

THE PERFECT IMAGE: THE ROLE OF IMAGES-RELATED ACTIVITIES AND APPEARANCE COMPARISON ON INSTAGRAM IN PREDICTING THE ACCEPTANCE OF COSMETIC SURGERY AMONG YOUNG ITALIAN WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

Instagram is a photo-based social network that has risen in popularity among young women, also in Italy (Global Digital Report, 2020). Social Networks (SNs) facilitate the possibility for users to present their best aesthetic self, even if digitally altered, through the use of digital editing tools and the interaction with sociocultural models that propose aesthetic standards that cannot be reached in a natural way (Tiggemann et al., 2020). Recent studies have shown that the use of SNs was associated with greater acceptance of cosmetic surgery (e.g., Martel et al., 2020). However, these studies mostly considered the time spent on the SNs rather than the type of activities performed and its target profiles. Measuring the total time spent on the SNs, not considering how it is actually used, is less informative than the specific measurement of the activities related to the appearance that the user can carry out on Instagram in relation to specific targets (Scully et al., 2020). From the application of the Tripartite Influence Model (Keery et al., 2004; Thompson et al., 1999) to the context of cosmetic surgery (Menzel et al., 2011; Nerini et al., 2019), the importance of considering the appearace-based social comparison emerged. Its role was also found with regard to SNs. Indeed, some studies have shown that the comparison between one's own appearance and that of other users was significantly associated with the use of Instagram (e.g., Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2018). The appearance-based comparison was also associated in the Italian context with both the use of Instagram for specific activities related to images (e.g., Di Gesto et al., 2020) and the acceptance of cosmetic surgery (Nerini et al., 2019). However its predictive role on the acceptance of cosmetic surgery in association with the use of Instagram has not yet been investigated. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the predictor role of both image-based activities carried out on Instagram in relation to different targets (i.e., themselves, friends, celebrities) and Instagram appearance comparison on the consideration of cosmetic surgery and its acceptance for intrapersonal and social reasons among young Italian women who use Instagram.

RESULTS

Table 1. Correlation analysis – Pearson's r (N = 322)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 BMI	-								
2 Instagram use (h per day)	.08	-							
3 Instagram images-based activities (self)	.09	.52***	-						
4 Instagram images-based activities (friends)	.10	.38***	.49***	-					
5 Instagram images-based activities (celebrities)	.12	.35***	.38***	.37***	-				
6 Instagram appearance comparison	.02	.12	.15*	.10	.20**	-			
7 Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery (Consider)	.12	.22**	.08	.11**	.30***	.34***	-		
8 Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery (Intrapersonal)	.04	.16*	.20*	.09	.20***	.17*	.55***	-	
9 Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery (Social)	.11	.19***	.27***	.10	.24**	.39***	.58***	.38***	-

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Table 2. Hierarchical regression on the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery—Consider (N = 322)

		β	t	F _(df)	R ² _{adj}	Δ R ²
Step 1	Instagram use (h per day)	.34	6.36***	40.48*** (1, 320)	.12	.12***
Step 2	Instagram use (h per day)	.18	2.95**	19.45*** (4, 317)	.20	.09***
	Instagram images-based activities (self)	.12	1.78			
	Instagram images-based activities (friends)	.15	2.48*			
	Instagram images-based activities (celebrities)	.17	3.09**			
Step 3	Instagram use (h per day)	.17	2.74**	17.63*** (5, 316)	.22	.02**
	Instagram images-based activities (self)	.06	.90			
	Instagram images-based activities (friends)	.16	2.61**			
	Instagram images-based activities (celebrities)	.15	2.69**			
	Instagram appearance comparison	.17	2.90**			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 3. Hierarchical regression on the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery—Intrapersonal (N = 322)

		β	t	F _(df)	R ² _{adj}	Δ R ²
Step 1	Instagram use (h per day)	.20	3.49***	12.15*** (1, 320)	.04	.04***
Step 2	Instagram use (h per day)	.06	.91	7.93*** (4, 317)	.08	.06***
	Instagram images-based activities (self)	.12	1.65			
	Instagram images-based activities (friends)	.10	1.57			
	Instagram images-based activities (celebrities)	.14	2.30*			
Step 3	Instagram use (h per day)	.05	.78	7.01*** (5, 316)	.09	.01*
	Instagram image-based activities (self)	.08	2.03*			
	Instagram image-based activities (friends)	.11	1.64			
	Instagram image-based activities (celebrities)	.12	1.08			
	Instagram appearance comparison	.11	1.77			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 4. Hierarchical regression on the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery—Social (N = 322)

		β	t	F _(df)	R ² _{adj}	Δ R ²
Step 1	Instagram use (h per day)	.29	5.25***	27.60*** (1, 320)	.08	.08***
Step 2	Instagram use (h per day)	.13	2.05*	15.44*** (4, 317)	.16	.09***
	Instagram images-based activities (self)	.28	4.03***			
	Instagram images-based activities (friends)	.08	1.25			
	Instagram images-based activities (celebrities)	.16	2.76**			
Step 3	Instagram use (h per day)	.11	1.78	16.00*** (5, 316)	.20	.04***
	Instagram images-based activities (self)	.20	2.84**			
	Instagram images-based activities (friends)	.07	1.15			
	Instagram images-based activities (celebrities)	.13	2.45*			
	Instagram appearance comparison	.23	3.91***			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 322 Italian women (mean age=23 years, SD=2.92; mean BMI=21.78, SD=3.04; mean time of Instagram use=3.13 h per day; SD=1.74), who completed a questionnaire containing the variables of interest. Correlation analysis and hierarchical regressions were performed.

Measures

- Body Mass Index (BMI). Participants reported their heights and weights, which were used to calculate BMI (kg/m²).
- Use of Instagram per day. We asked how much time participants spent on Instagram every day (α=.81).
- Instagram images-related activities. We used the Instagram Image Activity Scale (IIAS; Di Gesto et al., 2020). Activities: images of self subscale (α=.85); Activities: images of friends subscale (α=.80); Activities: images of celebrities subscale (α=.86).
- Instagram appearance-related comparison. We used the Instagram Appearance Comparison Scale (IACS; Di Gesto et al., 2020) (α=.94).
- Acceptance of cosmetic surgery. We used the Italian version (Stefanile et al., 2014) of the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale (ACSS; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). Consider subscale (α=.89); Intrapersonal subscale (α=.91); Social subscale (α=.90).

DISCUSSION

Considering the presence of statistically significant associations between the Instagram use and the criterion variables, the former was included in the first step of the regression models to control for its effect. First of all, regressions showed that both friends and celebrities images-related activities (e.g., watch photos of friends or celebrities) and appearance comparison on Instagram predicted the consideration of cosmetic surgery. No predictive role of self images-based activities on Instagram (e.g., post an Instagram story of myself) emerged. Second, the acceptance of cosmetic surgery for intrapersonal reasons (e.g., higher self-esteem) was predicted by self images-related activities only, neither friends and celebrities images-based activities nor appearance comparison on Instagram were significant predictors of its acceptance. Third, our findings showed that self and celebrities images-related activities (e.g., check the number of likes received on my photos or watch stories of celebrities) and appearance comparison on Instagram predicted the acceptance of cosmetic surgery for social reasons (e.g., greater appreciation from others). No significant predictive role of friends images-related activities on Instagram was found.

CONCLUSIONS

This research is one of few analyzing how specific images-related activities carried out on Instagram and appearance comparison on it could predict young women's acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Our findings could be important for a clearer understanding of the role that images-related activities carried out on Instagram in relation to different target profiles (i.e., themselves, friends, celebrities) and the tendency to make appearance-based comparisons on Instagram can have on the consideration of cosmetic surgery and its acceptance for intrapersonal and social reasons in young women. Moreover, these results could also provide preliminary indications for the design of interventions in the field of health promotion such as social media literacy training aimed at fostering a critical understanding of the potential negative effects of photo-based social media networks. Future research could adopt experimental designs to investigate whether different activities conducted on Instagram in relation to different target profiles are causally related with the acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Experimental studies on the relationship between Instagram use and cosmetic surgery could examine the actual decision to undergo cosmetic surgical procedures.

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