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REVIEW

Bodies on screen: the impact of social networks on body image and mental health

Cuerpos en pantalla: el impacto de las redes sociales en la imagen corporal y la salud mental

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media transformed body perception, especially among teenagers and young adults. He argued that constant exposure to idealised bodies on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok generated body dissatisfaction, affecting self-esteem and favouring the development of eating disorders. He pointed out that concepts such as body image distortion and the 'fitspiration' trend intensified these problems. He also indicated that many users opted for aesthetic procedures in response to these beauty standards. However, he mentioned that movements such as body positivity emerged, promoting acceptance and emotional well-being in the face of aesthetic pressure.

Keywords: Body Dissatisfaction; Self-Esteem; Social Networks; Eating Disorders; Body Positivity.

RESUMEN

El auge de las redes sociales transformó la percepción corporal, especialmente entre adolescentes y jóvenes adultos. Expuso que la constante exposición a cuerpos idealizados en plataformas como Instagram y TikTok generó insatisfacción corporal, afectando la autoestima y favoreciendo el desarrollo de trastornos alimentarios. Señaló que conceptos como la distorsión de la imagen corporal y la tendencia "fitspiration" intensificaron estas problemáticas. También indicó que muchos usuarios optaron por procedimientos estéticos como respuesta a estos estándares de belleza. No obstante, mencionó que surgieron movimientos como la positividad corporal, que promovieron la aceptación y el bienestar emocional frente a la presión estética.

Palabras clave: Insatisfacción Corporal; Autoestima; Redes Sociales; Trastornos Alimentarios; Positividad Corporal.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media's rise has radically transformed how people interact, inform themselves, and perceive themselves. This phenomenon, especially prevalent among teenagers and young adults, has generated new forms of influence that transcend communication and directly affect users' mental and physical health. One of the most notable impacts is growing body dissatisfaction, fueled by constant exposure to unrealistic beauty standards and idealized bodies circulating on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. These representations, often digitally manipulated, generate unrealistic comparisons that affect self-esteem and promote the development of eating disorders. In this context, it is essential to analyze how social media acts as a vehicle for aesthetic pressure, influencing body perception and motivating decisions such as invasive cosmetic procedures or risky practices to achieve a socially accepted ideal of beauty.

DEVELOPMENT

Today, social media has become a central part of everyday life, especially among teenagers and young adults. These platforms, which allow users to share images, videos, and messages instantly, have changed how individuals perceive themselves and others. According to Zapillón[1], intensive use of social media directly influences users' body image, which can trigger self-esteem issues and eating disorders.

One of the key concepts is body dissatisfaction, understood as an individual's dissatisfaction with their actual physical image compared to an idealized model. This phenomenon is exacerbated by constant exposure to images of "perfect" bodies on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, often edited with filters or digital retouching programs.[2] This idealization of beauty promotes the idea that only a thin, toned, flawless body is socially acceptable.[3]

Likewise, the concept of body image distortion plays an important role. This is defined as the erroneous perception that a person has of their body, which can lead to self-critical behaviors and extreme behaviors to modify their appearance.[4] Body image distortion has been closely associated with the development of eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder. These conditions severely affect the physical and mental health of those suffering.[5]

A phenomenon that has gained momentum on social media is the "fitspiration" trend, which promotes an ideal of a healthy and athletic body but often presents a distorted and unattainable reality. Ladwig et al.[6] point out that this type of content can have both positive and negative effects. In some cases, it motivates self-care, but in others, it reinforces social comparison and body dissatisfaction.

Another relevant aspect is the increase in cosmetic procedures to achieve the ideal of beauty promoted on social media. Rebordinos[7] and Ruiz[2] agree that digital influencers portray these procedures as accessible, effective, and even necessary, leading many people to opt for them without considering the physical and emotional risks involved.

Furthermore, the relationship between excessive social media use and low self-esteem is well documented. Studies such as those by Roqué Vall, et al.[8], have shown that, during periods such as the COVID-19 lockdown, increased exposure to digital content correlated with a higher prevalence of body image disorders, especially among young women.

On the other hand, movements such as body positivity and neutrality have emerged as responses to the hegemonic model of beauty. These movements propose accepting diverse and real bodies, promoting emotional well-being over physical appearance.[6] Such an approach is presented as a healthy alternative to the social pressure imposed by current beauty standards.

Finally, it has been shown that it is not only women who are affected. However, to a lesser extent, men also experience body dissatisfaction, especially related to muscle mass and physical strength, which can lead to practices such as steroid use or extreme exercise routines.[9,10]

CONCLUSIONS

The intensive use of social media has been shown to have a significant impact on body image perception, promoting beauty standards that are, in many cases, unattainable and unrealistic. This constant exposure can lead to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem and contribute to the development of eating disorders and harmful behaviors. However, alternative movements such as body positivity and neutrality have also emerged, seeking to counteract these influences by promoting acceptance of physical diversity and emotional well-being. Despite these advances, it is crucial to continue promoting critical education about digital content and collective reflection on beauty ideals to build a healthier and more realistic relationship with one's body

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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