

Young Men's Social Media Use & Fashion Innovativeness: Body Consciousness, Vanity and Para-social Interaction

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Background and Conceptual Framework. Research has examined a variety of social media-related issues such as use of social media and body image concerns particularly among young women. Not as much research has looked at the effect of social media use on body image concerns of young men. Social media refer to websites and online tools that facilitate interactions between users by providing them with opportunities to share information, opinions, and interests (Khan, 2017). Social Media Engagement theory defines user engagement as a “user’s state of mind that warrants heightened involvement and results in a personally meaningful benefit (i.e., involvement to fulfill a need)” (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016, p. 57). It proposes that higher engagement leads to greater use of social media. **The purpose of this study** was to examine relationships among young men’s social media use, fashion innovativeness, body consciousness, vanity and para-social interaction.

Fashion innovativeness is not only a proclivity to create original ideas but also a perception of and reaction to new fashion innovations and willingness to change (adapted from Hurt, Joseph & Cook, 1977). Young men high in fashion innovativeness can display their fashion interest via social media. Research has found that fashion innovativeness is related to vanity (Lee & Workman, 2014) but no research has looked at its relationship to body consciousness or para-social interaction.

Physical appearance vanity is a positive (perhaps inflated) view of one’s physical appearance (Netemeyer et al, 1995). Social media make available a venue for young men to display their self-admiration, abilities, appearance, and achievements to others (Piatkowski et al., 2021). Men who are high in vanity may be motivated by self-image concerns; a desire to maintain or improve a positive self-view that has been built through social media use.

Some men internalize cultural ideals for the body; internalization leads to a belief the standards are internal and achievable. Social media profiles often feature images of attractive peers; comparison with these retouched pictures or edited selfies may lead to a negative view of one’s own appearance (Lee & Lee, 2021). Images of peers found on social media are more attainable comparison objects and have a stronger link with body image than images of professional models. Young adults’ social media use is related to negative attitudes about their bodies (Jarman et al, 2021).

Para-social relationships are one-way psychological associations that viewers develop with digital celebrities (Rubin & Step, 2000). Men may be influenced by digital celebrities’ physical appearance and these relationships may encourage men to be preoccupied with their own body. Experiencing the body as an object is known as objectified body consciousness

(McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Men's objectified body consciousness may be affected by para-social relationships with digital celebrities. Facebook engagement was positively related to objectified body consciousness (Boursier et al., 2020). Thus, greater para-social interaction will encourage greater social media use that will lead to greater body consciousness. Hypotheses were proposed: H1: Men with greater (less) social media use will score higher on body consciousness. H2: Men with greater (less) social media use will score higher on vanity. H3: Men with greater (less) social media use will score higher on para-social interaction. H4: Men higher (lower) in fashion innovativeness will be higher in body consciousness. H5: Men higher (lower) in fashion innovativeness will be higher in vanity. H6: Men higher (lower) in fashion innovativeness will engage in more para-social interaction.

Method. A questionnaire was compiled that consisted of demographic items and measures of social media use (13 items; possible range 13-91; Khan, 2017), fashion innovativeness (9 items; possible range 9-63; Batinic et al, 2008), body consciousness (8 items; possible range 8-56; McKinley & Hyde, 1996), vanity physical view (11 items; possible range 11-77; Netemeyer et al, 1995) and para-social interaction (6 items; possible range 6-42; Kim et al., 2015). Each item was accompanied by a 7-point Likert-type scale. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, reliability, M/ANOVA and Student-Newman-Keuls post hoc test.

Results. Participants were 145 male college students (M age = 21.58). Participants' ethnicity included 28 African American, 9 Asian, 86 Caucasian, 10 Hispanic/Latino and 12 others from ~38 different majors. Most were single ($n=108$), 8 were married, 14 indicated other marital status. Reliability for each scale ranged from .83 to .95. Participants were divided into two social media groups (high/low) based on the median and four fashion innovativeness groups based on the mean and standard deviation. MANOVA was conducted with social media use and fashion innovativeness as independent variables and body consciousness, vanity, and para-social interaction as dependent variables. Results were as follows for social media use [$F(3,123)=1.83$, $p < .14$] and fashion innovativeness [$F(9, 375)=5.44$, $p < .000$]; ANOVA revealed social media use groups differed in body consciousness ($M^{\text{high}}=31.75$; $M^{\text{low}}=26.61$), vanity ($M^{\text{high}}=50.42$; $M^{\text{low}}=42.17$), and para-social interaction ($M^{\text{high}}=22.51$; $M^{\text{low}}=16.09$). H1, H2, and H3 were supported. ANOVA revealed that fashion innovativeness groups differed in body consciousness ($M^{\text{innovators}}=30.46$; $M^{\text{early adopters}}=31.0$; $M^{\text{late adopters}}=30.48$; $M^{\text{reluctant adopters}}=21.63$), vanity ($M^{\text{innovators}}=57.82$; $M^{\text{early adopters}}=48.04$; $M^{\text{late adopters}}=43.32$; $M^{\text{reluctant adopters}}=37.21$), and para-social interaction ($M^{\text{innovators}}=29.14$; $M^{\text{early adopters}}=18.82$; $M^{\text{late adopters}}=16.64$; $M^{\text{reluctant adopters}}=15.75$). Reluctant adopters were significantly lower in body consciousness than all earlier adopter groups (who did not differ from each other). Fashion innovators were significantly higher in vanity and para-social relationships than all later adopter groups, followed by early adopters, then late and reluctant adopters (who did not differ from each other), H4, H5, and H6 were supported.

Discussion/Implications. Results of this study show that young men with higher (vs lower) social media use had greater body consciousness, higher vanity, and greater para-social relationships. The more young men used social media, the more conscious they were of the appearance of their body compared to others, the higher their vanity, and the greater their para-social interactions. Young men differ in fashion innovativeness and this variable plays a part in

body consciousness, vanity, and para-social relationships. Fashion innovators were higher in body consciousness, vanity and para-social relationships than all later adopter groups. Because physical appearance plays an important role in defining one's self-identity, social media use, fashion innovativeness, body consciousness, vanity, and para-social relationships have repercussions in the consumer market. Young men spend a great deal of money to purchase appearance related products that help to define their self-identity. This study investigated three psychological variables related to social media use and fashion innovativeness among young men: body consciousness, vanity, and para-social relationships. Future research needs to study the relevance of other variables using a larger sample size in diverse locations. Future research can explore links between social media use and negative attitudes related to the body (e.g., low self-esteem, body shame). Given the importance of social media in the lives of young men, it is important to understand how social media use has impacted their perspectives, values and behaviors.

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