



Effects of Social Media Images on Mood, Self-esteem, Body Image: Do Cute Images Make us Happy?

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Introduction

Social media use has increased rapidly over the span of the last 10 years, so that currently 80% of university students report using their devices for social networking purposes (Sherlock et al., 2019). Exposure to Instagram images, which includes exposure to contents of idealistic beauty and fitness standards, can be harmful long-term (Pedalino et al., 2022). The question of whether some of these images can be helpful remains open. A study published in 2022 examined if viewing cute images could have a positive effect on the consumers - it was found that viewing cute images results in more positive emotions and lower stress levels (Myrick et al., 2022). The present study examined both the positive and negative effects social media images can have on the consumers.

Methods

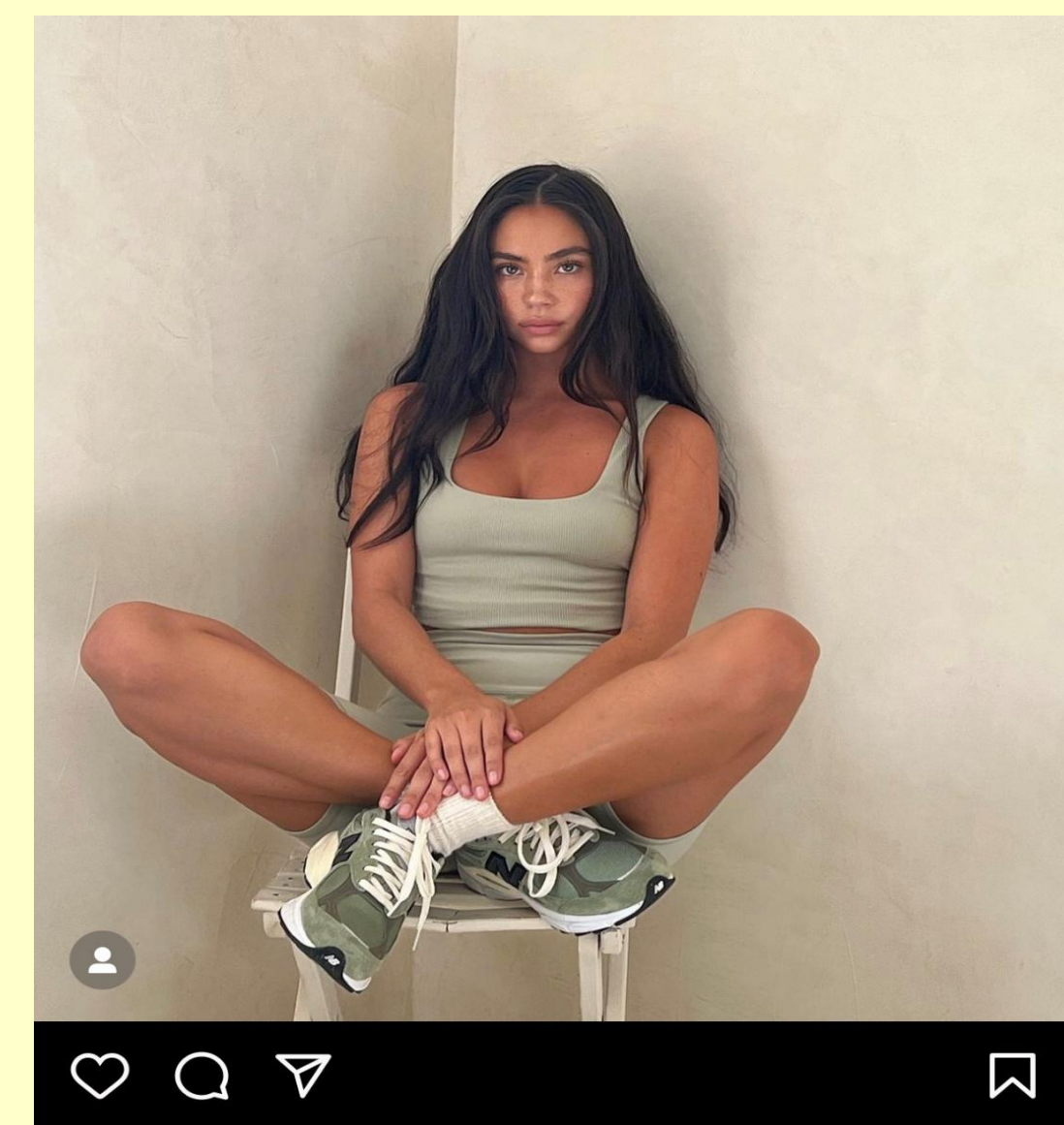
Participants: A total of 95 females participated in the study with a mean age $M = 20.37$ ($SD = 2.51$). They were recruited using volunteer/haphazard sampling. All the participants signed informed consents, were reassured that the participation was fully voluntary, and were treated in accordance with ethical standards.

Design: The current study uses a between-subject experimental design. The independent variable was the type of social media image (influencer, neutral, cute) viewed and the dependent variables including self-esteem, body image, and positive/negative mood, were measured by questionnaire responses.

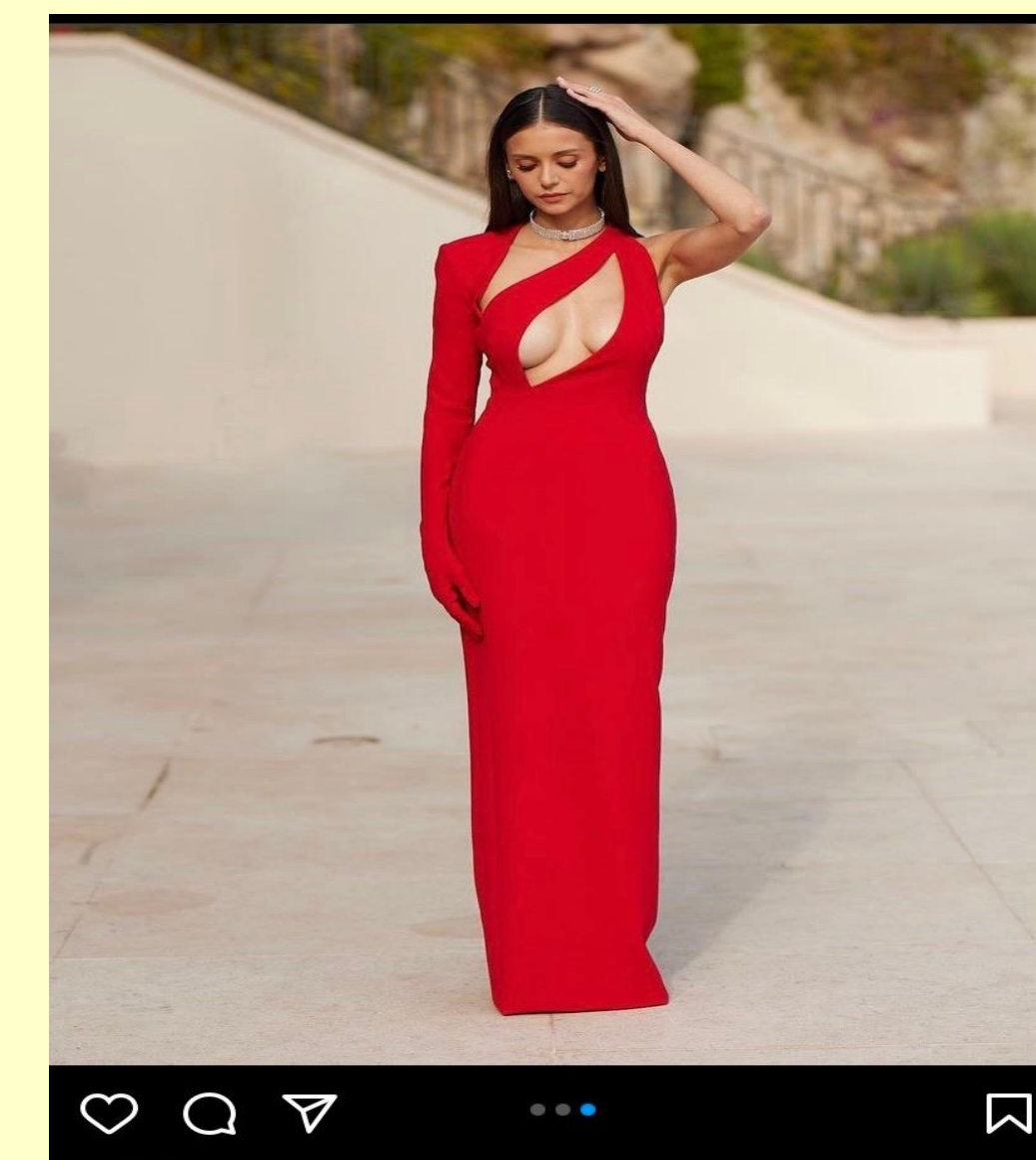
Materials: Subjects were randomly assigned to the 3 different conditions (influencer, neutral, cute). They were then shown a slide show consisting of 28 pairs of social media images from their assigned condition, labeled A and B. Each participant was given a response packet that included an answer sheet with 28 forced-choice options (either A or B) to select the preferred picture. The packet also included the questionnaires, which evaluated self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), body image (Body-Image Questionnaire), and positive & negative mood (Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale). Additionally, the packet contained a demographic questionnaire and a debriefing form. Finally, there was a designated sheet where the participants could indicate if they wanted extra credit.



example of Cute Images shown in the Powerpoint (A & B)



example of Influencer Images shown in the Powerpoint (A & B)



Procedure: After providing informed consent, participants viewed a slide show and filled out the response packet with the questionnaires attached. During the slide show, participants viewed 28 pairs of pictures labeled A and B in 1 of the 3 conditions (influencer, neutral, or cute). Participants viewed the pictures and were asked to note their preferred image on the answer sheet. After the presentation, the participants were asked to fill out the attached questionnaires assessing mood, self-esteem, body image, and basic demographic information. At the end of the experiment, the participants were given a debriefing sheet, that explained that the study was about the relationship between social media and one's well-being.

Results

To test the hypothesis that viewing social media images can influence one's mood (positive and negative), self-esteem, and body image we conducted 4 separate ANOVAs, with the alpha levels set to .05. We found that participants who viewed cute images reported a more positive mood than those who viewed influencer images [$F(2, 92) = 3.29, p = .042$]. There were no significant effects on negative mood, self-esteem, or body image.



Conclusions

Social media is still a relatively new phenomenon that has the potential to influence many aspects of life. While there is a growing body of literature about the negative effects of viewing social media images, little is known about the potentially beneficial effects of viewing some kinds of images. The current results suggest that viewing cute social media images may have a beneficial effect on mood. Additional analysis is required to further explore the link between viewing social media images and mood, self-esteem, and body image in both males and females.

References

- Myrick, J. G., Nabi, R. L., & Eng, N. J. (2022). Consuming memes during the COVID pandemic: Effects of memes and meme type on COVID-related stress and coping efficacy. *Psychology of Popular Media, 11*(3), 316–323. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000371>
- Pedalino F, Camerini A-L. Instagram Use and Body Dissatisfaction: The Mediating Role of Upward Social Comparison with Peers and Influencers among Young Females. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.* 2022; 19(3):1543. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031543>
- Sherlock, M., & Wagstaff, D. L. (2019). Exploring the relationship between frequency of Instagram use, exposure to idealized images, and psychological well-being in women. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 8*(4), 482–490. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000182>

example of Cute Images shown in the Powerpoint (A & B)