individuals' overall appearance satisfaction is, the greater their intention to share selfies on social media will be. Therefore, we hypothesized that individuals who share selfies on social media would have a higher appearance evaluation compared to individuals who do not share (H2).

Methodology

The scale developed by Winstead and Cash (1984) was used to determine assess attitudinal dispositions towards body image. In this context, questioning technique was used within the framework of survey method.

Sample

The target population for this research is students with different majors of study in Turkey. From this population, a total of 294 graduate and undergraduate students who were selected using convenience sampling willingly participated in the study. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 50 years (mean = 22.59, SD = 3.73). 14.3% of the participants were freshmen, 15.6% were sophomores, 14.3% were juniors, 42.5% were seniors and 13.2% were master students. 179 (60.9%) of the participants were women.

Instrument

Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) which was developed by Winstead and Cash (1984) was adopted to assess attitudinal dispositions towards body

image. The appearance orientation and evaluation subscales of the MBSRQ were used in the present study. Thus, the instrument has total 13 items, including 10 items for appearance orientation and 3 items for appearance evaluation. Turkish adaptation of this scale was conducted by Dogan and Dogan (1992). They suggest that the scale items exhibit high discriminant, convergent, and factorial validity. Participants indicated their degree of disagreement or agreement using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (definitely disagree) to 5 (definitely agree). Furthermore, a detailed demographic questionnaire was administered to obtain information about the participants.

FINDINGS

Sample Demographics

Table 1 presents the detailed information on the participants involved in this study. Overall, 82% of the 294 participants reported that they have shared selfies on social media, while most of them share single selfies. Majority of the sample give importance to their privacy, and the number of participants who want their sharings on social media to be seen only by their friends is 232 (78.2%). In addition, the number of participants who connect to the internet with their mobile phones is 274 (94.9%).

Hypothesis Testing

Independent samples t-tests using SPSS (ver. 20) were utilized to examine the appearance orientation and evaluation differences between individuals who share and do not share selfies on social media. The results show that individuals who share selfies on social media have higher appearance orientation scores ($t = 4.38, p < .001, M (SD) = 3.94 (.60)$) compared to individuals who do not share ($M (SD) = 3.54 (.59)$). Similarly, individuals who share selfies on social media have higher appearance evaluation scores ($t = 2.88, p < .01, M (SD) = 3.86 (.58)$) than individuals who do not share ($M (SD) = 3.60 (.65)$). On the other hand, no significant differences between individuals who share and do not share selfies on social media were found in terms of gender. The results suggest that both hypotheses, 1 and 2, are accepted. Table 2 shows the results of independent samples test.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study aims to investigate the relationships between individuals' appearance concerns and their selfie sharing on social media. Individuals with a high score of appearance orientation give more importance to their physical appearance. Similarly, individuals with a high score of appearance evaluation have more positive feelings and opinions about their body and physical appearance. These suggest the higher the individuals' appearance orientation and evaluation is, the greater their intention to share selfies on social media will be. Therefore, it is hypothesized that individuals who share selfies on social media would have a higher appearance orientation and evaluation compared to individuals who do not share.

A total of 294 graduate and undergraduate students who were selected using convenience sampling willingly participated in the study. The related subscales of the MBSRQ, which aims to assess attitudinal dispositions toward body image, were used in the present study. Independent samples t-tests were employed to examine the appearance orientation and evaluation differences between individuals who share and do not share selfies on social media. The results suggested that the students who share selfies on social media have higher appearance orientation and evaluation scores than the students who do not share. Consistent with the hypotheses, there was a significant difference in appearance orientation and evaluation between the students who share and do not share selfies on social media at the .01 level.

The appearance orientation and appearance evaluation have also been investigated in prior studies. For example, Adami, Meneghelli, Bressani, & Scopinaro (1999) found that greater improvements in appearance evaluation was associated with a greater improvements in mental measures of quality of life. Similarly, Foster, Wadden, & Vogt (1997) found that a greater improvement in appearance evaluation was associated with a greater percentage of excess weight loss.

In a similar study, Dixon, Dixon, & O'Brien (2002) found that a decrease in the importance of appearance orientations was associated with an increase in body mass index. Furthermore, they found that major improvements in appearance evaluation may occur with weight loss and that is associated with psychological benefits. In another study, Grogan, Hartley, Conner, Fry, & Gough (2010) investigated the relationship between appearance concerns and smoking in young women and men. They found the smokers score significantly lower than nonsmokers on appearance evaluation, which can predict smoking status in both women and men.

All these studies are psychological, physiological and sociological based. There is not a similar study in the literature about appearance concerns that appear through communication devices. Therefore, this study brings a new perspective to the topic.

This study investigated the relationship between selfie sharing practice and appearance orientation and evaluation. Focusing only on these two components of body image is a limitation. Future research should therefore focus on the relationships between this new and unexplored phenomenon and some other factors such as cultural traits, social norms, and security and privacy concerns.

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TABLES AND FIGURES**Table 1: Demographics of the Participants**

	Frequency	Percent
Where did you grow up?		
Metropolitan	79	26.9
City center	64	21.8
County	109	37.1
Town	11	3.7
Village	31	10.5
Where do you live now?		
Near my family	121	42.2
With friends in an apartment/house	61	20.7
Alone in an apartment	5	1.7
In a dormitory	102	34.7
Mobile device ownership		
Smartphone	274	93.2
Tablet	49	16.7
Laptop	173	58.8
Other	9	3.1
Do you have Internet in your device?		
Yes	279	94.9
No	15	5.1
From where do you connect to Internet?		
Smartphone	275	93.5
PC	194	66
Tablet	53	18
Public places (labs, libraries, etc.)	53	18
How much time do you spend in social media (in a day)?		
0-2 hours	144	49.0
3-4 hours	81	27.6
4-6 hours	40	13.6
More than 6 hours	6	2.0
Always on	23	7.8
Have you ever share selfies on social media?		
Yes	241	82.0
No	53	18.0
Frequency of taking a selfie		
Daily	46	15.6
Every 2-3 days	61	20.7
2-3 times in a week	72	24.5
2-3 times in a month	102	34.7

Frequency of sharing a selfie		
Daily	4	1.7
Every 2-3 days	30	12.4
2-3 times in a week	51	21.2
2-3 times in a month	156	64.7
What type of selfies do you share		
Single	173	58.8
With my best friend	36	12.2
With my romantic friend	144	49.0
Group	12	4.1
My social media postings attract attention from		
My friends	277	94.2
My relatives	124	42.2
Advertisement firms	5	1.7
Third persons	31	10.5
Who can see your social media postings?		
Public	44	15.0
Friends	230	78.2
Customized group	5	1.7
Only me	15	5.1

Table 2: The Independent Samples Test Results

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower		Upper
Appearance Orientation	Equal variances assumed	.637	.426	4.383	292	.000	3.962	.904	2.183	5.741
	Equal variances not assumed			4.443	77.712	.000	3.962	.891	2.186	5.738
Appearance Evaluation	Equal variances assumed	.437	.509	2.879	292	.004	.777	.270	.246	1.309
	Equal variances not assumed			2.666	71.081	.010	.777	.291	.196	1.359