



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

INFLUENCE OF INSTAGRAM'S BODY IMAGE ADVERTISING
ON YOUNG MEN'S SELF-ESTEEM AND PERCEPTION OF
THEIR BODIES

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a
Master's Degree in Communication Studies: Communication,
Marketing and Advertising

By

Francesco Giacomo Di Dia

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas

September, 2022



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ABSTRACT

Academic research has showed that social media have considerably shaped the perception of our own physical and intimate characteristics. Over the last years, communication agencies and celebrities have taken up the role of “influencers”, trying to dictate the patterns of beauty standards and acceptable body features to the online society. Together with the rise of advertising’s influential power, especially on Instagram, new social scenarios emerged. These, in turn, have contributed to the development of new masculinity traits. Agencies and content creators on such platforms, therefore, should be aware of the effects they could have on their young public, whose self-evaluation is still malleable. Although most of the actual research is conducted on young women, research on boys of the same age seems to derive interesting results.

This research addresses the degree of influence of Instagram body image type of content on young men’s levels of self-esteem in Italy, but it also proposes to be an analysis of how advertisers and agencies make use of gender differences to come up with different content on the platform. The study employs different methods of research: quantitative surveys to male participants (N= 204, Italian adolescents between 16 and 23 years old) and questions to Instagram content producers primarily using the body as their communication mean to understand their role in the formation of certain behaviors.

In this dissertation it was concluded that Italian adolescent men’s exposure to body image content does not contribute to major changes in their self-esteem, contrary to the female counterpart. However, when approaching themes such as visual adjustments on Instagram, both content creators and the users of the platform validate the hypothesis of a perceivable correlation between the alteration of body features on the platform and a diminishing self-confidence.

Keywords: self-esteem; Instagram; masculinity; genders; body Image

RESUMO

A investigação académica revelou que as redes sociais determinaram consideravelmente a percepção das nossas próprias características físicas e íntimas. Nos últimos anos, agências de comunicação e celebridades assumiram o papel de "influencer", tentando ditar os padrões de beleza e características corporais aceitáveis à sociedade online. Com o aumento do poder de influência da publicidade, especialmente no Instagram, surgiram novos cenários sociais. Estes contribuíram ao desenvolvimento de novos traços da masculinidade. As agências e os criadores de conteúdos em tais plataformas devem, portanto, estar conscientes dos efeitos que poderiam ter no seu público jovem, cuja auto-avaliação ainda é maleável. Embora a maior parte da investigação propriamente dita seja realizada sobre mulheres, a investigação sobre rapazes da mesma idade parece obter resultados interessantes.

Esta investigação aborda o grau de influência do tipo de conteúdo de imagem corporal Instagram nos níveis de auto-estima dos homens jovens em Itália, mas também propõe ser uma análise de como os anunciantes e as agências fazem uso das diferenças de género para apresentar diferentes conteúdos na plataforma. O estudo emprega diferentes métodos de investigação: pesquisas quantitativas para participantes masculinos (N=204, adolescentes italianos entre os 16 e 23 anos) e perguntas aos produtores de conteúdos Instagram, utilizando principalmente o corpo como meio de comunicação para compreender o seu papel na formação de certos comportamentos.

Nesta dissertação concluiu-se que a exposição dos homens adolescentes italianos ao conteúdo de imagem corporal não contribui para grandes mudanças na sua auto-estima, ao contrário do que acontece com o homólogo feminino. Contudo, ao abordar temas como os ajustamentos visuais na Instagram, tanto os criadores de conteúdos como os utilizadores da plataforma validam a hipótese de uma correlação perceptível entre a alteração das características corporais na plataforma e uma diminuição da auto-confiança.

Palavras-chave: auto-estima; Instagram; masculinidade; gênero; imagem corporal

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INTRODUCTION

At the basis of the present study there is the analysis of young adolescents' evaluation of social media content to which they are continuously exposed. The research investigates the relationship between sensitive images depicting male bodies on Instagram to convey a message and the resulting changes in the individuals' perception of their physical traits. In particular, it sheds a light on the Italian male population, to which the researcher pertains: the segment of analysis includes Italian adolescents from 16 to 23 years old. In addition to the male population, attention is posed to the difference between the mentioned segment and females of the same age to assess contrasts and similarities between the two genders. Besides, the research is also structured to capture variations in males' evolution of masculinity throughout different generations: thus, part of the data analysis is devoted to highlighting differences in the response to Instagram stimuli between the research population and generation I (30+ years old).

The starting point for the development of this dissertation was the recognition of how much of an impact social media content has on a personal level, while simultaneously almost not affecting the researcher's males' acquaintances, family, and peers belonging to more mature generations. In particular, although this is not to be generalized, I always felt that older generations have always been more conscious and confident about their features. However, since these were just personal thoughts on the evolution of such a wide concept as Masculinity, I chose to investigate this topic by starting to look at the ramifications of the New Men in recent years. Consequently, the interest in social media progression led to the desire to understand these changes in relation to the perceived media influence.

The thesis' objective is to furnish an evaluation of young men's reactions to visual external stimuli "commanding" new societal body characteristics. The elaboration seeks to contribute to existing research on the topic by employing a quantitative and a qualitative methodology section. In addition to conducting a web-based survey on the selected segment, two

interviews with distinct sectors on Instagram were in fact conducted to grasp a different point of view from the creators 'side.

The thesis is articulated in seven chapters: the first three provide a theoretical description of the phenomena that are responsible for any change in the response to the mediatic exposure on Instagram. More specifically, the first one collects information about the evolution of masculinities and their ramifications over time and in different media contexts: a comparison between hybrid and hegemonic masculinity is provided, and a preliminary analysis of gender differences in advertising enlarges the picture. The second and the third chapters analyze, respectively, the relationship between body image and advertising and its consequences on attitudes and self-esteem, and the implications of Instagram tools and their visual characteristics in the formation of self-confidence. From the fourth chapter on, the researcher presents the main research questions, and the design of the study, and goes more in-depth into the evaluation of the results obtained through the mixed methods employed. The fifth and sixth chapters are entirely devoted to data analysis and interpretation: numeric data and comparisons of means through independent samples T-Tests are supported by qualitative answers from the two sectors interviewed: photography and fitness. After approaching separately each of the methods in chapter five, chapter six put them together and allows the researcher to discuss and interpret them in a more extensive way. Finally, chapter seven completes the investigation with general conclusions, and possible limitations and hints for future research.

Thanks to this study, it was possible to analyze some important relationships between adolescents' exposure to body image on social media and the consequences on their attitudes and awareness of their presence online. The final results will be exposed in detail in the final discussions and conclusions of the present dissertation.

PART I – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 1 – New masculinities: Sociology of “new men” and Gender differences in the context of social media

One of the biggest arguments this chapter pivots around is the arising interest in researching masculinities. Men studies had been carried on since the beginning of 1900, initially from a perspective focusing on the social issues related to masculinity. However, since the first Connell’s studies at end of the twentieth century, the attention systematically shifted towards the analysis of different types of masculinities. Researchers focused on how distinctive masculine segments benefited differently from patriarchy, and how the phenomenon of homophobia interfered with men’s perception of themselves and sentiments of fear.

Finally, recent studies on Millennials highlighted the role of inclusive masculinity, decreasing homophobia as a result of radical changes in society and cultural attitudes, and emotional availability to express feelings that were typically characterized as feminine.

Therefore, since the evolution of such a wide concept like Masculinity is changing over time, I chose to investigate this topic by starting to look at the ramifications of the New Men throughout the last years. Consequently, this section of my dissertation seeks to understand these changes concerning the perceived media influence.

1.1 Social Ramifications of Hegemonic Masculinity

To better understand the societal changes leading to the phenomenon of the Hybridization of Masculinity, a definition of its roots was needed. And it is exactly from Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity provided in 1995 that I would like to start. In a hierarchical society composed of subjugated and dominators, hegemonic masculinity represents the relation between the latter and the firsts. More specifically, men’s assertion of

dominance over women is justified, in that it stands for: “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995, p.77)”

It's also Connell's sociological study carried out in 2005 that helped comprehending the reasons behind this definition, and the factors legitimizing such relation. Its initial research remarks that in our society, masculinity is perceived as related to males 'bodies. Men are said to be naturally more aggressive than women, as well as being homosexual is still considered unnatural in most countries. Therefore, society dictates how a man should claim certain statuses (Coats, 2015).

Hence, the aspiration to acquire a certain body type for men goes beyond the mere physical appeal. This is rather referred to elements such as toughness and dominance. But where does it come from? Among the many lines of research trying to assess the foundations of men's need to demonstrate tough masculinity, Willer's theory of Masculine Overcompensation is one of the most reliable. When comparing men's and women's attitudes after being exposed to assumptions about their gender, only men showed changes in response to this stimulus. In particular, the response to having their masculinity less “secure” is an over-demonstration of typical masculinity traits, led by the need to exhibit what is more socially desirable (Willer et al., 2013). This, in turn, derives from Freud's psychoanalytic phenomenon of “reaction formation”, according to which people tend to respond to the hint of not having a socially accepted trait by extremizing it.

Going deeper into the literature review, another interesting aspect of hegemonic masculinity that deserved more attention is that it mostly refers to the subordinate relationship between men and women. Despite it seems to define the attempt to distance as much as possible from anything that could represent femininity, it has been shown that gender inequalities can happen also among men (Arxer, 2011). Consequently, the definition provided before would be wrong, in that hegemonic masculinity avoids both feminine and “alternative” forms of masculinity that recall feminine traits. To this scope, the concept of “Homosociality”, which describes the dynamics of men gatherings, must be considered when studying masculinity.

It indeed induces a distinct separation between men and women. However, it is exactly this feature that causes a “clear distinction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities”. Moreover, Demetriou’s study on the relationship between these two masculinities types, demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity begs with itself potential hybrid traits (Arxer, 2011).

The basis of this kind of research seems to derive from the concept of social comparison. In this regard, one interesting outcome brought by the studies conducted in the late 90s on the systematic gender differences in response to emotional advertising is the need to adjust to what is socially preferable. When being exposed to this advertising type, for instance, the main difference in how men respond is the presence of someone around them, or not. As supported by the sociologist Leary in 1995, men will be less oriented toward the expression of their true feelings when they are “low agency” (Fisher & Dubé, 2005). This is because a low-agency emotion is not socially desirable if we stick to the males’ stereotypes of power.

This has implications for old consumer behavior tactics (media and advertising) that still must be considered. However, the present shift to hybrid masculinity and all the characteristics it begs with itself makes it easier for companies and influencers nowadays to engage with the male public.

To make it actual, the implications that this reasoning could have on social media targeting tactics are clear: if they have to hide their feelings in public, they would experience discomfort towards the message of the advertising content, therefore negatively affecting their perception of the product itself.

Nevertheless, although the phenomenon of hybrid masculinity is truly occurring during recent years, we cannot generalize to the entire male population. Recent investigations that fascinated me throughout the literature review include the one conducted by Eisen and Yamashita in 2017. By interviewing twenty-five men on the perception of their masculinity, the findings were surprising and contrary to the evolution occurring among “new men”. The interviewees were in fact shown to employ three different tactics to make themselves stand from traditional men.

To do so, they purposely included negative attributes in the description of what they considered to be the “stereotypical man” (Eisen & Yamashita, 2017). In other words, by defining themselves as more feminine, and by stigmatizing common interests in today’s men, they rather showed “symptoms” of male dominance and hegemonic masculinity.

Accordingly, the qualitative analysis conducted by Schmitz and Haltom shares Eisen’s view of “fake” hybridization for some men. When investigating college men’s encounters with feminist discourses and gender-related topics, the research shows that they could shape their views and adapt to the circumstances downplaying their masculinity (Schmitz & Haltom, 2017). The deconstruction and reconstruction of their gender identity according to the situation are in fact due to the advantages they can get from the social context surrounding them at a time. Also, the same trend was found when it comes to social dynamics online.

1.2 The importance of Gender differences in Advertising

The complementarity between the two genders, as discussed in the previous paragraphs and as we will tackle in the present section, is crucial when studying advertising stimuli, and it depends on the hierarchical stratification that society proposes. Only an irrelevant number of men manifest symbolic dominance over women through attributes like physical power. Nevertheless, to assert dominance and reinforce complementarity, females include vulnerability and physical inferiority traits (Schippers, 2007). Once more, the most substantial constituent of hegemonic masculinity relies on the symbolic meanings that ensure their dominance over the female gender. Social structures and organizations are in turn responsible for the representation of gender identities.

As anticipated before, however, the objective of this chapter is to scrutinize the evolution of men’s patterns of self-definition. The concept of masculinity itself has indeed gone through a series of radical changes since its very first investigations.

To help us go deeper into them, it is necessary to start with the definition of masculinity

provided by Chesebro and Fuse: “From a communication perspective, masculinity is the study of the discourses and the effects of the discourses generated by men, unifying men, and revealing the identity and characteristics men ascribe to themselves, others, and their environment” (Chesebro & Fuse, 2001, from Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011, p. 32).

Based on this definition, the theory of Inclusive Masculinity (IMT) developed at the beginning of the twentieth century helps us deepen the subject of research. The results derived from Anderson and McCormack’s study employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, in fact, do not just discover mere masculinity types. However, its original objective was to investigate more inclusive behaviors of men. To this point, the research conducted in the US and UK in 2014 confirms that young adults firmly reject any kind of homophobia, and it shows both emotional and physical closeness with their men friends (Anderson & McCormack, 2014). Also, the recognition of activities once defined as “feminine”, as well as freedom of sexual orientation, are disappearing.

To a larger extent, the phenomenon of inclusive masculinity found its biggest space for expansion within generation I, or Millennials. Compared to previous generations, in fact, different sociological studies confirmed that boys in this category tend to be supportive and to show signs of appreciation for each other. This, in turn, is made possible by the features brought by all digital platforms. The concept of popularity itself, which is responsible for the levels of self-esteem, has changed profoundly, and it now relies on traits such as demonstrated emotional support and authenticity on social media (Morris & Anderson, 2015).

To this scope, Morris and Anderson’s quantitative and qualitative analysis of YouTube vlogs (chosen because of their intimate relation with followers online) across 2012 and 2013 showed what this authenticity has brought to British YouTubers in terms of popularity and numbers. The intended association with homosexuality and femininity, “homosocial tactility” (vloggers employing a non-typical physical interaction with each other, such as arm touching or sitting shoulder-to-shoulder), and the expression of their vulnerability online enabled them to establish and maintain the status of “celebrity” among young adults and not only (Morris & Anderson, 2015).

Hence, being part of the audience who appreciates this type of content and who reflects ourselves in openness and progression, my objective is to enlarge existing literature on this topic by analyzing inclusive content in heavily utilized platforms nowadays like Instagram.

Despite the findings of many studies, however, it's not possible to assert the direct correlation between the decreasing homophobia trend in young generations and the change in men's behavior. To clarify this uncertainty, the development of IMT theory highlights that the main responsible factor for social change is homophobia. The more homophobic a culture is, the more masculinity's archetypes will be stratified, thus posing an obstacle to the development of men's attitudes (Anderson & McCormack, 2014). On the other hand, a lower hierarchical level for men in the society will induce more diverse masculinity traits and no stigmatization of feminine ones.

Overall, the advertising type itself and the message cues are responsible for the different responses of the two genders. Opinions, judgments, and attitudes towards a product shown through advertising are therefore gendered biased. Of the many studies encountered throughout the review of literature on the topic, the experimental research published at the beginning of the 90s by Levy and Sternthal had already manifested these differences. The results of their experiments involving 25 males and 28 female students in the evaluation of a product, namely toothpaste, in fact, demonstrated that women's observations of small changes in the message cues were more specific.

This, in turn, resulted in a deeper judgment of the product itself, and a lower threshold for the elaboration of such judgment (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991). More in detail, these gender differences are amplified by the features that the advertising message bears with itself, and the attention span required to elaborate them. The peak is then reached when the type of task demand is average (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991).

1.3 Hybrid Masculinities

To make it more specific, all the emerging characteristics discussed before construct what

we call “Hybrid masculinities”. This, in turn, refers to the men’s assimilation of identity traits that society describes as feminine among others (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

More accurately, according to the theory of hybrid masculinity, the changing process is based on three main elements, of which the dissent from hegemonic norms is the first. Secondly, as we will see approaching the last paragraphs of this chapter, the inclusion of gender traits “borrowed” from minority groups led by the phenomenon of social comparison and by the need to construct our social identity. Consequently, the third and last step is to accentuate differences between groups, to hide all the inequalities typical of those groups (Barber & Bridges, 2017).

Some of the established characteristics, common to the almost totality of new men nowadays, refer to the importance of commitment, loyalty, and hard work, together with some traditionalism when it comes to demonstrating to be a man to a woman. Fun fact, according to Ask Men’s Male Survey, for instance, around 86% of men want to pay for their dates, even though women could earn more. The points I would like to stress, however, concern the emerging characteristics distinguishing new men. Not surprisingly, they are most likely to include their bodies and feelings about them (LaFrance, 2010).

After expanding its definition and contextualizing it to the scope of my research, the chapter then proceeds with an analysis of the media’s weight in these continuous changes. Exploiting men’s tendency to be influenced by their surroundings and communities, in fact, media provides them with the opportunity to emulate what Masculinity should look like. (Coats, 2015).

The clothing sector, and more generally the fashion industry, represent one effective example of dissent from hegemonic masculinity. To this regard, the concept of “remarking” emphasized by Kaiser and Green in 2016 helped me understand the many ways in which an individual can accomplish gender. By simultaneously unmarking and remarking gender peculiarities through the choice of a particular garment, men can articulate their bodies and frame their appearance in opposition to stereotypical gender norms (Barry, 2018). Hence,

according to contemporary research, clothes allow men to re-fashion their social identities, creating space for expression and making them feel safe.

The interviews conducted on a sample of 35 men in Canada analyzing the motives behind their clothing selection highlighted a pattern of “social domination”. Although most of the choices from the participants seems to reject hegemonic masculinity at first, their preferences showed an intrinsic desire to benefit from them to ensure once more their gender privilege (Barry, 2018). However, since the process leading to hybrid masculinities is culturally shaped, contemporary research suggest that men will increasingly take actions to reframe their identity.

In this scenario, gender role, which is the crucial aspect this chapter rotates around, is actively contributing to body dissatisfaction, especially in adolescents. To this regard, research from 2004 and 2005 conducted by McCreary, also confirm this relationship by making use of the Drive for Masculinity Scale (DMS), which simply stands for the perception of someone’s being muscular enough or not. As for males’ physical attributes, studies of the following year showed how the endorsement of the traditional role of a male, including characteristics like toughness and power, were directly connected to Drive for Masculinity. More specifically, gender differences are said to be responsible for more than 25% of the variance in the Drive for Masculinity Scale adopted for their study (Smolak & Stein, 2006). Finally, one of the most interesting aspects of their research is the presented evidence of a strong relationship between muscular images to which boys (11-13 years old) are exposed on media and the desire to compare themselves to those figures.

Although the focus of past research has been on girls and women due to a lower degree of males’ involvement in clinical eating disorders, current investigations have led to a deeper understanding of the actual societal constraints. If, on the one hand, girls are pressured to be thinner, sociological studies show instead that society imposes men to meet the so-called “muscular mesomorphic” ideal body image type (Keum et al., 2014). This, in turn, often leads to significant depressive outcomes, whose “responsible” are both society and media. Nevertheless, the relationship between the drive for masculinity and the association of male

and female aspects depends on gender as a function. To this scope, the concept of “differential salience” provided by McCreary in the late 90s explains the moderating role of gender in the already mentioned associations, with different consequences on internal factors such as self-esteem (McCreary et al., 2005).

Despite the similar internalization of many of these dimensions for both genders, in fact, the type of pressure imposed by society to meet certain requirements is shown to be higher for men than for women. In other words, men’s failed attempts to match expectations in terms of gender-role norms are viewed more negatively compared to women. More specifically, in the case of young adolescents, which is the main subject of my research, the study carried out by McCreary and Sasse in the early 2000s confirms that the drive for masculinity corresponds to lower levels of self-esteem and depression in boys compared to girls (McCreary et al., 2005). Once again, the recognition of the importance of such an outcome brought me to seek further confirmation.

Hence, when it comes to processing each of the advertising stimuli we are exposed to, gender attributes must be carefully considered. The influential power of social media, for instance, induces its users to periodically adapt to certain behavioral attitudes which are “typical” of a culture (Birknerov et al, 2018).

In the post-modern era, aspects such as consumer behavior in marketing must deal with the different sets of values common to different genders. However, the role that men are supposed to display is the result of stereotypes around the advertising practice. Even though one might think these are not as significant as before, they are indeed still part of the marketing mix when targeting possible buyers. The stereotypical representation when presenting men and women, therefore, is made to facilitate the orientation of the message body (Pospisil et al., 2015).

In simple words, although it is clear that the perception of advertising uniquely depends on individuals’ orientations, there are elements of the social environment that enables faster familiarization with the ad. It is not a coincidence that the new ramifications of masculinity studies have become increasingly attentive to the pattern of relations between genders, both dictated by society and internal representation of male identity.

Factors such as economic circumstances and political involvement, at first not related to this topic, are shown to have a significant weight on the construction of men's identity. Its construction, in turn, is a "systematic process" that has its roots in the way society shapes men (Itulua-Abumere, 2013). Consequently, also gender can be considered "cultural". Femininity and masculinity can therefore co-exist and inhabit the same "cultural space", each with its own set of internal attributes (Itulua-Abumere, 2013).

1.4 Intersection between New Masculinity and Social Media Platforms

And it is exactly this co-existence between gender norms that I would like to contextualize to the advertising scenario, especially to the social media one. For instance, the example of the recent phenomenon of "Menvertising", inspired by the already established "Femvertising", shows how to disrupt the stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity by taking advantage of specific advertising features. To this regard, the investigation conducted by Canteli and Rodriguez clarifies the concepts just mentioned.

Menvertising comes from men's need to resist and react to the traditional gender role attributes in advertising (Pando-Canteli & Rodriguez, 2021). Reactance, in the case of gender studies, derives from the evaluation of stereotypical content by male consumers as a threat to their freedom: by implicitly trying to associate themselves to the advertising actors, self-perception stems from what is instead shown in the ad. This may result in negative brand associations, with consequences on the behavioral attitude towards the product.

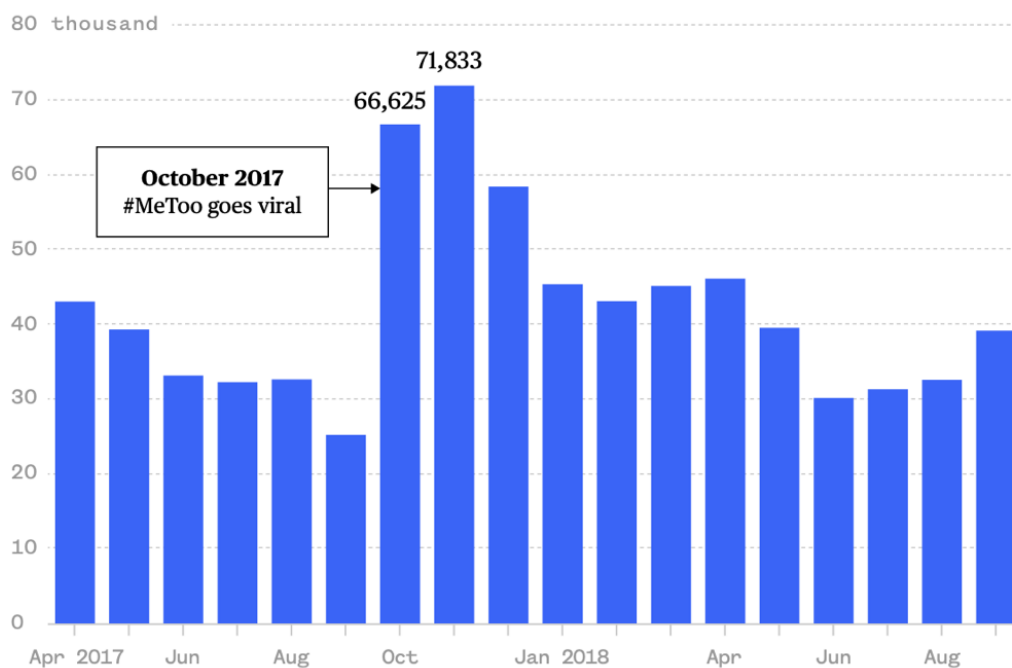
Of the three advertisements considered for their investigation, the analysis of Gillette's famous advertisement "The Best a Man Can Get"¹ is what captured my attention the most.

¹ Gillette. (2019, Jan. 13). We Believe: The Best Men Can Be | Gillette (Short Film) [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0>

The techniques utilized in its display fully represent Menvertising concept. In particular, the inclusion of different males’ generations and body types and the change in their attitudes, going from bullying and asserting dominance to a denounce of any form of hegemonic masculinity, truly shows “the best a man can be” (Pando-Canteli & Rodriguez, 2021).

Moreover, addressing the issue from a social media perspective, the timing for the development of this advertisement was specifically framed to support the movement against domestic violence and sexual abuses carried out on Twitter with the #MeeToo.

According to BBC News, the well-known American Newspaper, the impact of this campaign on sexual harassment requests from women drastically increased after going viral in October 2017, as shown in **Figure 1**.



Source: The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Graphic: Jiachuan Wu / NBC News

Figure 1- Impact of Twitter Campaign #MeeToo on sexual harassment requests from women across the U.S. Source: The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-data-metoo-s-first-year-shows-undeniable-%20impact-n918821>

To provide additional context, the master thesis performed by Bianca Biggs in 2019 furnishes more than one useful hint into the recognition of the new type of masculinity on platforms like Instagram and Reddit. What we are going through here is the so-called

“feminist masculinity”. The content analysis conducted on these two platforms and the evaluation of the most relevant hashtags in this field depicts two different instances.

When looking at #feministmen and similar on Instagram, what the platform shows is mainly content-oriented towards women, not necessarily embracing an egalitarian view (Biggs, 2019). Despite criticizing hegemonic masculinity, in fact, the types of posts shared, and the comments only favor women’s view of things, generally against men because of their gender.

On the other hand, the interesting aspect of this research is the findings on Reddit. Users on this platform employ feminist masculinity to reinforce hybrid masculinity and build an active discussion involving men’s issues from a feminist point of view. Rather than criticizing, the content found on r/MensLib is educative and oriented towards the resistance to the stereotypical masculine traits we encountered through this chapter so far (Biggs, 2019). This, in turn, starts from the re-evaluation of the education that kids should receive by family, teachers, and society, standing out from conformity to gender-thought behaviors. And this is something the researcher fully shares.

Hierarchical stratification of the masculine identity is actively performed by social media platforms to achieve the representation of idealized body images. In particular, the aspect I am really attentive to is what different researchers in the field of social studies call “self-representation modes”. According to Foucault and Sorokowski, the main actor in the selection process of how we want to look or appear is the person itself. However, selective tools like Instagram amplify the desire to expose ourselves in the most idealized form. Therefore, it has direct consequences on the way users compare themselves on social media platforms, leading to monitoring behaviors and a critical approach towards their bodies (Marshall et al., 2020). For this reason, the reproductive role of social media in terms of cultural expectations is a topic that deserves to be analyzed, and an in-depth investigation will be performed in the last chapter of my theoretical framework.

To give an example, the established phenomenon of male bodybuilding on Instagram derives

many interesting topics of debate. To this extent, the content analysis conducted by Marshall, Chamberlain, and Hodgetts in 2020 gives us more than an overview of the modalities this category of men utilizes Instagram to express themselves (Marshall et al., 2020).

Despite displaying hegemonic traits, mainly highlighting the relationship between their muscular form, gender dominance, and body surveillance on the platform, the findings of the research were surprising. The emotional type of expression that both bodybuilders and their followers use is in fact in line with the characteristics common to the “new men” mentioned at the beginning of this chapter by Lafrance. Some of the examples proposed in the study show the continuous presence of intimacy and desire to involve aspects of personal lives in their social feed. Friendship and appreciation posts for beloved family members, as in the case of the bodybuilder “drewbishopfitness”, means that men are increasingly more comfortable expressing their feelings, thus not being afraid of being compared to females (Marshall et al., 2020).

In addition, the positives of the dissent from a traditional masculinity type do not stop here. For instance, a strong correlation between traditional masculinity and negative attitudes towards sexuality (use of condoms and non-awareness of sexual transmissible infections) has been shown by contemporary research (Noar & Morokoff, 2002, from Genter, 2014). Norms of what should be considered “male behavior”, therefore, should be avoided. Considering the impact of images and videos on platforms like Instagram or Twitter, the focus should be on how to encourage the increasing segment of progressive users to share their internal representation of gender identity with external users.

On the same line of reasoning, the example of how advertising is adapting to these new hybrid masculinities is the one provided by Scheibling and Lafrance’s thematic analysis carried out between 2011 and 2013. Although not so recent, the investigation of the modalities through which grooming companies conducted their advertisements, being aware of new masculinity traits, is something we can learn from.

When dealing with bodywork, the ads included in the analysis employ an approach that does not “stigmatize” what should be the characteristics of a real man. Rather than

“masculinizing” the product they are promoting, advertising companies combined storytelling and communication techniques that emphasize well-being and responsibility for being healthy (Scheibling and Lafrance, 2013). The shift from matching men’s expectations from society to the imperative of looking good for yourself is the key to their success. Moreover, the induced need to “Manning Up” without recurring to actions typically related to men, lead them to find alternative ways to establish body satisfaction and positive levels of self-esteem.

Therefore, the example of grooming products advertising shows that the construction of flexible masculinity is possible. The inclusion of hardness and softness, toughness, and awareness of their emotions (also evoked through nostalgia feelings), demonstrates that, despite the complexity of men’s gender representation, there are effective ways to target this new public sector (Scheibling and Lafrance, 2013).

To conclude, one of the many different facets of flexible masculinity in advertising is the use of satire. Satirical masculinity can be used as a mediating factor when dealing with gender relations: in other words, it favors the shift from what usually is socially unacceptable to a different type of “**casual confidence**”. By proposing advertising contents of something “excessively” masculine, the new “post-feminist” marketing type clearly makes fun of those traits criticized by women (Barber & Bridges, 2017). This, in turn, has two direct consequences: the contrast between hypermasculine and feminine behaviors makes the audience aware of what is now socially accepted or not. On the other hand, as confirmed by the sociological investigations by Pascoe and Bridges, these kinds of advertisements indicate men’s real tendency to incorporate marginalized masculine characteristics into their personalities.

What is relevant here is that it does not necessarily mean that a change in gender equality has happened. The inclusion of hybrid features into men’s gender identity only gives us the feeling that a social change has occurred, without an actual change in the privileges’ positions (Barber & Bridges, 2017). As mentioned before, however, this is part of the changes masculinity makes towards its hybridization.

1.5 Italian Masculinity and Culture

Before moving on to the second chapter and assessing the degree of influence held by advertising on men, an overview of my representative sample was necessary. More specifically, the investigation of Italian men's cultural traits, their masculinity norms, and what factors influence their approach to masculinity could be of help to the scope of the research.

It is in fact impossible to conduct this kind of analysis without considering the socio-demographic factors distinguishing each population. The remarked variation among each of the 20 Italian regions, for example, is something that should be considered when analyzing the results of the quantitative survey.

To this regard, the role of the empirical research conducted by Tager and Good is to discredit the stereotypes about Italian traditional masculinity and the display of men's dominance over women. By comparing university Italian men students and students from the USA based on masculine gender norms, the stereotypical American views of Italians as patriarchal and homophobic were in fact rejected. The employment of specific measures like the Psychological Well-Being Scale and the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) allowed the researchers to go in-depth into their investigations. Particularly, Italians exhibited less traditional attitudes on 9 out of the 11 gender norms utilized in the study. The "Mafioso" stereotype, for instance, was strongly contradicted by the interviews, showing less conformity to the hegemonic norms by Italians (Tager & Good, 2005). Nevertheless, as mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, signs of traditional masculinity were often found in southern Italian students, remarking the importance of socio-demographic variables.

On the other hand, however, when comparing Italy to other European countries, Hofstede's Indexes clearly show how the Masculinity factor is the highest in Italy. By taking advantage

of Hofstede’s insights website, it was possible to compare countries like Italy, France, Germany, and Portugal to assess the degree of Masculinity in each of them. The results indicate how Masculinity Index is the highest in Italy, meaning that the path from a society mainly led by masculine factors such as competition, success, and hierarchical stratification to a one driven by the need to do what you like to do (feminine) instead of aiming at the best (masculine) one is still in progress.

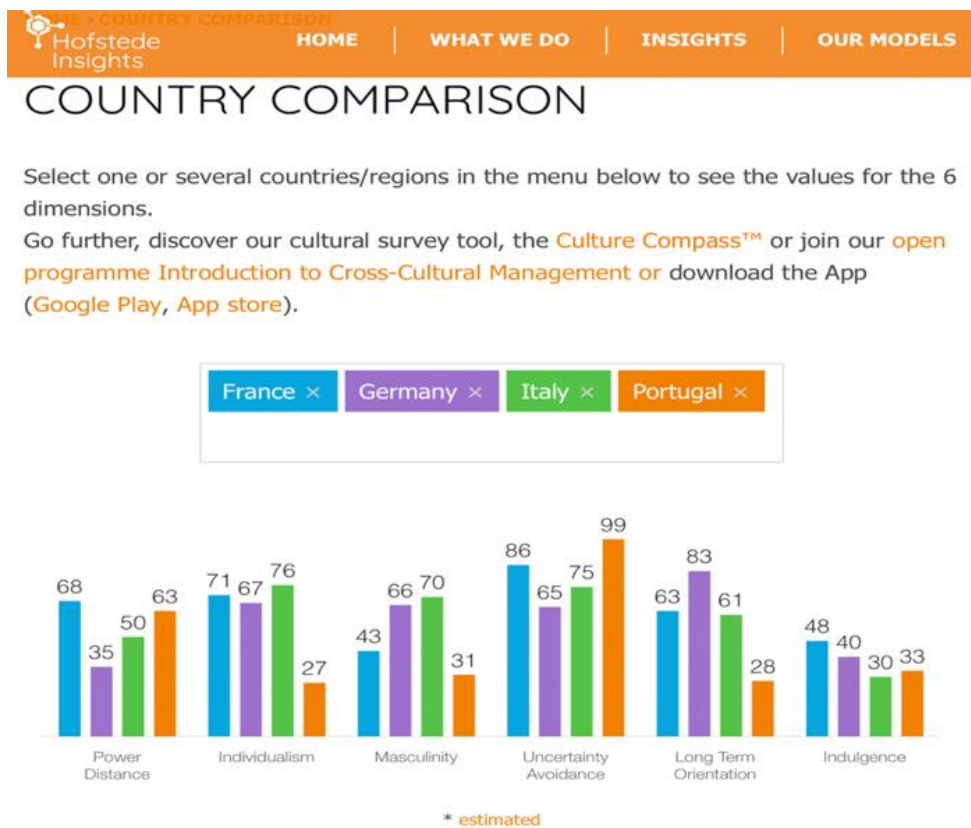


Figure 2: Hofstede Insights (<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/countrycomparison/france,germany,italy,portugal/>)

In conclusion, this overview and the discussed intersection between new masculinity and social media platforms should represent a solid starting point for the analysis of the impact that advertising on such platforms could have on men. This, in turn, will be the topic of discussion for the next chapter.

Chapter 2 – Body Image and Advertising

Having investigated the development of masculinity traits and its ramifications in the context of social media, the following chapter now seeks to understand the intersection between the need to compare ourselves with each other, and the effects that advertising techniques can have on our self-perception.

Then, the chapter proceeds by addressing the role of advertising in amplifying these comparisons. As learned from Clay's sociological analysis conducted in 2005, in fact, my methodology will incorporate all that advertising begs with itself. In other words, during this research, I will try to include socio-cultural variables such as age, gender, and Internalization of attitudes towards body appearance to make the analysis more accurate. All these factors depend on everyone's internal characterization, which is then reflected in gender differences (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005).

Also, the subject of interest is a very recent theme, and although some research has been conducted since the rise of social media, many layers still need to be studied. The starting point for this chapter will therefore be the phenomenon of Social Comparison, whose literature review gave me an overview of the actual trends of self-evaluation among young adults.

2.1 Social Comparison and Body Dissatisfaction

According to the theory of social identity, individuals are self-reflexive, and they tend to categorize themselves based on social categories. By doing so, people construct their identity by grouping with others with similar characteristics. Each of them, in the end, will be nothing else than a "member of a unique combination of social categories" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p.225).

The primary goal of this chapter will therefore be to extend the picture to the social media landscape and its advertising features, to understand the implications that it could have on its subjects. It is in fact true that the general thought when it comes to social media advertising, especially when body images are employed, is people's dissatisfaction. However, it would be interesting to go more in-depth and understand the roots of such feelings, the differences between individuals and genders, and to what extent they can be measured or controlled.

To explain the human need to compare, social psychology's theories such as Festinger's social comparison and further contributions based on it will help us. It is from Wood's theory of 1989, for instance, that comparison was shown to be relevant not only in the evaluation of opinions (as theorized by Festinger) but also in personal characteristics (Richins, 1991). Hence, being satisfaction the consequence of a series of comparison steps, it is extremely dependent on the discrepancy between what is shown by advertising and what are these personal features. Utilizing a satisfaction model to predict the results of the studies employed in Richins' research, it was possible to demonstrate differences in the standards used for comparison in college girls when exposed to idealized body image advertising by models. This change, however, was not referred to feelings about the self, but rather to the way individuals would look at others based on the advertising content they have been exposed to.

Besides, to understand the current advertising trends and their effects on the targeted audience, it is necessary to scrutinize how the use of body image has changed in the last two decades. In this regard, the observational analysis of body image traits throughout these years conducted by Camerino not only seeks to compare the male and female gender but also proposes to assess the evolution of the communication mix for both. Although focused on magazine advertising, the findings were interesting to me, since they actually show how the use of gender changed, and what improvements have been made in terms of attitudes and

techniques.

In the last decade, for instance, sports advertisements focused more on the action itself, while contemporary advertising features tend to highlight emotions through intense facial expressions. As for gender, the results illustrate a more balanced use of males and females, with no distinctions in the actions taken (Camerino et al., 2020). This is due to a much more active presence of the consumers in the creation process of the advertising content. Technological improvements and the immediate reaction companies could get from them (especially millennials) are part of the radical changes advertising is involved in (Camerino et al., 2020). The case of millennial females studied in 2015 shares the same view by showing how personal factors can shape body image satisfaction, thus changing their perspectives on products as consumers. Accordingly, marketing tactics behave to accomplish these needs and appraise personal preferences and environmental factors to produce favorable purchasing attitudes (Rieke et al., 2016).

It is true, however, that their role as co-creators has some downturns in terms of advertising influence and social comparison needs. Also, when contemporary studies did not show significant differences in self-evaluations when employing super thin or average-sized actors, a correlation between perceived similarity with the model and brand evaluation has been shown (Yu et al., 2011). This, in turn, shows once more the crucial role of these advertising types in shaping the customers' buying intentions.

By inserting social media into this scenario, I now seek to understand how this phenomenon may be amplified, and what could be the short- and long-term effects on individuals being part of it. Some studies highlight for instance a positive correlation between the utilization of a dynamic platform like Facebook and feelings of satisfaction in real life: in other words, the effects of a Facebook post displaying happy people are comparable to the same situation in an offline context (Miller et al., 2016).

Once more, personal peculiarities must be considered when trying to assess the degree of

effectiveness of such correlation, since while some studies show a positive trend, others predict negative consequences in terms of gratification. Despite being placed on a “Filter Bubble”, where groups of users are exposed to similar pieces of content, one must be aware of these differences.

To a more general extent, culture, as extensively discussed in the first chapter about masculinity, is what shapes individuals’ use of social media. If western cultures tend to associate social media to aspire to something unachievable in real life, more traditional societies like China instead make use of it to adjust behaviors and induce people to act accordingly (Miller et al., 2016).

Many studies from the field of communication have demonstrated the effectiveness of media advertising in body image perception, satisfaction, and self-esteem, with direct consequences also on consumption behaviors. Based on the theory of cultivation, for instance, it has also been shown that constant exposure to TV advertising distorts the view of reality and becomes the only comparative means to represent real life. From this, the theory asserts that Television cultivates reality, and not reality itself. At a consumer level, this could be translated into the distorted perception of consumption frequency and buying type, and an overestimation of materialistic values (Eisend & Möller, 2007).

More specifically, when the advertising type employs body image as a persuasion tool, it is again Television that cultivates the average body type, and not the average population anymore. Fouts and Burggraf’s content analysis of TV characters, for instance, showed that almost 70% of women under analysis were considered as “thin” by the audience, while this percentage stops at less than 20 % when it comes to men. The resulting internalization, therefore, is that being thin is something to be achieved, and societal pressure to meet these standards becomes normal. Consequently, the dualism between the “actual” and the “ideal” self becomes more distant, leading to new consumption practices aimed at reducing the perceived gap (Eisend & Möller, 2007).

A different piece of advice is instead given by Lennon and Kim’s research of 2007 on the same topic. In their investigation conducted on a convenience sample of 114 females, it was not found any correlation between exposure to television advertising content of thin models

and lower levels of women's self-esteem and inclination toward eating disorders. According to the two researchers, the differences in the results obtained on the effects of the same images on magazines (which instead were found to be determinant in those measures) could be due to the different levels of intensity with which images are proposed. Nevertheless, the demonstrated relation between magazine images and dissatisfaction was only at a general appearance level, thus not including body evaluation. When it comes to eating disorders, however, exposure to fashion magazines and advertisements for products reducing body sizes were shown to be high predictors of excessive dieting attitudes in women (Kim & Lennon, 2007).

To reinforce the gender discourse approached in the first chapter, it is also true that the way people access information is dependent on their gender: compared to women, for example, men's self-perception is typically led by the need to be independent and show their autonomy. Although previous studies conducted by Allgood-Merten revealed a higher association between psychical attractiveness and self-esteem in girls compared to boys, on the other hand, men's perception of social reality when it comes to body image is more influenceable by attractive individuals on television (Eisend & M ller, 2007).

2.2 Body Image Advertising and Weight Control Behaviors

Among the consequences brought by media advertising of the human body, the effects on eating behaviors represent a considerable part. Just in the US, to contextualize, longitudinal studies conducted on adolescent kids demonstrated a correlation between the hours of tv consumption and overweight conditions. In particular, almost 60% of them were attributable to excess exposure to media content (Robinson et al., 2017).

Therefore, this paragraph tries to grasp the roots of eating disorders in a media scenario, its historical context, actual trends, and future implications with the development of the social media environment. Rather than just attributing all the fault to media's communication type, investigations of cultural changes over time try to convey a deeper meaning to it. For this purpose, the academic article proposed by Derenne and Beresin in 2006 compares the

evolution of the ideal body type over time. The first signs of cultural pressure to meet certain body requirements were in fact before the development of media's advertising tools: colonial times, for instance, preferred strong women with a muscular body type, while a century after they were required to be tiny and with small waists (Derenne & Beresin, 2006).

Modern times, instead, highlight media's tendency to be highly influential in the way individuals, especially young people, approach food and physical activity. Rather than just causing body dissatisfaction due to unreal body standards, it was in fact shown that excessive tv consumption in kids led to a reduction in energy and desire to perform activities requiring physical efforts (Derenne & Beresin, 2006). Also, eating disorders and weight control behaviors are now diagnosed at increasingly younger ages and more often, and this can be assessed by the rise in blogs or websites pro-disorders. Also in this case, gender plays a role, in that if women are more prone to develop anorexia and bulimia, men's pressure to meet societal standards significantly increases their concern about shape.

Many correlational studies observing the relationship between the exposure to unrealistic muscular body types and self-perception, like the one conducted in 2008 by the sociologists Barlett, Saucier, and Vowels validate the negative trend already mentioned. Overall, media pressure was responsible for negative body concerns: more specifically, rather than just negatively affecting measures such as self-esteem and satisfaction, it also confirmed Derenne's hypothesis of induced eating disorders and depression (Barlett et al., 2008). Moreover, this effect is amplified when it comes to young men (college-aged).

At a younger age, results from a study conducted on boys and girls from elementary school in the USA report instead that not only does TV exposure produce distorted ideals of what is "normal", but it also influences the perception of other people's characteristics not necessarily related to body features. For example, overweight girls were considered as not capable of making friendships and thus being selfish and impatient (Levine & Harrison, 2009). The phenomenon explaining such a concept is Weight Stigma, and it explains the stereotypes around overweight (but also underweight) people. The belief that overweight individuals are often undesirable and cannot make decisions, for instance, are only two of the many biases that the Master Thesis conducted by Selensky tries to assess concerning advertising campaigns. Although the social identity theory suggests that people within a

group tend to show greater solidarity compared to outgroup dynamics, this does not happen when it comes to weight stigma. It is as if individuals in the discriminated group tend to accept and confirm such prejudices, probably due to the general belief that weight is a controllable factor, changeable by adopting specific behaviors (Selensky, 2019).

In addition to the health issues overweight people face, weight stigma drastically reduces their quality of life, in that prejudices and negative opinions would be a constant in every life sphere. Thus, the more subject to stereotypes, the more statuses of obesity, eating disorders, negative self-esteem, and dissatisfaction will perpetuate. This was in turn demonstrated by the longitudinal study carried out by Sutin and Terraciano in 2013 for the duration of 4 years, whose results showed that the initial classification into obese or not obese category influenced participants' final BMI and physical conditions (Selensky, 2019).

Therefore, the key responsible factor for negative body image and eating disorders is the internalization of these unreal beauty standards. In particular, one of the most reliable scales, encountered throughout many articles of my theoretical framework is the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ), which tries to assess the degree of internalization based on 8 items. Moreover, the study conducted on young adolescents in the early 2000s shows once more that everything is to be gender-adjusted. Comparing the results obtained between males and females, the study showed that boys were captured by three main factors: internalization, awareness, and the general distorted belief that a more muscular body implies a better man (Levine & Harrison, 2004).

2.3 Consequences on Attitudes and Self-esteem

Another factor that body image concerns can affect is self-efficacy. The definition provided by Bandura of the term self-efficacy is relevant to what I just mentioned. Being described as the “beliefs’ in one’s capability to organize the courses of action...” (Bandura, 1997, p.3), society and media consideration of your ability to do so based on your weight is a key determinant in this relationship. In turn, several studies showed that high levels of self-efficacy may translate into high academic achievements, higher expectations, and personal motivation (Fortman, 2006, from D’Amico & Cardaci, 2003).

Grounded on this basis, results from the investigation carried out in Fortman's Thesis of 2006 on a convenience sample of 92 students from the Ohio State University revealed a positive correlation between women's body perception and their self-worth and attitudes. On the other hand, the academic achievements of the participants under analysis were not influenced by general levels of self-efficacy, and this may be due to the poor factor loadings of this measure (Fortman, 2006). Moreover, differences in the results obtained in males and females highlight once more the importance of gender in these kinds of studies. When it comes to women, body image was found to be influenced by self-assessments, contrary to men. This implies a lower degree of effectiveness of media tools on males' self-worth levels, suggesting that proper attention should be devoted to women's prevention measures (Fortman, 2006).

Similarly, the findings of the study carried out by Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas, and Williams in 2000 about the role of social comparison in the perception of attractiveness revealed that not only the exposure of women to media-distorted images influences their satisfaction but also the mood. The irritation levels depend in turn on the degree of acceptance of the mentioned sociocultural norms of attractiveness: the more individuals tend to internalize such norms, the more "vulnerable" they become towards this system, and the more they would search for average looking bodies to feel comfortable with their own (Cattarin et al., 2000). Although it is not specified whether the mood variation is positive or negative, the study demonstrated their presence concerning the acceptance of norms imposed by the society, and media in this case.

Accordingly, the two theories of actual-ideal and self-discrepancy provided respectively by Harrison and Higgins in the late 90s/ early 200s explain symptoms of depression and dissatisfaction. On the one hand, the first theory analyzes the consequences on self-esteem derived from a discrepancy between what individuals perceive about themselves and what is instead the ideal self they would like to reach to experience serenity. Hence, this activates feelings of failure, which can result in binge eating or food avoidance, depending on the anxiety state (Levine & Harrison, 2009). On the other hand, the discrepancy can also occur between the perceived self and the desired body type society pressures you to achieve. In

this case, it has been also shown that adolescents with actual-ought discrepancies tend to experience anxiety after being exposed to images of individuals of the same social sphere being “punished” for not being thin enough (Levine & Harrison, 2009).

To evaluate the relationship between these two types of discrepancies and symptoms of eating disorders, the researchers Hamamoto, Suzuki, and Sugiura conducted a psychophysiological experiment on female university students, providing each of them with modified representations of their actual body types. Their task, in turn, was to state whether those images were fatter or thinner than their body weight or their ideal body type. The findings of their study in fact confirmed differences in the effects that perceived-actual and perceived-ideal discrepancies brought. The first one was shown to be related to a dismissive evaluation of the self, while the second one was instead linked to a perceived dissatisfaction with one’s own body (Hamamoto et al., 2022).

To deepen the role of social appearance anxiety in adolescents, the regression analysis performed by Turan, Arici and elik provided some interesting hints for discussion. Data from 276 participants between 13 and 15 years old showed the extent to which “metacognitive awareness” was responsible for the sample’s social anxiety when it comes to their body appearance. Thanks to the use of Social Appearance Anxiety and Metacognitive Scales, it was possible to demonstrate how low levels of awareness were linked to high levels of anxiety. Nevertheless, gender differences in terms of results were also present: the relation was in fact stronger in males compared to women, due to the early development of females’ physical attributes. Generally speaking, however, an increase in procedural information and self-evaluation was related to a decrease in social anxiety (Turan et al., 2014).

2.4 How Socio-Cultural variables influence Body concern

Besides interior characteristics, studies have shown a relationship between socio-demographic variables, economic status, weight, and body image practices in children and adolescents. For instance, the most vulnerable category to the risk of being overweight and

encountering weight control behaviors is children from “lower” socio-economic status.

As written before, this remarks the relevance of education and prevention tactics in reducing the exposure to eating disorders. One interesting aspect of this study is that participants (overweight boys) were not concerned about being fat despite showing symptoms of obesity, simply because parents and peers were not concerned as well, due to the lack of education on the matter (O’Dea & Caputi, 2001). In terms of internalization of socio-cultural norms, this may signify that being part of that category implies higher resistance to such influences, with fewer consequences on self-esteem.

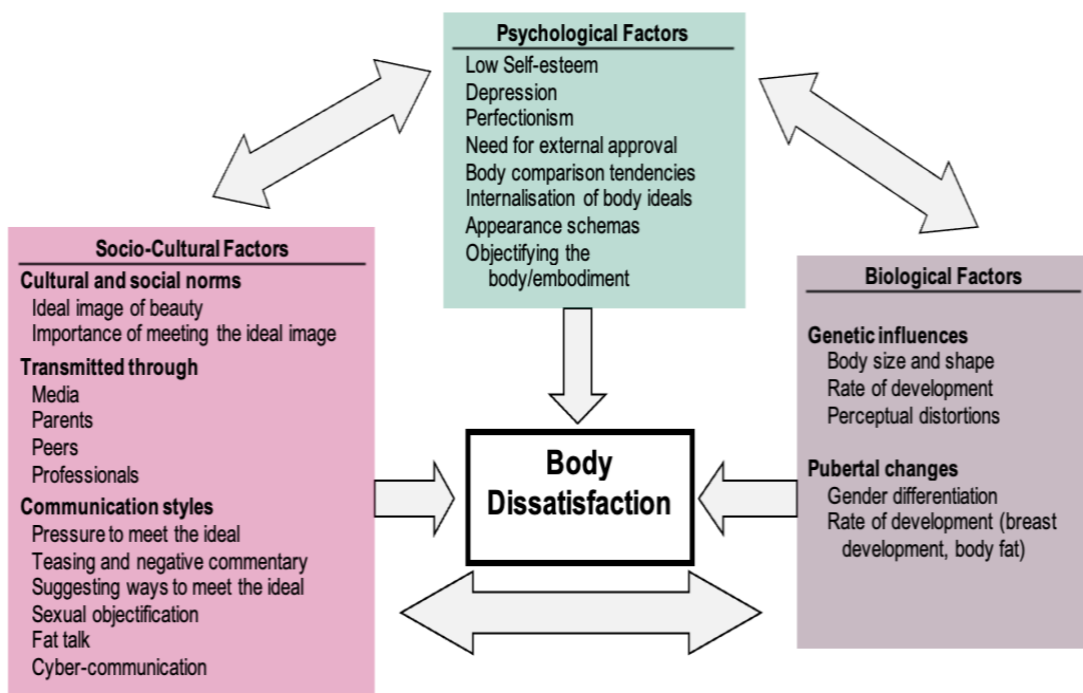


Figure 3: Paxton, S. J., McLean, S. A., & Shelton, B. (2012). Body Confidence Campaign: Progress report 2013, p.6.

Body satisfaction comes therefore with many different factors capable of influencing individuals’ well-being. As shown by the model of putative factor developed by Paxton et. al in 2012, not only psychological elements such as depression and low self-esteem are to

be studied, but also schemas of social appearance, Maslow's need for external approval, and personal biological factors depending on gender and genetics. On top of that, socio-cultural components are yet again determinants in the construction of self-evaluation, especially at younger ages. Media, as well as peers and family, and the varying communication techniques used to share thoughts and opinions, are extremely dangerous if not used responsibly (Swinson, 2013).

Moreover, other ethnicity studies on eating pathology and awareness of people's body image in the U.S. contributed to the literature on the topic by comparing body dissatisfaction and cultural issues. According to Framer and Ferrao, in fact, social status and levels of education determine differences across different cultural groups. To enlarge the picture, other factors such as financial conditions and the influence of popular culture and family contribute to such variability of results. African American girls, for instance, were shown to avoid thin body types. Also, despite having a higher BMI compared to other cultural groups such as Latina, Asians, and Native Americans, they usually have higher levels of self-esteem, due to their beliefs about not being overweight. Nevertheless, even though one might think that this results in the total absence of eating disorders in such a group, binge eating is present, particularly among boys. When considering Native American adolescents, however, the focus of attention shifts to obesity problems, higher dieting frequencies, and BMIs (George & Franko).

2.5 Social Media Perspective on Body Image Advertising

The accretion of social media content throughout the years brought with it new psychological facets to be analyzed. In particular, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the phenomenon of social comparison finds its biggest opportunity for expansion in a social context where users share and show off the best moments of their lives. When focusing on a platform like Pinterest, allowing its users to categorize content related to thin or fit inspirational body types in many different contexts, many investigations consider it a negative form of social comparison. For this purpose, the quantitative analysis performed by Lewallen and Behm-Morawitz on women contributed to the existing literature by addressing

the link between the phenomenon of endorsement of ideal body type and social comparison on Pinterest (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016).

The inclusion of measures such as Ideal body type, motivation to perform physical activity, and the degree to which social comparison influenced the participants resulted in a well-developed analysis. The findings demonstrated how, despite promoting self-appreciation, some of Pinterest's features typical of social media environments enhance social comparison among women and pressure them to attain beauty standards through exercise and diet. Moreover, it has been discovered that searching "fitness" as a keyword can lead to thin-related content, almost impossible to achieve. Finally, the present study confirmed that the endorsement of the ideal body type is a huge predictor of the extent to which women compare to models in the "Fit Pins" category of research (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016).

Complementary, the experimental research conducted 4 years later by Yee et al. added a layer of knowledge on the topic by adopting an exclusive men's point of view. Due to the major focus on women, as in the case of Lewallen's study mentioned before, there was the need to discover more about the effects of categories such as fitspiration and thinspiration on social media. This was in fact the objective of this study conducted on a sample of 224 males, which were required to scroll through 30 different images selected from the main social media including Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook. After completing an initial assessment of their body perception and scrolling through those images for a week, they had to refill the self-assessment to compare the results, which were not far from predictable (Yee et al., 2020).

Exposure to fitspiration images, as one might think, led to an increase in body discontent (especially fat-reduction needs) and to a more negative mood. On the other hand, thinspiration content compared to neutral images had the opposite effect on body fat perception, despite having similar effects on mood. Moreover, an interesting finding that deserves attention is the variability of results between the actual study focused on men and past research on women. Hence, when it comes to fitspiration images, gender differences in terms of effects on mood and dissatisfaction were not observed. Contrarily, females reacted

differently to thinspiration content on social media: thin body types are in fact generally considered less attractive by men, while women try to achieve them (Yee et al., 2020). Therefore, the theory of social comparison explains once more that the difference lies in the comparison type itself, being downward for men and upward for women (Festinger, 1954). From a similar perspective, a different analysis conducted on young women's Facebook usage and its influences on body image concerns, tries to compare the effects of an online magazine and a complex social media platform like Facebook. In Fardouly's study, participants were assigned to spend 10 minutes browsing through either Facebook, a magazine, or a control website, filling out a survey immediately after this task. To achieve reliable results, the Visual Analog Scale (VSA) was utilized to take a trace of participants' changes in mood before and after browsing through the suggested tool.

The results were not surprising, in that women assigned to Facebook usage revealed a more negative mental condition compared to the control website. Moreover, the group of women with the highest "appearance comparison" instinct was led by a greater need to modify traits of their physical features like face, hair, and skin. However, comparisons on weight factors were not found, due to the type of "portrait" pictures, or to the higher variability of body types on the platform compared to magazines (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Hence, it is not the time spent on the platform that determines the internalization of the norms that users are exposed to. Contrary to what one might think, the effects derived from the thin ideals proposed by Facebook depend on the amount of time devoted to photoactivity. This was in fact confirmed by the examination conducted by Meier and Gray on body image disturbances in adolescent girls. Complementary to Fardouly's study, this research adds a layer of knowledge to the topic by demonstrating a link between exposure to body visual aids and self-objectification and tendencies of social comparison (Meier & Gray, 2013).

If we talk about social media and its interactivity, it is not possible to exclude from the analysis Twitter and its users' instantaneous reactions to real-life events. The intersection between the offline and online world is fascinating, so the present literature review will include the findings obtained by the content analysis carried out on almost 1000 users' tweets about the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show of 2011 (Chrisler et al., 2013). The show was

selected because of the variety of factors it begged with itself, ranging from feminism, advertising stimuli, body concern and self-esteem, social comparison, and weight disorders. Not surprisingly, a percentage (although small) of tweets belonging to the category of self-harm was present (0,9%). More than that, body image issues were also found, in that women experienced “downward” social comparison, thus feeling insecure after being exposed to extremely thin models’ bodies. Also, slightly less than 15% of comments included feelings of disgust related to dieting and exercising practices models were subjected to (Chrisler et al., 2013). Finally, the objectification of women’s bodies was also a relevant topic of discussion.

Finally, with Instagram’s evaluation of body conformity to the proposed males’ standards and their effects on wellbeing I now seek to complete the picture about social media scenario in relation to body image advertising. Although most of the research about Instagram’s content influence on self- confidence focuses on the negative effects, from body dysmorphia to social appearance anxiety (as in Turan’s study), a recent study of 2020 on young males’ motivation to stick to the so-called “Instabod” shows the opposite trend (Filiari et al., 2020). Not only the users’ participation in hashtag communities devoted to development of the self-being improved their engagement with fitness-related hashtags on Instagram (such as #fitfam or #fitspiration), but it also increased their internalization of such practices and their motivation to start a psychological and physical process of change. Moreover, when dealing with social comparison, this also resulted in an increasing desire to compare and emulate more popular users on the platform, thus putting pressure on them (Filiari et al., 2020).

2.6 Body Confidence and Prevention Measures

The natural consequence of what I described before is the need for men to find ways to reduce this discrepancy. It usually happens, for instance, that adolescent athletes make use of steroids to achieve the desired body type. The facility to access them, and the increasing social acceptance are only two of the factors contributing to the rise in men’s consumption of anabolic androgenic steroids (AAS). In this regard, **media literacy** could be of help in preventing it. The implementation of the ATLAS program by Goldberg et al. on high school

male athletes is an example of how effective media literacy programs could be in spreading knowledge and shaping consumption behaviors and attitudes towards body image (Levine & Harrison, 2004). The use of media campaigns, and in particular social marketing, had the role of dislocating eating disorders and wrong attitudes from the fundamentals of the society. To reduce the impact that sociocultural norms have on the most vulnerable individuals, educational classrooms, interventions, and preventive treatments should focus on changing the target of comparison. Rather than evaluating themselves with media examples, comparison with real people's bodies could be an initiative.

As mentioned before, it is also not true that the outcome of the social comparison process is negative per se. Examples like the research by Durkin and Paxton on young girls show two opposite trends when it comes to comparison to attractive models on magazines and television. Younger girls showed in fact a reduction in their body satisfaction levels. On the other hand, however, 1/3 of 7th-grade girls and 1/5 of the 10th-grade girls from the population sample experienced the opposite trend (Levine & Harrison, 2009). As for women, these results identify the potential for preventive measures: the way the advertising subjects approach the proposed content shapes the modalities of being affected. In other words, the findings of Durkin's study explain that if you focus on models and remove the attention from yourself, you will be more likely to identify with the models. In the opposite direction, if you tend to evaluate yourself through the advertising models, it will result in the activation of either actual/ideal or actual/ought discrepancy, thus negatively affecting your self-esteem (Levine & Harrison, 2009). Consequently, the approach that media should aim for is to highlight the relevance of the self in social comparison dynamics, management of the information, and individuals' emotional response.

Therefore, once assessed what are the causes of low levels of body confidence and their impact on self-esteem, the next step would be the identification of practices aimed at reducing the levels of social appearance anxiety mentioned before. It is the case of the Body Confidence Campaign conducted by the UK's Minister for Equalities in 2010, Lynne Featherstone. The extensive work performed by the government rotated around many different categories of implementation, ranging from the representation of multiple body types through average-sized mannequins in shop windows, to educational courses on the

impact of media images on primary school students. Furthermore, diversity was emphasized through Public Associations promoting the so-called “PPA Diversity Award”, blogs in the Huffington Post, and detailed reports about media’s effects on young females (Swinson, 2013).

Finally, politics was also a relevant part of this project, in that strict guidelines related to the age-appropriate, non-sexualized, or gendered-stereotype, and cosmetics regulations were implemented by the UK Department for Education. Additionally, sensitive topics such as violence against women and ethnicity and minorities’ concerns were addressed by giving citizens the possibility to report and make complaints online (Swinson, 2013). Besides, the findings of Fortman’s thesis on body appearance and self-efficacy also confirm the need to expand the knowledge about the importance of body image, especially in middle- and high schools. By simply trying to increase the awareness about media’s effects on self-perception, results in terms of self-worth and capability to achieve objectives (both academic and personal) are obtainable (Fortman, 2006).

Having concluded this second chapter with an evaluation of the possible actions that can be taken to prevent and control media’s power on individuals’ wellbeing, the following chapter of my dissertation will provide an overview of a specific social media platform, namely Instagram. Concepts such as self-image will be approached from a different perspective, trying to shift the focus of attention onto the advertisers’ perspective. The goal would be to assess what is the current advertising value of Instagram content on young adolescents (males in particular), which are the main population of interest for my dissertation. Hence, observations of Influencers’ credibility and their role in favoring purchase intentions will be conducted, with a focus on Instagram’s visual complexity as an advertising platform.

Chapter 3 – Social media advertising, the role of Instagram in the development of self-evaluations

This last chapter before the development of my empirical study has the goal of introducing the wide variety of characteristics and possibilities that a complex platform like Instagram begs with itself. Especially when dealing with issues concerning body image and appearance satisfaction, the transition of the platform into an advertising one in recent years (2013) had direct consequences on its users. Although body-positive movements carried out by influencers and agencies pushed their followers to share their perspectives about eating disorders, self-confidence, and acceptance of our peculiarities, the objectification, and the commodification of human bodies came immediately after. Consequently, practices like filters and effects on posts and stories to modify our external appearance became more usual over time (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). On top of that, marketers started to derive consumers' data and attitudes on the platform by scrutinizing their behavior, thus inducing them to share more about themselves with external users to learn more. To contextualize, just between 2018 and 2021, Instagram's marketing allocation increased from 67 to 390 million U.S. dollars (Statista, 2021).

According to recent studies on the topic, the contemporary success of the platform is heavily dependent on its visual nature and the concept of "image sharing", which is more capable of invoking an emotional response in the viewer and it is easier to remember compared to a text post (Fahmy et al., 2014). Hence, brands allocate most part of their marketing budget on Instagram to be able to create and reinforce a strong positioning and positive associations in the consumers' minds (Datta & Kaushik, 2019).

3.1 Self-Image and Beauty Notions in the Age of Social Media

The rise in Instagram's usage lies therefore in the psychological motives leading people to construct their online network. A distinct feature compared to other social media like Facebook or Twitter is the importance attributed to images rather than texts. The resulted "visual-oriented culture", which I will investigate later on in this chapter, and its application mainly focused on the mobile experience are only two of the main characteristics making Instagram unique for its users. Different studies encountered throughout my literature review

tried to assess the reasons behind Instagram's success. Among them, the research conducted on a population of 212 Instagram users captured my attention, due to its quantitative nature. The results showed five main psychological elements contributing to its utilization. More in detail, two out of these five are relevant in the context of body image and self-esteem, namely the need to social interact and compare, and the desire to express our personalities and physical attributes online (Lee et al., 2015).

Central to this desire is the visual impression that users try to expose, which reflects once again differences in genders. Behaviors such as the careful selection of seductive pictures for young girls and dominant images for boys reproduce the stereotypes mentioned in the first chapter. Nevertheless, to a common extent, both genders share the tendency of self-sexualization of their bodies, as a consequence of the unconscious internalization of media content to which they are exposed (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). On top of that, the validity of the information posted on their social media accounts does not necessarily reflect the truth. The results from a survey conducted by Lenhart and Madden in 2007 on American adolescents, showing that more than half of the participants have shared false information online, confirm their likelihood to provide other users only with their ideal self-representation (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). This time, however, the adjustments to body features, and more generally physical attributes, are done consciously through the instruments provided by social media platforms.

3.2 Advertising Value of Instagram Ads on Young Adults

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter also tries to assess the effectiveness of such visual tools from an advertising lens. Therefore, shifting the focus of research on purchase intention, the content of advertising is crucial in determining its effect on possible customers. According to the Master Thesis conducted by Mathisen and Stangeby, the type of buyer is correlated with a specific advertising type: native advertisements, for instance, are more suitable for frequent purchasers, while occasional buyers were shown to be more attracted by obvious ads. On the other hand, frequent buyers tend to be negatively influenced by a low fit between the brand and the endorser (celebrities and influencers), thus reducing their

attitudes towards the brand and their purchase intention. When it comes to the recognizability of the brand itself, however, their intention to buy rises if the brand is not so well-known (Mathisen & Stangeby, 2017). The combination of these factors, together with the information about the advertising tools that will be discussed in the following paragraphs, makes clear that communication agencies or social media managers should devote an enormous amount of attention to their marketing tactics, especially on a continuous developing platform like Instagram.

In terms of influence on individuals' well-being, one of the many effects derived from the need to meet social expectations is the tendency to modify our appearance through photo editing applications before posting pictures. According to a study conducted on Korean females in their 20s, almost the totality of participants (84%) admitted using such editing apps, whose role was to "moderate" the discrepancy between unrealistic ideals of body image imposed by media and personal satisfaction (Lee & Lee, 2019). Despite reducing the gap, and thus increasing levels of satisfaction, the increased use of such apps can lead to a distorted perception of reality, with negative consequences in the long term.

Among the advertising tools used to influence consumers' attitudes, a scrupulous evaluation of Instagram Stories is necessary for the scope of my research. Accordingly, the data collected by the survey spread among 100 millennials in Indonesia seek to understand Stories ads' effectiveness in such a sample population, focusing on how their consumer attitudes change towards these types of ads. To do so, four different elements, namely informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and credibility, were assessed to determine the value of advertising, and finally millennials' attitudes. Although the representative population is relatively small, the findings confirmed previous studies' hypotheses and contradicted some others. For instance, contrary to the previous studies mentioned before highlighting the image's importance over the text, Arya and Kerti's analysis revealed a positive correlation between informativeness and advertising value, meaning that millennials evaluate the quality of information they are exposed to in stories (Arya & Kerti, 2020).

Also, an extremely relevant factor in favoring positive attitudes is the degree of entertainment the ads provide, which should not be generally due to the short duration of the ads (maximum 15 seconds). It was in fact shown that high levels of entertainment, thanks to the use of heuristics or humor, were linked to positive attitudes and purchase intentions (Arya & Kerti, 2020). Besides, credibility was the highest determinant of advertising value. From a body image perspective, this means that the more “credible” and achievable a body looks, the more users are led to perform actions to achieve it, and the more their appearance satisfaction will decrease as soon as they recognize the impossibility to do so.

These results were extremely useful in the context of the present research, since one of the questions to be answered is the effectiveness of social media platforms in determining how young adults relate to themselves in a personal sphere like body perception and self-esteem. Going more in-depth, it is also interesting to assess the reciprocal influence that users share with themselves through the use of pictures and selfies, the main category of content on the platform. The Master thesis carried out by Diliara Bagatdinova on the effects of IG selfies on users’ appearance satisfaction, although focused on women, cleared me some doubts about this topic. Answers from the interviewees highlighted their involvement in upward body image comparison when exposed to celebrities’ selfies. The unconscious need to compare to those standards made them feel aware that they did not meet the average body type to be able to actively participate in the social media setting (Bagatdinova, 2018).

The distinction between social comparison with famous users and peers and friends is also clear from the responses, also because of the socio-economic variables entering the picture, as discussed in previous chapters. However, the results did not show a general trend highlighting the degree of negative influence derived from these two types of comparisons. Half of the population showed more negative signs of self-evaluation when being exposed to influencers and celebrities’ selfies, while the other half reported more negative results when feeling personally connected to the user they are viewing, as in the case of friends, inducing feelings of jealousy (Bagatdinova, 2018).

Other than selfies, the effects of self-disclaimer captions on Instagram have been studied. In particular, the experiment conducted by McComb on the influence of captions declaring photos' editing statuses on women's mood and body perception, shared some positions with Lee's study on the power of virtual makeovers mentioned before. First of all, the investigation confirmed the association between exposure to thin body types on the platform and a decline in satisfaction and the extent to which participants were happy with their bodies (McComb et al., 2021). Secondly, this resulted in a reduction of their desire to compare to other women, to avoid experiencing downward comparison.

However, despite the effectiveness that one might attribute them at first, no correlation was found between self-disclaimers and a contraction in women's mood. In other words, negative shifts in mood and perception were not mitigated by generic or specific captions about the truthfulness of that image (McComb et al., 2021).

Finally, the use of photo editing apps and similar behaviors from participants were shown to mitigate the influence of self-disclaimers on the tendency to social comparison. Findings revealed that the more a user self-modify her pictures on the platform, the less external viewers exposed to the self-disclaimer were inclined to compare (McComb et al., 2021). Therefore, the role of specific self-disclaimers in protecting Instagram's users from unrealistic comparisons needs to be further investigated in the context of prevention measures.

To the same scope, practices like body positivity campaigns cherishing of personal features can also act as mediators of the negative influence that such exposure brings. The themes of discussion, however, as observed by Cohen's study on body-positive accounts on Instagram, do not just include physical appearance. From the content analysis carried out on the 64 accounts under inspection, coded on imagery, human subjects, and post themes, many other related topics emerged. Posts referring to mental health, positive attitudes towards anxiety, respect of personal emotional demeanor, happiness from successfully tackling eating disorders narrated through storytelling and impactful visual imagery, as well as practices of activism towards responsible plastic consumption were in fact encountered (Cohen et al., 2019).

Following prior expectations with these kinds of posts, around half of the body images analyzed display variation in terms of sizes and features. More specifically, the incentives to appreciate such diversity start from the acceptance of non-ideal beauty standards such as cellulite, and unconventional fat percentages. Also, beliefs about the stereotypical utilization of white women as means of representation were discouraged by the present study, including other ethnicities into the picture. This in turn helped individuals (especially women) to experience satisfaction compared to feelings of unacceptance after exposure to thin ideals (Cohen et al., 2019). Furthermore, the investigation of content coming from body positivist accounts such as @FatGirlFlow rejects the dominant belief that body positivity promotes obesity in all its forms. It was in fact shown that no explicit reference was made to food throughout the analysis. The objective of promoting a healthy lifestyle was instead implicitly achieved through the exposition of the benefits in terms of happiness and personal empowerment.

Perceived authenticity of body size is also determinant in the construction of customers' attitudes and buying intentions. As approached in the quantitative research carried out by Shoenberger et al. in September 2019, body size and digital enhancement affected customers' evaluation of the ads, and therefore value. More in detail, a positive correlation between a plus-size body type not digitally enhanced and women's intention to buy the sponsored products was found. The possibility of the participants to relate to the body to which they were exposed, contrary to the typical thin model proposed by agencies and influencers, increased the perception of authenticity, with positive consequences on persuasion, self-esteem, and brand trust (Shoenberger et al., 2019).

To conclude, the validation of results from all the studies in the field of body positivity relies on the degree of focus devoted to the commodification process of such influencers. Their commercial nature and the need to promote a product or a service for a mere economic purpose are crucial factors that we cannot take out from the analysis. This aspect, in turn, will be a theme of discussion for the interviews that will be conducted at the producers of such contents' level.

One of the characteristics of the main target population of such posts, namely millennials, is in fact their tendency to focus on the present rather than the future. Hence, communication agencies and influencers take this feature into account and translate it into specific communication types on the platform. For instance, body-positive posts of such types may only be concerned with the way people's bodies look at the moment, excluding from the picture future health implications (Filieri et al., 2020).

Moreover, concepts like gratification theory are useful to explain the inner reasons behind millennials' use of such platforms. The motivation behind Instagram's utilization, compared to Facebook, was found to be more personal: users experience feelings of satisfaction after employing their time selecting the best online representation of themselves and receiving the approval from the society in which they are immersed. Therefore, it is social validation, achieved through the visual tools described before, that provide satisfaction (Huang & Su, 2018).

Attainable to the results of the first chapter, it has also been found that gender affects visual preferences: if, on the one hand, men usually tend to select spatial images, women are more attracted by the quality of the image and its colors (Huang & Su, 2018). Also, results from their findings underline Instagram's young users' focus on a visual type of communication when it comes to creating a post to either propose variation in lifestyles or their photography works. Taking the food industry as an example, their social media advertising also imposes implicit pressure on users to purchase a specific product. Persuasion in this case is exercised to produce a behavioral change in customers who are not motivated to focus on the message of the ads. The visual affluence adopted on Instagram on young adults for this type of advertising has the role of inducing that change in information processing, and it is usually done through alluring and simplistic visual imagery (Molenaar et al., 2021).

3.3 Role of Influencers on Product's Credibility and Purchase Intention

Considering the relevance of these communication features and their demonstrated effects on young people, how do communication agencies and influencers utilize them? How do they discern gender characteristics, including all the new features of masculinity previously discussed, to provide each of us with different content? What type of targeting strategies suits best the needs of contemporary society? And what is behind them? This paragraph of my third chapter proposes to answer these questions. To validate the results of the theoretical framework, however, the empirical part of my research will be of help, and hopefully, clear possible doubts, and confirm or contradict the current results on the topic.

To a general extent, influencer marketing has been addressed from different points of view. However, due to the lack of extensive research on the relationship between their engagement strategies and the behavioral response from their followers, the study conducted by Tafesse and Wood fits the needs of this paragraph. As a matter of fact, the focus of their quantitative investigation on a sample of 243 Instagram influencers from Saudi Arabia is to test the link between metrics such as content volume, number of followers and followed, topics of interest, and followers' engagement. Although the results do not display body image-related data, it was interesting to discover that the higher the number of followers, the lower the perceived identification with the followers, and the worse the attitudes. Moreover, the same findings were shown in the context of content volume, revealing a negative correlation between the number of posts shared and the perception of originality (Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, the theory that can best explain the motives behind users' need to rely on influencers on the platform is the Uses and Gratification theory, first introduced in the 1940s from a variety of prior communication theories. The elements constituting such theory, namely social interaction, archiving, documentation, self-expression, and many others are all represented by the figure of social media influencers. Therefore, the need to investigate their role in the context of effects on consumers' attitudes and products' credibility grew from the recognition of their relevance. They do not only act as brands' endorsers online, but they represent the mean that individuals use to fulfill the

psychological needs mentioned before. In other words, they are capable of adapting the ecosystem of the platform to change and influence their follower's life (Sudarshan et al., 2022). To do so, they shape their character to make it authentic, and they provide hints and recommendations to satisfy consumers' needs to seek truthful information about products or services.

Complementary to Molenaar's investigation, the non-experimental cross-sectional study conducted by Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko about the communication methods adopted to promote healthy lifestyles on Instagram proposes to go deeper into the advertising dynamics. In particular, the role of digital influencers, communication, and marketing agencies in inspiring young audiences to change their habits is extensively approached throughout their study. Although the analysis only takes Germany into account, the results demonstrated that the visuals employed to promote fitness-related objectives are typically "staged": in other words, pictures of the influencers advertising products or services only represent a "fictional" and standardized reality (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). The content of almost the totality of the posts under analysis showed the same typical body parts (arms, legs, chest, abs, or glutes), and the message conveyed is that what matters is not your well-being, but the visual impact of your online representation.

In terms of mere communication types, the authors were able to discern the main divisions. The intended strategic positioning of influencers on the platform is "experts" of the sector. Hence, this could result in a rise in total engagement, or it can be viewed by followers as an attempt to reduce the perceived gap between users and content creators, to increase familiarity and therefore positive emotional response (Datta & Kaushik, 2019). The careful selection of content to post and the audience to target is among the advertising tools that help them extend their credibility and trust (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). Additionally, the content analysis performed by Silva et al. 2 years ago on Instagram's digital influencers' content showed that, to achieve that trust, most of the posts scrutinized contained texts with emotional elements and "personal" suggestions on how to use that product (Silva et al., 2020). Thus, it is crucial to establish a connection between the external beauty standards shared by Generation Z (low body fat and remarked muscularity) and the perception of being both physically and mentally healthy and satisfied.

Furthermore, familiarity has been also studied in the context of para-social interactions between followers and influencers. Although the concept was originally developed to explain the relationship with characters from television, the illusion of establishing a personal connection with the person on the media platform can be extended to Instagram as well. The tools influencers can exploit to share content from their personal sphere are many, and the more it appears approachable, the more their followers perceive them as friends and tend to establish a PSI with them. Also, perceived similarity makes users believe that the communicative intent is not the purchase one, which in turn affects positively the degree of trust in their regard (Naderer et al., 2021).

By manipulating the perceived similarity with two different IG Accounts, differentiating their brand and disclosure occurrence in their posts, Naderer et al., were able to test the impact of similarity manipulation, thus assessing participants purchasing intentions of the brand. Their findings highlighted the efficacy of brand disclosure in participants' recognition of influencer advertising (Naderer et al., 2021). More in detail, the shared posts' theme also influenced the degree of recognition of sponsored content: in particular, followers of the fashionista account were more likely to recognize advertising than other accounts dealing with environmental topics. Interestingly, despite the belief suggesting a negative correlation between brand disclosure and intention to buy, the study under analysis confirmed the opposite, showing that elements such as transparency and similarity resulted in positive attitudes towards the brand (Naderer et al., 2021).

To complement these findings, the research conducted by Ahadzadeh seeks to investigate the role of self-schema and self-discrepancy in mediating the effects of Instagram body image advertising on young people's satisfaction. Also, in this case, results from the convenience sample of 273 students from university showed a correlation between the time spent on the platform and the extent to which its users internalize the "thin ideal" (Ahadzadeh et al., 2016). This is due to the self-created online scenario in which everyone posts only the best representation of themselves, contributing to downward social comparison and body dissatisfaction.

When it comes to men, for instance, influencers' images showing bare chests resulted in body image dissatisfaction. Contrary to women, however, this phenomenon was not predicted by the degree of social comparison, while in the opposite case comparison based on appearance-related features has been associated to increase dissatisfaction after exposure to such content (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Additionally, the role of self-schema has also been addressed, and it turned out to be influential in young individuals' self-discrepancy. In other words, self-schema induced participants to be more involved with physical-related information, so that appearance becomes so relevant that the difference between the actual and the ideal attributes increases. Therefore, the users find themselves in a "loop" that starts with exposure to ideal body types on Instagram, then proceeds with self-schema inducing self-discrepancy, and culminates with body dissatisfaction (Ahadzadeh et al., 2016).

The present study was fascinating to the researcher because it also included the investigation of young people's self-esteem. As hypothesized by previous studies, low levels of self-esteem were associated with higher vulnerability to Instagram's influence and therefore higher risk of feelings of discomfort. On the other hand, individuals with high self-esteem could use it as a moderator in the relationship between self-schema and self-discrepancy (Ahadzadeh et al., 2016). Consequently, media literacy programs should emphasize the importance of self-acceptance and de-emphasize the stereotype posing attractiveness and thinness on the same line.

Finally, many studies encountered so far shared the same view about the negative consequences from the psychological point of view of idealized images, especially when it comes to body features. Moreover, contrary to the common expectations, the findings of the study carried out by Lowe-Calverley and Grieve on Instagram's metrics demonstrated that, overall, Instagram's action of hiding the number of likes to prevent negative social comparison did not affect consumers' way of approaching content. Rather than the metric itself, in fact, the comparison is based on the type of content proposed (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2021). From this last point, this chapter is likely to be concluded by providing more details about Instagram's tools, the impact of its communication means, and the end consequences on consumers' attitudes.

3.4 Instagram Endorsement and Visual Complexity

The development of advertising tools mentioned at the end of the second chapter rotates around the concept of consumer awareness of the brand, and the use of communication in line with their visual potential. Social media, and Instagram in particular, represent a powerful tool for organizations to establish their brand identity visually through different touchpoints. Many studies from the late 90s in fact witnessed the role of sensory touchpoints in brand differentiation in the customers' minds (Hutton, 1997, from Lee & Hur, 2018). Despite the discrepancy in the results obtained throughout the years, some revealing a positive correlation between high visual complexity and customer's perception of the brand, and some the opposite, it is not possible to deny its relevance in the context of brand associations.

Accordingly, the methodological review carried out by Datta and Kaushik 3 years ago on the theme of Visual Communication produced some interesting results that can help me answer some of the questions I posed myself. The extent to which a picture seems familiar to individuals, for instance, can influence the response type and the way consumers decode the information, attaching personal meanings to it. To make sure followers correctly process the information brands want to convey, Instagram takes advantage of concepts such as Image Denotation and Connotation. By simply trying to connect a product to one action (to improve your well-being in our case), agencies and brands target specific customer segments to transfer the intended message (Datta & Kaushik, 2019).

When dealing with physical attractiveness, results from previous studies provide enthralling insights. It has been shown, for instance, that for both very-low and very-high visual complexity perceived by customers, a smaller degree of attractiveness was associated (Berlyne, 1971, from Lee & Hur, 2018). Further investigation of the advertising scenario then showed how moderate visual complexity led to a higher purchase intention (Mulken et al., 2014).

Since visual complexity is a very broad topic to scrutinize, this chapter will be devoted to its analysis in the context of Instagram body image advertising. Throughout the following

paragraphs, the study will try to grasp the role of the main advertising tools present in the platform, their effects on its users, and the use that advertisers on the other hand make of them.

Image variability, for example, is said to produce different reactions in users. Tools such as adjustments of colors, filters, sizes, and exposition (features all included on Instagram), combined with the use of specific user-related hashtags convey different meanings to each piece of content. In terms of customers' perception, this results in the enhancement of unique psychological states: as stated by Kuzinas in 2013 and then confirmed by Jue and Know, color adjustment is influential in individuals' moods. It is not a case, in fact, that body image content trying to affect people's satisfaction is usually bright, due to its implicit association with positivity (Rathnayake & Ntalla, 2020).

Furthermore, extending what have been approached in the first two chapters, studies such as the one conducted by Jyun and Kim 3 years ago demonstrated a link between gender characteristics and the type of colors used on Instagram when posting images. More generally speaking, a correlation has also been found between the values of RGB pixels in images and users' personality archetypes (Kim & Hyun, 2018, from Rathnayake & Ntalla, 2020). Together with specific settings of Instagram's images, the narrative and the storytelling behind a post also influence the extent to which consumers immerse themselves in this virtual environment: the role of telepresence, for instance, was shown to be a strong predictor of users' positive emotional response, thus increasing the value of advertising (Lim & Childs, 2020).

The visual centrality of Instagram and its utilization for marketing purposes and interventions on users' attitudes and self-esteem represents one of the main topics of debate my dissertation works around. The construction of public profiles and the desire to influence and to be influenced in every aspect of our lives relies on the type of communication users decide to adopt. In particular, the aspect deserving attention in this paragraph is the social influence that the perception of an image can bring. It is in fact the influence derived from the expression of interests and thoughts on the platform that builds the relationship between Influencers and followers. More in-depth, the visual congruence and the perceived similarity

are the main constituents that strengthen such a relationship (Argyris et al., 2020).

From a customer perspective, the two experiments conducted by Leng et al. in 2018 about the effectiveness of visual social network sites as marketing platforms showed unexpected results. Contrary to my expectations, Instagram's visual affluence, in the form of induced social influence, affected neither customers' perception of products' quality nor their purchasing intention (Leng et al., 2018). The downsides of an image-centered platform like Instagram, in this case, could therefore be that its users tend to focus on the image before, not leaving enough space for the body of the ad. On the other hand, in line with previous research on the topic, further results confirmed the correlation between a high-quality image and the increased perception of the product's quality. For this purpose, specific tactics aimed at increasing image sizes can also provide the same effect on users (Leng et al., 2018).

The visual perspective of the users of an image also determines advertising outcomes such as attitudes toward the promoted brand. People's brain is said to process visual content 60000 times faster than it does with a written one, and it leads to a more positive response from consumers (Parkinson, 2012, from Huang & Ha, 2020). Also, previous research on the topic showed for instance a more favorable behavioral outcome when the individuals experience first-person visual perspective, as if they were living in that proposed scene (Hur et al., 2020). Generally speaking, different visual viewpoints may result in different judgments and information processing attitudes: in other words, a first-person perspective has been typically associated with people thinking about "situational circumstances", while a third person is more likely to induce people to evaluate possible comparisons with others (Hur et al., 2020). Moreover, when dealing with advertising, a first-person perspective usually leads users to "locate" themselves in the influencer's position, thus reducing the already mentioned image gap.

Being this process manipulable by the platform and its content creators, it was decided to include the results of the experimental study carried out by Hur et. al, to extend the picture of consumers' evaluations of brands on social media. Their findings are in fact useful in the context of body image advertising because, in addition to confirming previous hypotheses sustaining the first-person visual perspective's part in favoring attitudes towards the brand,

they also demonstrated the mediating role of imagery fluency. It was in fact shown that images including pleasant messages such as inviting followers to visualize themselves in the picture not only induce preferences but also make it easier for them to understand the content and relate with the influencer (Hur et al.,2020).

Finally, eye-tracking studies like the one conducted by Zhou and Xue in 2019 provided additional elements to the topic of visual elements and focus. Thanks to the tools utilized for their investigation, namely Tobii Pro X2-60 and X3-120, the results of their experimental design showed that both product- and customer-related posts on Instagram receive more degree of attention from followers compared to other visual themes. This is due to the co-creation nature of today's customers in the brand profile: in other words, customer-related images strengthen this co-creation process and lead to higher attention from the visual point of view (Zhou & Xue, 2021). Moreover, when it comes to recognition of the brand, it has been demonstrated that, although participants' eyes remained in the area of interest for a long time during the experiment, the areas with more attention were the ones with bright colors and familiar elements. This means that, to improve the levels of brand recognition, an increase in the visual repetition of the logo would be more effective than lengthening the time spent in the areas of interest (Zhou & Xue, 2021).

In the end, the present research hopes to contribute to understanding the points already been touched on so far in the context of body image advertising and self-esteem. It is attainable to believe that the evaluation of gender differences in the social media scene, with a special focus on the phenomenon of new men, and the analysis of the advertising types employing the body as a means of communication on a visual platform like Instagram enlarged the picture of the current literature. After reviewing studies and observations carried out in the previous years, the research can now focus on the elements that need to be stressed out in my dissertation. To do so, the methodological approach that will be adopted in the following chapter seeks to derive interesting results and answer all of my questions.

PART II – EMPIRICAL STUDY

The second part of the present dissertation will be devoted to the investigation of the methods used to analyze the relation between exposure to body image on Instagram from the chosen population and their levels of self-esteem. The methodology will be first described in its totality: here the researcher will explain the reasons behind the choice of such methods of research, the modalities through which they will be applied throughout the whole chapter, and the research questions to be answered. Finally, the data resulting from the mixed methods chosen will be scrutinized separately, and then put together for a final discussion and interpretation.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

The methods section of this dissertation develops around some of the main research gaps encountered in the literature review in Part I. Along the reading, it was clear that there are many studies about the consequences of body image utilization in a social media context on men. However, the absence of a focus on a segment such as the Italian one, distinguished by specific masculinity traits and gender norms (approached at the end of the first chapter) required a proper investigation. Also, the objective of the empirical study is to discourage any type of remarkable stereotype related to patriarchy, inclination to a more traditional masculinity type, and apparent refusal of today's cultural norms when it comes to gender recognition.

Moreover, the present study proposes to add a layer of knowledge to the existing literature by confirming or disconfirming the role of gender differences in assessing media's effectiveness on self-worth values. Although the study is uniquely devoted to men's perception of their bodies and self-recognition, the data analysis and discussion sections will provide a basis for comparison with women, whose literature review is rather much denser.

Secondly, the readings also revealed the poverty of studies including the perspective of the creators of such content on Instagram. It would be therefore interesting to analyze the phenomena of new masculinities and young men's levels of self-esteem from a content

creator's lens, be it an agency, an influencer, or a public figure. Such inclusion, performed through interviews with a selection of Instagram's profiles based on pre-established criteria, contributes to understanding the choices behind specific communication tactics, selection of contents, targeting strategies, and awareness of the Italian adolescent audience.

4.1 Research Design

The present study used a mixed methods design approach to collect, analyze, and “mix” qualitative and quantitative data within the same research. The motivation behind this mixing is that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are explicative enough by themselves to capture the points of view of the subjects and the creators of social media content. Their complementarity in turn allowed for more complete analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

On the one hand, quantitative research makes use of numerical data and measurement and observation of specific variables of analysis to answer hypotheses and questions. By focusing on objectivity, and by relying on a sample that can be considered representative of a population, the results obtained are not only quantifiable but also constitute an exhaustive view of the entire population (Martin & Bridgmon, 2012). On the other hand, quantitative methods of analysis cannot cover reality dynamics that are not quantifiable: everything that represents beliefs, values, and population attitudes is often difficult to delineate in terms of numeric variables (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017). To this scope, qualitative research were used to complement data, justify previous answers, and establish a connection between the two constituents of online content.

4.1.1 Convergent Parallel Design

The study relied on a convergent parallel design, composed of two complementary and distinct stages of analysis. In a mixed method convergent parallel design (Creswell, 2013), the objective is to provide an ample field of vision of the research problem by merging quantitative and qualitative results. The initial idea was to collect both data simultaneously,

but due to the restricted availability of Instagram's content creators, the web-based questionnaire to the representative population of young Italian men was launched in advance. However, as required by such design, both methods were prioritized in the same way, and the data analysis proceeded independently during the first stages of the dissertation's development. The analysis and discussion section at the end of the thesis then combined the results obtained and interpreted them by looking at possible correlations, and cause-effects relations and by comparing them to the ones encountered in the literature review (Cresswell, 2013).

The first phase concerned the collection of quantitative and numeric data through the use of a web-based survey. The primary goal was to identify how the respondents' use and approach to the platform shape their self-perception, and what role masculinity plays in this process.

In the second phase, qualitative semi-structured interviews were used to explain whether the answers obtained in Part I are the result of particular targeting and communication strategies adopted by the creators of such content (using the body to convey a message) and whether they are aware or not of the influence they hold in their followers' regard. The rationale for such adoption is that quantitative results obtained from the questionnaire only provide a one-sided picture of the problem assessed: the reflection of young adults' appearance on a social media level and the consequences on self-worth in relation to masculinity aspects. Although quantitative scales such as Drive for Masculinity, Rosenberg Self-esteem, and Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scales might seem enough to have a comprehensive view, qualitative data will be useful to refine and explain the obtained statistical results from another lens, the "responsible ones" for such relations. The figure below graphically explains the procedures that will be employed for the development of the present research.

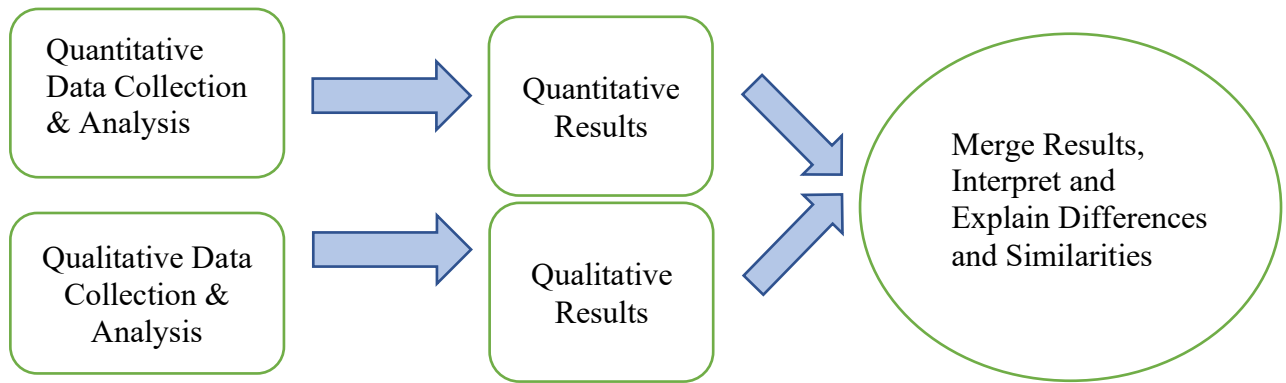


Figure 4: Convergent Parallel Design Explained

4.1.2 Side by side comparison

The data merging process was the result of a side-by-side type of comparison. By adopting this convergent approach, the interpretation of results will be elaborated in the discussion section of this dissertation, which proposes not only to compare the two sources of data but also to investigate the presence of any convergence between them (Creswell, 2013).

Quantitative statistical results (means, standard deviation, and skewness) and qualitative findings (behaviors and communication tactics adopted by agencies and influencers in different sectors, awareness of online audience, and beliefs about inclusive masculinity) that may reinforce or contradict each other will be reported in a specific section, in order allow the researcher to compare results and still be able to present them in the desired order.

4.2 Research Questions

Research questions represent the starting point for the construction of the methodology section. As mentioned before, the review of the literature on the topic, the identification of gaps, and the willingness to contradict gender and cultural stereotypes led to the formulation of four specific questions. The research was thus guided by 4 research questions, presented below:

Primary Research Question:

- **RQ1:** How does Instagram' body image type of content influence young men's evaluation of their bodies and levels of self-esteem?

Secondary Research Questions: The following questions propose to expand the social media/self-perception relationship by assessing it from the three different points of view: gender differences, new masculinities, and content creators' perspective, as listed below:

- **RQ2:** What role do gender differences play in the response to social media exposure?
- **RQ3:** How do Instagram's features contribute to the development of Body Confidence?
- **RQ4:** How do Instagram's actors (Communication Agencies, Influencers) employ these gender differences in selecting their strategies?

4.2.1 Paradigm of Research

These research questions are the result of a study based on a Critical Postmodernism paradigm. This type of analysis is based on the conception that transcends rooted beliefs and thoughts. The constructs derived from this mixed-methods research are the consequence of a view seeking to bring cultural and societal change, capable of eliminating gender assumptions and rooted hierarchies of domination, i.e., male-female, hegemonic-inclusive masculinity (Willis, 2007). More in detail, the combination of a quantitative survey with a representative sample of the population and semi-structured interviews was considered the most appropriate method for this dissertation. Table 1 gives a clear understanding of how each method was tailored to each research question.

Research Question	Research Method	Research Technique
How does Instagram' body image type of content influence young men's evaluation of their bodies and levels of self-esteem?	Quantitative	Online survey
What role do gender differences play in the response to social media exposure?	Quantitative and Qualitative	Online survey and Interviews
How do Instagram's features contribute to the development of Body Confidence?	Qualitative	Interviews
How do Instagram's actors (Communication Agencies, Influencers) employ these gender differences in selecting their strategies?	Qualitative	Interviews

Table 1: Methods and techniques utilized for each research question

4.3 PHASE I- QUANTITATIVE

4.3.1 Target Population & Sample

The target population in this study will be young Italian men between 16 and 23 years old that utilize Instagram daily. The reasons behind the choice of this segment are specific. First of all, as anticipated in the introduction, the Italian population was chosen with a clear goal of discrediting the stereotypes about the community the researcher lives in. One of the objectives of this study is also to discourage the view representing Italian masculinity as anchored to traditional norms, having men's dominance over others as a cornerstone. Secondly, the population of analysis needed to include individuals whose self-esteem and consciousness of their physical appearance were still malleable. Therefore, subjects that are still influenced by Instagram content were optimal. Contrary to popular perceptions defining adolescence range as between 10 and 19 years old, a more inclusive definition of 10-23 years

old was shown to be more accurate. Habits such as education, marriage, and responsibilities in terms of adulthood are now delayed. On top of that, stimuli coming from the digital world contributed to this age shift (Sawyer et. al, 2018).

Besides, the issue of individuals' identities construction is strictly related to the cultural and historical period to which it belongs. According to Bauman, we can distinguish between a solid and a liquid societal state: on the one hand, modern society is represented by the desire to stick to and share the universal and "solid" values proposed by old beliefs. On the other hand, in post-modern times, adolescence can be rather translated into the rejection of absolute truth. In turn, liquid adolescence embrace individuals standing for themselves, dismissing traditional masculine beliefs (Casoni, 2017). It is therefore interesting to analyze the perspective of this new inclusive adolescent age when it comes to dealing with the new social media sphere, trying to impose a common view of what body type or appearance is more socially acceptable.

To summarize, the criteria for selecting participants include:

- Being part of the Italian community and environment
- Belonging to a range age of 16-23, typical of liquid adolescence and subject to external stimuli
- Being exposed to content on Instagram mainly utilizing body image to vehicle a message

4.3.2 Tools and modalities of sharing the survey

Once assessed the population criteria and completed the survey design through the use of specific scales (discussed in the sections below), the questionnaire was created on Google Form and measured the following dimensions: self-perception and awareness of the population's physical appearance on Instagram, levels of self-esteem, and drive for masculinity. One of the benefits of these types of web-based surveys is the capability to automatically store data and translate them into a dataset to be later analyzed in SPSS.

Furthermore, the opening page of the survey includes informed consent, displaying respondents' confidentiality and information about the requisites to participate in the study depending on the age. As reported in the methodological guidance of the research project providing support in terms of children's internet utilization, namely Global Kids Online, the assessment of parental consent was needed when dealing with sensitive questions such as evaluation of self-esteem, body perception, and sense of belonging to gender for minors (Global Kids Online, 2022).

It was in fact specified that to proceed with the fulfillment of the survey, for individuals under 18 years of age (16 and 17), the filling of a parental consent module will be required. The section immediately below will in fact contain a link sharing the module to be downloaded, filled, signed by their parents or legal custody, and then shared to the researcher's email to assess its validity.

Questions were built from the salient themes that emerged from the literature review and used three different scales (as mentioned before): Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale for Adolescent Boys (Instagram-related version), Rosenberg Self-esteem scale, and Drive for Masculinity Scale. Each of them will be investigated in detail later on in the methodology section. The questions were translated into Italian for research purposes and deployed online to the population of interest. In particular, dedicated Facebook groups such as "Trova partecipanti per gli studi (sondaggio, questionario, tesi di laurea), the researcher's Instagram network, and WhatsApp were used to share the survey and collect data. A pre-test was conducted at the end of July 22nd, 2022, on a small sample (10 participants, 5.0% of randomly selected participants) to assess the reliability and the validity of the questions, and then finally shared 5 days later. A total of 207 respondents completed the survey, whose results were then examined using SPSS version 28.0.0.0 (190).

4.4 Variables in the Quantitative Analysis

After assessing the modalities through which the survey would be created, shared, and interpreted, the researcher proceeded by identifying the variables of analysis. By doing so, the structure of the relations between different items within the questionnaire was determined. In the following section, the study describes the process leading to the selection of the variables and categorizes each of them according to the survey section they belong to.

4.4.1 Demographics & Instagram utilization

Demographic measures were first assessed in section II of the survey, gathering information about age, region, socio-economic status of the family (i.e., level of income), degree of education, and occupation type. Section II was instead specifically designed to assess the motivations behind Instagram's utilization and daily usage time. Questions such as "Why do you primarily use Instagram?" were asked, and the respondents could choose between boredom, entertainment, interaction with friends and family, interaction with celebrities, and influencers of inspirational models, to show off the best version of your persona online, or simply not to feel left apart by people using it. Thus, the first section includes what are considered to be the moderator variables of analysis. A moderator is in fact a variable that guides the direction or the strength of the relationship that occurs between independent and dependent variables in the study (MacKinnon, 2011). Contrarily, Section III includes the first set of independent or predictor variables in the quantitative analysis.

4.4.2 Scales of the Quantitative survey

The fourth and fifth sections of the quantitative survey answers the questions "How does Instagram's body image type of content influence young men's evaluation of their bodies and levels of self-esteem?" and "What role do gender differences play in the response to social media exposure?". And they do so by predicting the "extent to which individuals' thoughts and behaviors reflect ongoing awareness of whether they might look attractive to a social media audience" (Choukas-Bradley et. al, 2020, p.164) through the use of three different scales.

The first scale, the so-called “Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMC)”, proposes to analyze the correlation between a set of measures for this study. In particular, the scale was translated and shared in Italian, and the questions were slightly modified by making Instagram, and not social media in general, the focus of attention. Contrary to other scales assessing body awareness and self-objectification, such as the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS) and the Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ) Scale developed at the end of the 1990s, the present scale was chosen because it involved a variety of social media dynamics common to the population sample. Its capability to assess specific attitudes only pertaining to the social media world (Instagram more specifically), allowed the researcher to contextualize them to the specific research’s background (Choukas-Bradley et. al, 2020).

The fourth section containing such scale is composed of 14 questions aimed at investigating users’ effects of Instagram’s use as a means of expression and self-perception. As anticipated before, this specific scale was utilized to understand the way concerns typical in the social media world impact people’s awareness of themselves, and whether they result in a distorted self-view when posting to a social audience. Everything that concerns the act of posting or being posted on Instagram by someone else was considered an independent variable. These factors were treated as such because they are responsible for the subsequent influence on respondents (Ivankova, 2007). On the other hand, the behaviors involving the need to check whether the photo itself respects our desired social media image, perceived attractiveness, concerns about other people’s opinions of our body, the degree of attention posed on our physical features, and the use of filters to reduce the discrepancy between actual and desired social media presence were labeled as dependent variables.

The fifth section makes use of 10 questions to track respondents’ self-evaluation and esteem, and it does so by employing Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale, developed in 1965. The motivation behind the choice of such a scale is its capability to assess general levels of self-esteem and its trustworthiness when it comes to measuring people belonging to the age range of the research. It was in fact encountered in many studies assessed throughout the literature review: Smolak’s research methodology, for instance, is something the present dissertation took inspiration from (Smolak & Stein, 2006). Also, its uni-dimensionality contributed to an

easier evaluation of the results, both at the individual and at the comparison level (Rosenberg, 1965). The variables of analysis here consist of 10 items, of which 6 are positive (Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 8) and 4 negatives (Items 3, 5, 9, 10) (Park & Park, 2019). More in detail, this segment seeks to explore individuals' perception of whether they possess a certain number of qualities, their self-comparison with other people, and the attitude and respect they hold towards themselves.

Finally, the sixth and last section of the survey proposes to scrutinize the occurring respondents' relation to their sense of belonging to their masculinity. To this scope, the Drive for Masculinity Scale (DM) was chosen to understand the extent to which different attitudes and behaviors, typically representative of the masculine perception of being muscular enough, are descriptive of the respondents. It is interesting to note that contemporary research suggests increasing levels of DM shown by women (McCreary, 2007). However, the scale was completed only by males for research purposes. In this last section, factors such as workout routines, percentage of muscle mass, and consumption of mass gainers or protein were labeled as independent variables. On the opposite side, the motives behind these choices, feelings such as guilt and self-confidence, and the uncertainty of their body can be considered dependent on the first set of variables mentioned.

4.5 Quantitative Data Collection

Demographics constitute the second section, right after the first one introducing the reader to the topic covered by the survey and the instructions to follow for minors before completing it. As mentioned in the section dedicated to variables, they will provide details about respondents' age, gender, employment type, average family income, educational status, and Instagram daily use (in minutes) and type. The variables in this fourth section will be measured on a continuous 7-point Likert-type scale in the questionnaire. Respondents completed the ASMC Scale after reading the instructions that follow: "The following 14 questions will analyze the type of relationship between the use of Instagram as a medium of expression and self-consideration. The scale utilized is designed to investigate how users' thoughts and behaviors reflect the awareness of how they may appear to a social audience.

The evaluation of the answers will be done on a scale from 1 to 7, as follows: 1 = Never, 2 = Hardly ever, 3 = Rarely, 4 = Sometimes, 5 = Often, 6 = Almost always, 7 = Always”.

The fifth section of the survey, as mentioned before, will make use of the Rosenberg scale to address participants' levels of self-esteem. The primary measurement for collecting quantitative data will be a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly Agree”, employed to dispense positive and negative data through items such as “I feel that I have several good qualities” or “I certainly feel useless at times”.

The sixth part of the questionnaire will ask for self-evaluation of how much participants belong to their masculinity, and it proposes to furnish data to understand the role of gender norms interfering with people’s self-awareness and confidence when exposed to stimuli. After reading the instructions “The following rating scale analyzes the relationship of individuals with the sense of belonging to their masculinity. With the questions below, I intend to understand the influence of this perception on the evaluation of ourselves, through typical characteristics of the male gender. The evaluation of the answers will be done on a scale from 1 to 6, as follows: 1 = Always, 2 = Often, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Rarely, 5 = Hardly ever, 6 = Never”, answers will be gathered through the 7-point Likert-scale, and the survey will be completed.

After discussing every aspect concerning the data collection phase of the quantitative survey, the researcher performed the same operation for the other complementary method of investigation, the qualitative semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the next paragraph, namely the second phase of the research’s empirical work, is devoted to the analysis of the qualitative methods utilized to sustain the quantitative data obtained so far.

4.6 PHASE II - QUALITATIVE

The second phase in the study is the qualitative one, whose purpose is to explain and complement the data obtained in the first quantitative phase. Rather than further focusing on the respondents themselves, the objective of this second phase was primarily to add a layer of knowledge and provide the reader with the view of the opposite side of the coin: the creators of content responsible for the so-called “cause-effect” relationship. A preliminary understanding of the population sample’s opinions and thoughts would not simply be enough to have a complete view on such an immense topic as self-esteem. On top of that, the process leading to the creation of communication and visual tactics on Instagram, the investigation of what’s behind certain targeting strategies, and the adoption of a global lens from communication agencies and influencers will be more than functional to the scope of the study.

4.6.1 Selection Criteria

The first step was the selection of the sectors to be interviewed. The topics of the present study, undoubtedly concerning all that is related to body perception and masculinity norms, led the researcher to the choice of two specific segments: photography, and fitness. More in detail, the establishing criteria to find the best representation possible for each sector were the following:

- Active presence on Instagram
- Representative of the Italian community (activity based in Italy, not necessarily conducted in Italian)
- Use of body image as the primary way to convey a message
- Accessibility

Due to the nature of the research, seeking to explore Instagram’s effects of a certain type of content on a population sample, the interviewees must be actively posting content on their Instagram profile. Questions related to their follower’s engagement type, communication

tactics employed in a social media sphere, and thoughts about the development of masculinity traits online will be asked. Therefore, a proper Instagram profile was considered to be the first requisite. Secondly, to complement respondents' questions (young Italian men between 16 and 23 years old) to the survey, the Instagram presence needs to be representative of the Italian population. However, as discussed with the researcher's advisor before selecting the proper questions for the interviews, it was concluded that the possibility of the interviewer utilizing another language (English in this case) would not be necessarily an issue. The difference between the adaptation of content from Italian to English, and the reasons behind the choice of such language will be topics of analysis. Furthermore, the international environment characterizing today's world (especially on social media) justifies the choice of English to communicate to a wider audience, but it does not interfere with the research objective.

Third, these two sectors were specifically chosen due to their utilization of the human body as the main communication tool. It is more than interesting to capture different views about the body, the importance attributed to it, and the shapes it might take according to the industry sector in which it is employed. Finally, the Instagram profiles must be accessible: for this reason, the number of followers online won't be a criterion. Rather, the content quality and consistency with the study's purpose will be valued. Consequently, the two figures analyzed, their industry category, and the representative Instagram profiles will be summarized in Table 2:

Industry	Name of the Interviewee	Instagram Profile Handle and URL
Photography	Claudia Verroca	@sonosolostorie https://www.instagram.com/sonosolostorie/
Fitness	Francesco Maiello	@fit.italia https://www.instagram.com/fit.italia/

Table 2: Profiles chosen for the interviews

4.6.2 Qualitative Data Collection

For the present dissertation, two one-to-one interviews will be conducted, consisting of questions and immediate answers, to go more in-depth into Research Questions 3 and 4. Due to the interpretive view of the researcher, interviews will be approached to explore the ideas, feelings, and thoughts of those involved in the communication and visual sphere on Instagram. Other than the flexibility given by the interviewees, this will allow them to express personal opinions that can be advantageous to the study (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

The questions selected for the interviews will be very context-specific because they aim at complementing the data previously obtained. For this reason, the primary technique will be conducting semi-structured online interviews (on Zoom): due to differences in the two industry sectors, the sequencing of questions will not be the same for each interviewee. The semi-structured form requires a guide with some main principles that must be followed. However, despite selecting the order and formulating the exact questions to be asked before conducting them, these factors might vary according to the dialogue development (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). To clarify any doubts and to give more detailed information about the scope of the dissertation, its modalities, and a general overview of the questions, a word file containing all this information will be sent before the actual interview. As remarked by Daymon and Holloway, such a choice establishes trust and credibility and favors positive relationship building (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). For accessibility purposes, online interviews were considered the most appropriate and suitable for the present study. In particular, the platform used was Zoom, the well-known video platform online. Participants will also be asked for consent to record the meeting, and they will be informed about the way their answers will be utilized exclusively for academic purposes.

The Interview Protocol will include fifteen-twenty open-ended questions. The content of these protocol questions will be related to the topics addressed in the first quantitative phase, to be able to analyze complementary data in the side-by-side comparison section required by the convergent parallel design. In particular, the interviews will be structured as follows.

There will be a first generic section dedicated to questions about the interviewee, their approach to their industry sector, and professional development over time, to make them feel comfortable and to structure a solid basis for the interview. The second set of questions will scrutinize their opinions about gender differences on the platform, communication strategies adopted, and general questions about their public of reference (variability in terms of gender, culture, and age). Also, some questions will be aimed at the analysis of specific content on their Instagram page, to understand the way each of them approaches the platform. The third section will ask questions about Instagram in general as an advertising platform, while the themes included in the fourth and last section will be the following: thoughts about the phenomenon of Inclusive and New Masculinities, recognition of differences between two different men's public on the platform (30 years old vs. the segment chosen for the study), and final opinions on the figure of the Influencer and its influential power when it comes to self-esteem and body perception.

In terms of the length of each interview, this was influenced by the participants' accessibility and availability. However, after formulating the questions and tailoring each of them to the different industry sectors, it was concluded that the complete interviews should not overcome 40 minutes duration (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

4.7 Reliability and Validity of the study

When conducting quantitative research, factors such as validity and reliability must be considered to reduce possible mistakes that might affect the final evaluation. In particular, reliability refers to the extent to which the results obtained in the present study can be reproduced by others under the same circumstances. On the other hand, validity must be ensured so that the study accurately reflects what it is supposed to measure (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The survey reliability has been assessed through pilot testing. Analyzing the study's feasibility before performing it was necessary: therefore, 10% of the total sample was randomly targeted. As a result of the responses' analyses, minor adjustments were applied to the questionnaire for its overall workability. In addition, content validity was performed to ensure that the items will be all representative of the specific construct the

researcher wants to measure. For this purpose, the wording of the questions has been examined by the researcher's advisor for this dissertation prior to translation into Italian.

As for the qualitative interviews, reliability has been established by clearly showing the modalities with which the research has been conducted, decisions have been made, and which questions for the interview will be posted in advance (Coleman, 2021). Therefore, transparency and details were assessed by having enhanced control of the interview process. To this scope, the semi-structured type of interviews helped the researcher maintain such control. Besides, criteria such as authenticity and credibility were scrutinized: the researcher asked different representatives to have a wider view of the topic and the different sectors' opinions (Whittemore et. al, 2001). Finally, the content validity of the questions' wording has been examined again by the researcher's advisor before conducting the interviews.

4.8 Research Permission & Ethical Considerations

To a general extent, attention to all the factors that can influence the design and the result of the research is of primary importance and should be present throughout the entire research development (Maxwell, 2012).

As mentioned in the paragraph dedicated to the research design, the present dissertation had to go through specific steps imposed by the thematic and the choice of the age range. As for the quantitative survey, the methodological guidance for the quantitative tools concerning minors' respondents was fully respected. The researcher was aware of the degree of consideration needed for studies on children' and adolescents' use of the internet (Global Kids Online, 2022). Therefore, in addition to providing the link for the parental module in the first section of the survey, an assessment of the validity of the modules themselves was conducted before including those results into the research. Finally, the introduction of the survey informed the participants of the possibility of refusing to answer the questions whenever they want.

Furthermore, the qualitative interviews' ethical framework was also observed. In line with the Association of Internet Researchers' Ethical Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0 of 2020, the interviewees were informed with a specific document sent by email before the interview about the researcher's name, the dissertation's title and main objectives, the methodology that was going to be adopted, and the structure and the modalities of the interview (Appendix 3). Also, a summary of the themes and the topics of each question was exposed. They were finally informed about the required consent to record the session for didactic purposes (to which they both agreed).

Chapter 5 – Data Analysis

The present section is devoted to the analysis of, respectively, quantitative and qualitative data. As suggested by the research design, these separate preliminary analyses were jointly discussed and interpreted in Chapter 6 for the purpose of the dissertation. The analysis in the present chapter followed the chronological order through which the researcher gained the results from these two methods. Therefore, the quantitative data analysis will be then followed by the qualitative one.

5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the survey items will be summarized in the text and reported in tabular form. The researcher will conduct a frequency analysis to assess the valid percentage of responses to all the questions in the survey.

Following the instructions presented in the Data Collection section, the researcher investigated the respondents' answers. The analytic sample included $N = 207$ respondents. However, a preliminary analysis had to be conducted by the researcher to make sure that every questionnaire was eligible for analysis. The first data screening distinguished 3 incomplete surveys, that could not be included in the final investigation. As a result, the total number of eligible surveys was brought to $N = 204$.

5.1.1 Demographics and Instagram utilization

Participants were Italian young men between the age of 16 and 23 (M age = 21.67; $SD = 1.84$ and $\sigma^2 = 3.368$), mostly coming from Sicily (35.7%), Lazio (11.1%), Emilia Romagna (8.7%), Lombardia (8.7%), Puglia and Toscana (respectively 4.8% and 4.3%). Due to the age range selected, it was also expected that more than half of the respondents were students, as shown by data (63.9%). The educational level was instead governed by secondary school and bachelor's degree (respectively at 37.4% and 33.5%), followed by master's degree and Master's. As a proxy for the socio-economic status of their families, almost the totality of

the sample positioned themselves into an average income (75.6%). The descriptive tables in Appendix 1 (Table 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) report in a tabular form the data extrapolated through SPSS 28.0.0.0, to sustain and validate the analysis of the results.

From a preliminary analysis, it also emerged that daily consumption of a platform like Instagram in the age range of the research is at least 30 minutes in the majority of the cases: as shown in Table 8, more than 40% of respondents utilize Instagram more than one hour per day, while 37.3% spend between 30 and 60 minutes on average. These results can be interpreted in light of excessive consumption of time spent on social media, which then can be related to excessive exposure and distorted appearance evaluation.

“How many minutes do you spend on average per day on Instagram?”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	10-20	16	7,8	7,8	7,8
	20-30	26	12,7	12,7	20,6
	30-60	76	37,3	37,3	57,8
	60+	86	42,2	42,2	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 8: Average Instagram Utilization (in minutes)

Table 9 explains the reasons behind such utilization, and despite the predominant part being constituted by “boredom and entertainment”, concerning aspects such as “not feel excluded and showing the best version of myself” still stand for 11.8 % combined.

Why do you mainly use it for?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	,5	,5	,5
Interact with friends and family	24	11,8	11,8	12,3
Interact with celebrities and inspirational models	4	2,0	2,0	14,2
Interest for others' life	1	,5	,5	14,7
Entertainment	93	45,6	45,6	60,3
Show the best version of myself	15	7,4	7,4	67,6
Boredom	57	27,9	27,9	95,6
Not feel excluded	9	4,4	4,4	100,0
Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 9: Intended Instagram Utilization

5.1.2 ASMC Scale

Means and Standard Deviations for each item and the full Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale's mean for the population sample were conducted in SPSS 28.0.0.0 (See Table 10). The confidence Interval utilized was 95%. The software recognized that 2 answers were missing out for such analysis. Therefore, the results for the ASMC scale will be based on a total of 202 valid answers.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
When people take pictures of me, I think about how I will look if the pictures are posted on social media.	203	1	7	4,86	1,586
I think about how specific parts of my body will look when people see my pictures on Instagram.	204	1	7	4,46	1,729
Even when I'm alone, I imagine how my body would look in a Instagram picture.	204	1	7	3,33	1,956
During the day, I spend time thinking about how attractive I might look when people see pictures of me on Instagram.	204	1	7	3,11	1,832
I try to guess how people on Instagram will react to my physical appearance in my pictures.	204	1	7	3,71	1,814
My attractiveness in pictures is more important than anything else I do on Instagram.	203	1	7	3,41	1,850
If an unattractive picture of me is posted on Instagram, I feel bad about myself.	204	1	7	3,30	1,936
I look at pictures of myself on Instagram again and again.	204	1	7	3,79	1,829
I zoom into Instagram pictures to see what specific parts of my body look like.	204	1	7	3,60	2,003
If someone takes a picture of me that might be posted on Instagram, I ask to look at it first to make sure I look good.	204	1	7	3,60	1,981
Before I post pictures on Instagram, I crop them or apply filters to make myself look better.	204	1	7	3,13	2,037
When I look Instagram pictures, I notice areas of my appearance that I think others will view negatively.	204	1	7	3,82	1,822
I spend time looking through pictures of myself that are posted on Instagram and thinking about whether I look attractive in them.	204	1	7	3,24	1,959
I take lots of pictures of myself before posting one, so I can find one that looks as attractive as possible.	204	1	7	4,32	2,148
Valid N (listwise)	202				

Table 10: Item and Scale Descriptive Statistics for the Final 14-item ASMC Scale (Instagram-adapted version)

Based on participants' mean ASMC scores (averaged across all 14 items), ASMC experiences were relatively common. Out of the total eligible respondents (N = 202), the average Mean statistic is in fact reported to be 3.69. This, in turn, shows the population's tendency to be concerned about their physical appearance on Instagram. Data from questions like "When people take pictures of me, I think about how I will look if the pictures are posted on social media" (Figure 5) and "I take lots of pictures of myself before posting one, so I can find one that looks as attractive as possible" (Figure 6) already give a preliminary answer to the first Research Question (RQ1). In the first case, 57.5% of respondents experienced ASMC more than "sometimes".

“When people take pictures of me, I think about how I will look if the pictures are posted on social media”

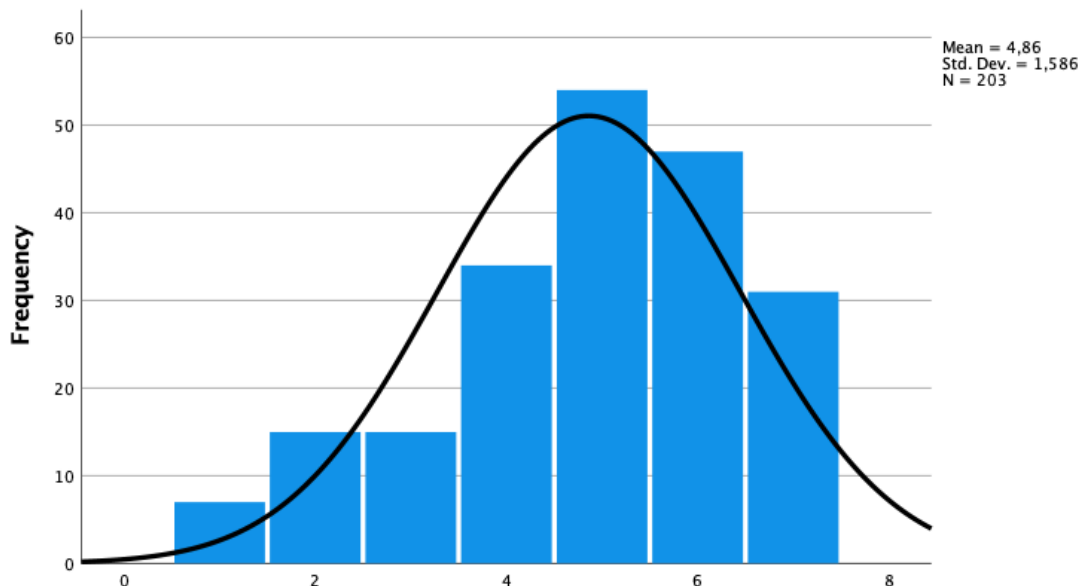


Figure 5: Skewness distribution of Question “When people take pictures of me, I think about how I will look if the pictures are posted on social media”

In the second case, the results are even more concerning, with 24.2% of participants showing their fear of finding the best picture to post.

“I take lots of pictures of myself before posting one, so I can find one that looks as attractive as possible”

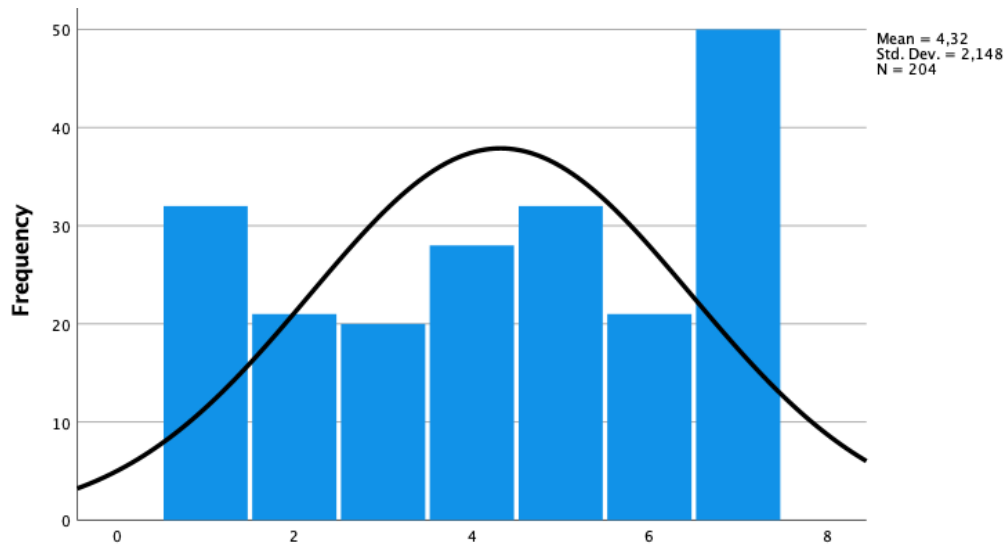


Figure 6: Skewness distribution of Question “I take lots of pictures of myself before posting one, so I can find one that looks as attractive as possible”

On the other hand, contrary to the expectations and to the results encountered in the literature review predicting the incremental use of filters and tools to modify photos online (Cwynar-Horta, 2016), a considerable number of answers obtained in the quantitative survey showed the opposite: 32.9% of respondents admitted to never using filters or photo-editing tools on Instagram to improve their physical appearance). Figure 7 graphically displays, in the form of a histogram chart, the distribution of the skewness of the three answers already mentioned.

“Before I post pictures on Instagram, I crop them or apply filters to make myself look better”

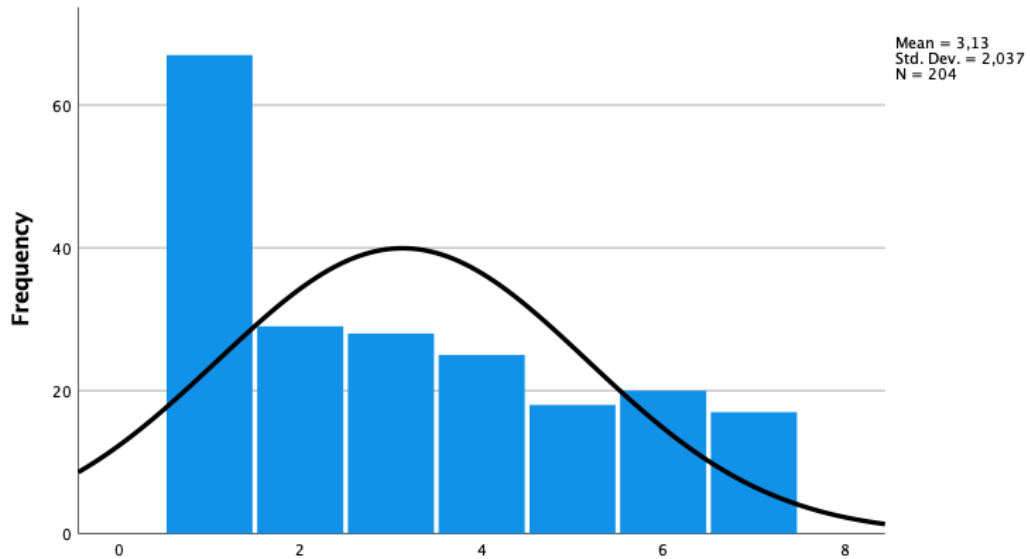


Figure 7: Skewness distribution of Question “Before I post pictures on Instagram, I crop them or apply filters to make myself look better”

Finally, coefficients of Skewness and Kurtosis were calculated across all 14 items. Skewness represents a shape index of a bell-shaped distribution that measures how far the two branches of the curve differ from the perfect symmetry. Kurtosis, on the other hand, refers to the punctuality of a peak in the distribution of the curve (Đorić et. al, 2009). As shown in Table 11, apart from the first two, the 12th and the last coefficients, respectively of -0.628, -0.48, -0.027, and -0.21, the others are all positive, ranging from a minimum of 0.106 to a maximum of 0.535. To determine the statistical significance of a skewness value, the z value (Skewness/ Standard error skewness) must be larger than 1.96. In mathematical terms: $Z > 1.96$. The table below (Table 11) shows the statistical significance of the skewness of each of the 14 parameters analyzed).

Skewness	Standard Error	Z Value	Z > 1.96
-0.628	0.171	-3.672	
-0.480	0.170	-2.823	
0.392	0.170	2.305	X
0.489	0.170	2.876	X
0.106	0.170	0.623	
0.181	0.170	1.064	
0.348	0.170	2.047	X
0.206	0.170	1.211	
0.191	0.170	1.123	
0.129	0.170	0.758	
0.535	0.170	3.147	X
-0.027	0.170	-0.158	
0.477	0.170	2.805	X
-0.210	0.170	-0.123	

Table 11: Statistical Significance of Skewness (Z Values) of the 14-item ASMC Scale

Analysis of the means

T-Tests

To compare the means of two independent groups to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated means of the samples are significantly different, an Independent Sample T-test was conducted. This method was chosen because the groups under analysis are independent of each other: respondents were in fact divided into subgroups based on age, educational level, occupation, time spent on Instagram daily, and reasons behind Instagram use. The last two variables are the most useful in the context of research: the scope of the present study is in fact to look at the possible effects of Instagram consumption on the three scales. As for the ASMC Scale, the following table highlights the differences in respondents'

appearance-related evaluations on Instagram. To clarify, Group 0 includes people spending up to 20 minutes daily on the platform, while Group 3 spends 60+ minutes a day. The T-test allows the researcher to capture the extent to which Instagram consumption shapes the social media consciousness of the two samples' bodies. As shown by Table 12, daily consumption of Instagram by participants is responsible for individuals' concern about other people's judgment of their bodies. As a matter of fact, Group 0 has an average mean of 3.94, while Group 3 has an average mean of 4.81. The mean difference between the two groups is in turn 0.87, meaning that there is a considerable difference in the way these two sub-groups are concerned when posting a picture picturing their bodies.

**“I think about how my body parts will be looked by people
when they see my pictures on Instagram”**

Group Statistics

	How many minutes do you spend on average per day on Instagram?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
When people take pictures of me, I think about how I will look if the pictures are posted on social media.	0	16	3,94	2,144	,536
	3	86	4,81	1,568	,169

Table 12: Independent Samples Test - Concern about people's judgment on social media in relation to daily consumption of the platform

Table 13 shows that the difference between the two means is even higher, accounting for 1.21. This supports, once more, that the time spent on the platform is capable of shaping the samples' feelings towards themselves.

**“If an unattractive picture of me is posted on Instagram,
I feel bad about myself”**

Group Statistics

	How many minutes do you spend on average per day on Instagram?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
If an unattractive picture of me is posted on Instagram, I feel bad about myself	0	16	2,81	1,974	,493
	3	86	4,02	2,000	,216

Table 13: Independent Samples Test - Perceived unattractiveness on Instagram in relation to daily consumption of the platform

This time, the independent variable in Table 14 is the motives behind Instagram Utilization: “Entertainment” has been assigned to Group 1, while “showing the best representation of myself” has been assigned to Group 4. The data illustrated in the table depicts a clear and remarkable difference between the subjects’ attitudes when outside the social media sphere. Even while not using the app, in fact, Group 4 almost always imagine how their bodies would look in an Instagram picture, with an average mean of 5.73. The difference with Group 0 is approximately 3, which highlights that Group 4’s primary concern during the day is other people’s evaluation online.

**“Even when I’m alone, I imagine how my
body would look in an Instagram picture”**

Group Statistics					
	Why do you mainly use it for?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Even when I'm alone, I imagine how my body would look in a Instagram picture.	1	93	2,75	1,705	,177
	4	15	5,73	1,580	,408

Table 14: Independent Samples Test - Offline behavior and concern about ourselves on social media in relation to Intended Instagram utilization

5.1.3 Rosenberg’s self-esteem Scale

The same statistical procedures were followed by the researcher for the fifth and the last section of the survey. Therefore, the table below (Table 15) shows in a tabular form the mean and the Standard Deviation of the respondents’ answers in relation to their levels of self-esteem. To capture the extent to which participants’ levels of self-esteem are more positive or negative, the researcher looked at the average mean, dividing the survey into two different sections: the positive items (1, 2, 4, 6, 7), and the negative ones (3, 5, 8, 9, 10). The average mean for positive items is above 3 (3.08 specifically), meaning that respondents believed on average to have a number of qualities and had a generally positive attitude towards themselves. The mean for the negative items, instead, is 2.15: thus, it is possible to deduct that this sample was not clearly oriented toward negative or positive feelings.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	203	3,29	,844
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	204	3,26	,799
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	204	1,76	,850
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	204	3,13	,867
I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	204	1,89	,943
I take a positive attitude toward myself.	204	2,84	,862
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	204	2,88	,871
I wish I could have more respect for myself.	204	2,83	,980
I certainly feel useless at times.	204	2,23	1,032
At times I think I am no good at all.	204	1,98	1,027
Valid N (listwise)	203		

Table 15: Item and Scale Descriptive Statistics for the Final 10-item Rosenberg's self-esteem Scale

What's interesting is that, although on average people answered the statement "I take a positive attitude towards myself" with almost "Agree" (2.84), the desire to have more personal respect is equivalent, and therefore still high with a value of 2.83. Tables 16 and 17 graphically represent the data mentioned.

"I take a positive attitude toward myself"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	12	5,9	5,9	5,9
	2	58	28,4	28,4	34,3
	3	84	41,2	41,2	75,5
	4	50	24,5	24,5	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 16: "I take a positive attitude toward myself" (Frequencies, Percentages, Valid Percentages and Cumulative Percentages)

“I wish I could have more respect for myself”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	24	11,8	11,8	11,8
	2	46	22,5	22,5	34,3
	3	75	36,8	36,8	71,1
	4	59	28,9	28,9	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 17: “I wish I could have more respect for myself” (Frequencies, Percentages, Valid Percentages and Cumulative Percentages)

T-Tests

The average mean for Group 2 (respondents answering “Almost Never” to the Question “When people take pictures of me, I think about how I will look if the pictures are posted on social media”) is 3, while the average mean for Group 6 (respondents answering “Almost Always” to the same question) is 2.74. This means that, regarding self-esteem correlated to concern about users’ opinions on Instagram, the means for both groups are almost identical. However, the number of participants in Group 2 is significantly lower. Table 18 shows the comparison of the means between these two groups.

“I take a positive attitude toward myself”

Group Statistics					
When people take pictures of me, I think about how I will look if the pictures are posted on social media.		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I take a positive attitude toward myself	2	15	3,00	,756	,195
	6	47	2,74	,846	,123

Table 18: Independent Samples Test – Attitude toward ourselves in relation to Concern about other people’s judgments on social media

For the following two questions (Table 19), the researcher decided to establish a cut point at 4, being the question “Before I post pictures on Instagram, I crop them or apply filters to make myself look better” based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “Never” to “Always”. In both cases, respondents with 4+ to this question, and respondents answering with less than 4, share very similar means. By comparing means, it is possible to deduct that the photo-editing behaviors do not seem to interfere with the overall self-satisfaction and things to be proud of. On the other hand, other aspects (investigated in chapter 6) such as desire to have more self-respect and drive for masculinity traits are instead influenced by Instagram’s filters utilization. Moreover, the respondents of the second group are significantly higher than the first one, factor that can affect the validity of this preliminary analysis.

**“I feel I do not have much to be proud of” &
“On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”**

Group Statistics						
		Before I post pictures on Instagram, I crop them or apply filters to make myself look better	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	>= 4		80	1,91	,874	,098
	< 4		124	1,87	,987	,089
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	>= 4		80	2,80	,753	,084
	< 4		124	2,93	,939	,084

Table 19: Independent Samples Test – Perception of things to be proud of & Self-satisfaction in relation to Utilization of filters on Instagram

As for the educational level, by comparing the means of two groups based on their education (Group 1 has completed secondary school, while Group 2 has a bachelor’s degree”, the researcher could notice some interesting differences. The average mean of Group 1 when asked “I certainly feel useless at times” is 2.11, meaning that on average they tend to agree with that. On the other hand, the average mean for Group 2 is 1.57, meaning that they rather disagree with this statement. In this case, the number of respondents is almost equal, which in turn better supports the data. Table 20 graphically supports the data.

“I certainly feel useless at times”

Group Statistics

	I certainly feel useless at times	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
What's your highest educational level?	1	62	2,11	,960	,122
	2	58	1,57	,920	,121

Table 20: Independent Samples Test – Educational level in relation to Self-perception

5.1.4 DMS Scale

Means and Standard Deviations are finally shown in Table 21 for the full Drive for Masculinity Scale, with the same constant Confidence Interval of 95%. In this case, the total eligible answers for data analysis recognized by SPSS were 201.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I wish I were more muscular	203	1	6	2,98	1,514
I lift weights to build more muscle	204	1	6	3,68	1,774
I use protein or energy supplements	204	1	6	4,51	1,931
I drink weight gain or protein shakes	204	1	6	4,55	1,886
I try to consume as many calories as I can	204	1	6	4,20	1,671
I feel guilty if I miss a weight-training session	204	1	6	4,29	1,814
I think I would feel more confident if I had more muscle	204	1	6	3,29	1,619
Other people think I work out with weights too often	203	1	6	4,63	1,754
I think I would look better if I gained 5 kilograms in bulk	204	1	6	3,11	1,684
I think about taking anabolic steroids	204	1	6	5,19	1,577
I think I would feel stronger if I gained a little more muscle mass	204	1	6	3,17	1,628
I think that my weight-training schedule interferes with other aspects of my life	204	1	6	4,50	1,721
I think that my arms are not muscular enough	203	1	6	3,36	1,684
I think that my chest is not muscular enough	204	1	6	3,34	1,704
I think that my legs are not muscular enough	204	1	6	3,54	1,785
Valid N (listwise)	201				

Table 21: Item and Scale Descriptive Statistics for the Final 16-item DMS Scale

Based on participants' mean DMS scores (averaged across all 15 items), DMS experiences were not relatively common, contrary to the expectations and to the results obtained in the DMS Scale. The average Mean for the 201 valid responses is in fact 3.889. On a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6 (from Always to Never, opposite to the one of the AMSC going from Never to Always), this means that, on average, young Italian men are slightly confident with

their sense of belonging to their masculinity in almost every item. When asked “I believe that my arms/chest/legs are not muscular enough” (body parts typically associated with masculine traits), the average mean is in fact 3.4. Additionally, the percentage of respondents who experienced DMS less than “sometimes” accounts for respectively 44.6%, 41.9%, and 53.7%. Respondents who experienced DMS more than “sometimes” are instead below the threshold of 35%. This, in turn, goes in accordance with the data analyzed in the previous section: on the one hand, data from Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale demonstrate the overall, although modest, feeling of confidence when it comes to self-respect and attitudes towards themselves. On the other hand, responses from the DSM confirm and translate this positivity in the masculinity sphere.

Nevertheless, the present section of data analysis disagrees to some extent with the results obtained in the early 2000s by McCreary and Sasse confirming the relationship between the drive for masculinity and lower levels of self-esteem in boys (McCreary et al., 2005). This could be due to the development of communities and movements carrying out the slogan of body confidence, and to the evolution of the societal values on social media. As stated by Casoni, post-modern society firmly rejects the idea of absolute truth and pressure to meet pre-established criteria (Casoni, 2017). The figures below (Figures 8, 9, and 10) summarize the distribution of results for the 3 questions mentioned before (Q13, Q14, Q15):

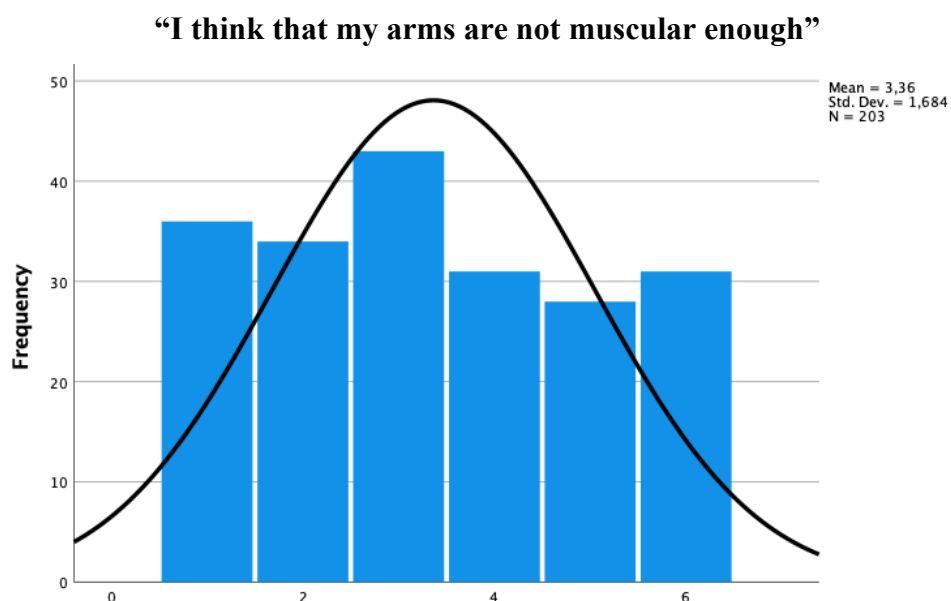


Figure 8: Skewness distribution of Question “I think my arms are not muscular enough”

“I think that my chest is not muscular enough”

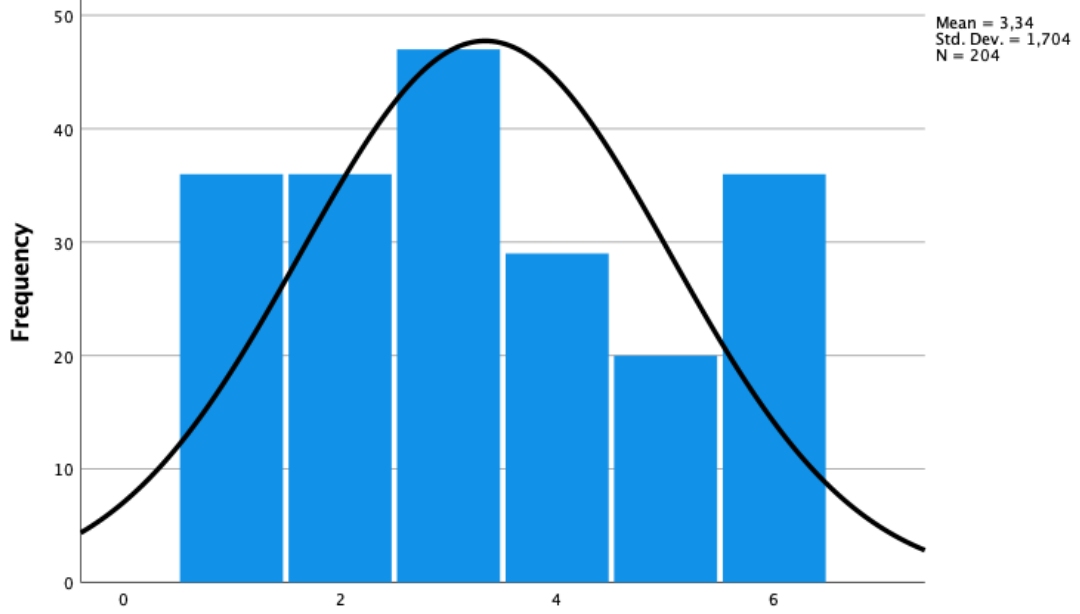


Figure 9: Skewness distribution of Question “I think my chest is not muscular enough”

“I think that my legs are not muscular enough”

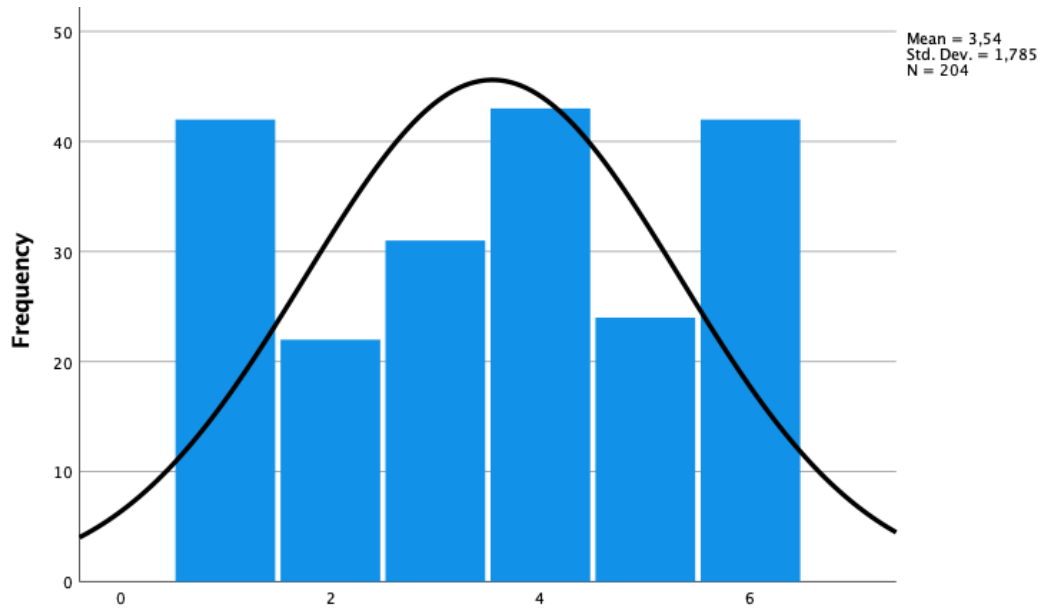


Figure 10: Skewness distribution of Question “I think my legs are not muscular enough”

T-Tests

In regard to self-confidence and muscles in participants' bodies, Table 22 compares the average means of two different groups. Participants answering "sometimes" or more (4+) to the statement: "I think about how specific parts of my body will look when people see my pictures on Instagram", have an average mean of 3.90 when it comes to the question: "I think I would feel more confident if I had more muscle", belonging to the DMS scale. The second group, answering from "Never" to "Rarely" to the same statement, have an average mean of 4.82. In this case, since the Likert scale goes from "Always" to "Never", this means that the second group's average responses are slightly more positive. In other words, the difference in average means of 0.92 shows that the respondents who are more concerned with the judgment of their body features on Instagram tend to show less self-confidence and desire to be more muscular, compared to the ones who care less.

"I think I would feel more confident if I had more muscle"

Group Statistics					
	I think I would feel more confident if I had more muscle	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I think about how specific parts of my body will look when people see my pictures on Instagram	>= 4	81	3,90	1,707	,190
	< 4	123	4,82	1,650	,149
My attractiveness in pictures is more important than anything else I do on Instagram	>= 4	81	2,93	1,672	,186
	< 4	122	3,73	1,898	,172

Table 22: Independent Samples Test - Concern about body features and Importance of attractiveness on Instagram in relation to Muscles and Self-confidence

Secondly, when dealing with the importance of the attractiveness of Instagram pictures over other aspects, the situation does not change. In this case, the average mean difference between the two groups (0.8) explains that answers from participants who rate attractiveness as the most important aspect are also related to a higher need for muscularity for approval on Instagram.

5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

As for the qualitative investigation, interviewees' data will be discussed in light of the convergent parallel design adopted. Therefore, opinions and thoughts gained from the interviews will be analyzed and used as a basis of comparison for the quantitative results. By doing so, the interpretation of the qualitative phase will be helpful for the researcher to discredit or confirm the answers from the subjects of Instagram content and enrich the discussion to give further explanations to the research questions. Having now cleared the modalities, the structure, and the topics to be covered in the interviews, the following paragraph will be focused on the elaboration and analysis of the qualitative data acquired through each of the interviews.

The first participant in this series of qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted on Zoom is Claudia Verroca, a promising and professional photographer from Marche. The 23-years old interviewee was chosen, after a careful analysis of the selection criteria, as the representative of one of the three industry segments the research proposes to investigate, photography. She was first contacted on her personal Instagram Profile @claudiaverroca and informed about the intent of the study, and the researcher's willingness to include her thoughts and opinions for academic purposes.

The second sector to be interviewed is the fitness one, represented by Francesco Maiello and his Fitness Page on Instagram @fit.italia. Francesco, as the representative of the 1st Italian Fitness Community on Instagram with his page counting 49.7 K followers at the moment of the interview, has immediately shown interest in being part of the methodology section of the present dissertation. The structure of the questions is the same as the one adopted for Claudia Verroca, and the final duration of both interviews is between 35 and 40 minutes.

The interviews started with the introduction of the main dissertation themes and research questions. A brief recap of the structure that the interview then followed, to let the interviewee know what to expect in advance, and to create a comfortable environment. The first set of questions is devoted to understanding the roots of their passion for the respective sectors, the development of their professional career over time, and whether they had any

future projects in mind. Claudia's passion was born at the beginning of her university years (about 5 years ago) as a hobby, but then immediately transformed into an "urgency to communicate, to narrate people's stories through images". The subsequent creation of her Instagram Profile @sonosolostorie allowed her to pursue such passion and share people's narratives also through interviews, portraits, and reportages. The turning point for the development of her professional career then occurred when moving from subjects including boys and girls from her city of origin to professional models. Some interesting insights were given when approaching the world of photography on social media, with all the advantages and disadvantages it begs with itself. Claudia's view about that was in fact optimistic in a way that everyone with a camera and a desire to represent his art online could do that. Social media and Instagram in particular are visual platforms giving users the freedom to share and a much wider and more accessible audience compared to 10 years ago. On the other hand, it is also true this market is becoming extremely competitive over time, and it is therefore much more difficult to emerge.

Francesco Maiello shared a similar view, exposing throughout the interview his passion for fitness and his desire to share his view on delicate issues such as body confidence and self-esteem. To this scope, as for Claudia, Instagram represented his springboard to reach a wider audience.

The second section of the interview structure finally goes more in-depth into the bullet points of the research. The IG Profiles @sonosolostorie and @fit.italia were in fact analyzed and considered for questions related to their followers. Moving on, the scrutinization of specific content (posts of interest encountered throughout their Profile prior to interviewing) constituted a large part of this second phase. The first topic approached was the segmentation of their public on Instagram, to which they answered by stating the respective percentages. In Claudia's case, that would be in favor of women compared to men (60% - 40%). Francesco instead shared the insights from his Instagram data section, and the percentages were the opposite, with 59.6 % of males.

When narrowing the question and asking about some specific sub-groups and cultural differentiation within those two macro-categories, Claudia Verroca brought in some surprising statements: according to her, despite the most consistent part of her public being Italian, a huge European and international component is present, compared to the fitness followers prevalently Italians (72.7%). In terms of age, Claudia's public was labeled as heterogeneous: people's age range from teenage years to 50 years old. However, the majority of followers belong to the range of 15-30 years old. A different situation was encountered in the fitness community, whose two most prominent followers' age groups were 25-34 and 35-44, respectively at 39.2% and 29.7%. His younger audience, ranging from 18 to 24 years old, is still present and active but stops at 9.1%. This did not prevent the researcher to proceed with the interview, since a different point of view coming from older users could also be interesting as a comparison and could enrich the scope of the analysis.

The following question, in relation to the European component mentioned by the interviewee, tried to investigate possible differences in terms of masculinities between the Italian and an international environment, on Instagram. Claudia explained that she does not have an extensive view to be able to support her beliefs on the topic with studies and analyses of her followers' profiles. However, on the basis of personal knowledge of some Italian followers, she highlights some differences compared to the international counterpart:

“I can admit that, when publishing some kind of content (referring to inclusive masculinity content-type), they were much less appreciated by Italian guys compared to other photos (referring to traditional ones)”, followed by “I understood what is more likable by an Italian public with respect to a European one. Italian guys' engagement with feminine bodies is much higher, for instance, than with men-based content”

Verroca, C. (2022). Interview for thesis “Influence of Instagram's body image advertising on young men's self-esteem and perception of their bodies”

This, in turn, was also shared by Francesco Maiello in regard to the Italian fitness community. He agreed with Claudia's thoughts on Italia guys favoring feminine bodies on Instagram, denoting a conservative view. However, rather than focusing on the masculinity aspect, he found himself more comfortable speaking about fitness trends and the comparison between Italy and different countries. When it comes to approaching a new communication

type, Francesco stated:

“Americans are the pioneers from the point of view of trends (in the fitness area)... I’ll explain it with an example: an American influencer creates a specific type of content, and then little by little my Italian fitness influencer friends comply with that communication type”

Maiello, F. (2022). Interview for thesis “Influence of Instagram’s body image advertising on young men’s self-esteem and perception of their bodies”

On the one hand, these two statements seem to share Hofstede’s view when comparing Italy to other European countries. The highest masculinity Index on Hofstede’s scale is sustained by Claudia’s beliefs and perception of Italian masculinity compared to the rest of Europe. As mentioned before, the difference in Italian guys’ engagement on Instagram, primarily favoring feminine bodies, could be the synonym of a society led by masculine factors such as internal competition (within the male gender), and it also reflects how much hierarchical stratification is still present. On the other hand, the interviewees’ beliefs about Italians and foreign countries seem to contradict Tager and Good’s research comparing university Italian men and students from the USA (Tager & Good, 2005). The exhibition of less traditional masculine attitudes and gender norms by Italians, although useful to the scope of the research, did in fact not go along with Claudia and Francesco’s opinions. As for Claudia’s profile, it was concluded that three different posts, all linked by the man’s body as the primary visual tool, should be commented on. However, after receiving much more positive feedback and interaction about one specific post out of the three (Figure 11), the first question aimed at understanding her objectives, focus points, and expected reactions from her public with the post below. With this project, called “Mascolinità non tossica”, e.g., “Non-toxic Masculinity”, Claudia wanted to “play” with some elements typically attributable to a girl and try to share this inclusive view through clothes and accessories. It was mentioned that:

“Nicola (the model chosen for this project) has always had a traditional male behavior. Thus, we wanted to play with such contradiction: make him wear clothes and strike an unconventional male pose.... To tell everyone that being a male is not dependent on the clothing, and that the accessories you wear have nothing to do with the person’s attitudes”

Verroca, C. (2022). Interview for thesis “Influence of Instagram’s body image advertising on young men’s self-esteem and perception of their bodies”

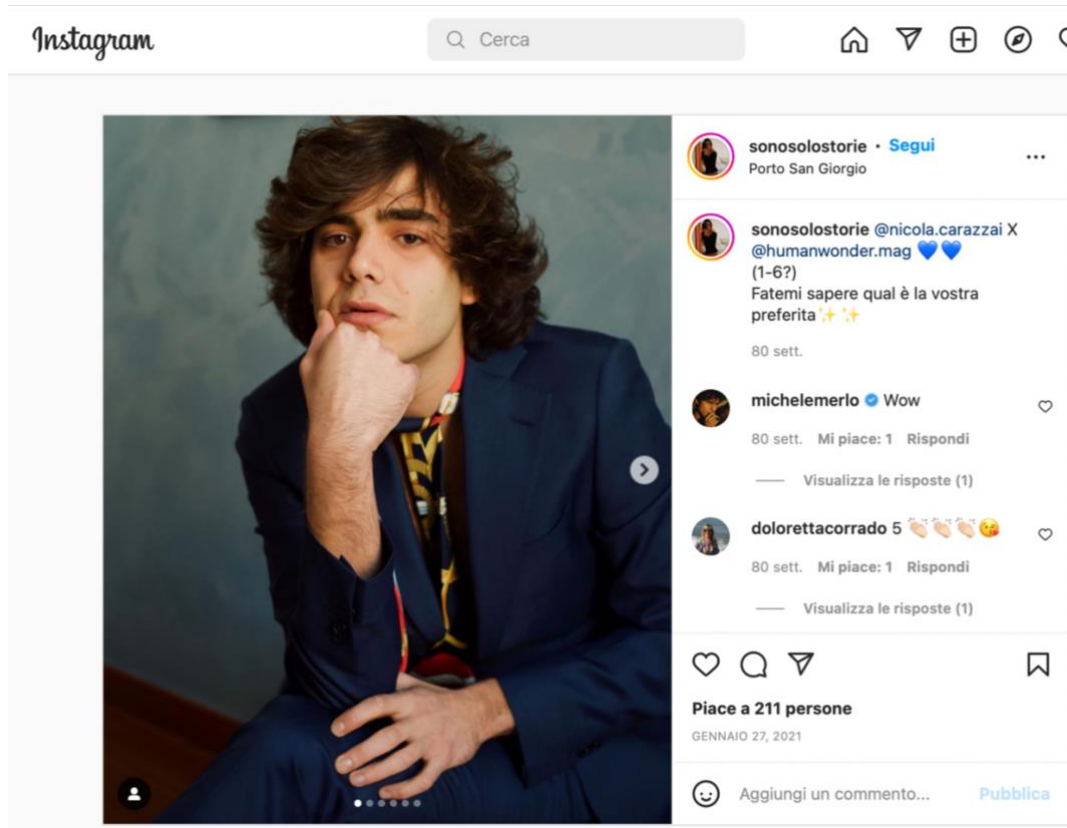


Figure 11: Instagram Post from @sonosolostorie: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKj3QAFBgt/>

One of the main motives behind the formulation of Research Question I was the recognition of different masculinity perceptions when comparing older people (30 years old) and younger generations (from 16 years old to 30 in general). Therefore, when bringing this up to Claudia in relation to what she just said, she was asked whether the reaction from her public (primarily young) was in accordance with her expectations, or if she had any kind of concern before publishing this post. The answer was immediately oriented towards the choice of the model (Nicola), who is anchored to traditional masculine values and is well-known to his friends and peers in Marche for this reason.

“He was making fun of gay people; he was a bully that became a manifest. Therefore, this choice was heavily criticized: the reaction from boys belonging to the LGBT community was strong at that time.... I was told not to choose such bully to represent these concepts”

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However, Claudia insisted on her progressive vision of masculinity and defended with strong arguments the theory of inclusivity with this choice. Figure 12 is another example of her consistency of vision. Moreover, the interviewer expressed his view on this topic by adding in relation to this specific post:

“It is exactly from models like him (Nicola) that we need to start again to unhinge a bit the idea of toxic masculinity. Contrary to the first model Alessio (referring to the post below), who belongs to the LGBT community and is not afraid to act in a specific way or wear specific clothes, in that they manifest his personality, Nicola is not like that. He is super theatrical, but he has been always considered the classic hetero-basic male”

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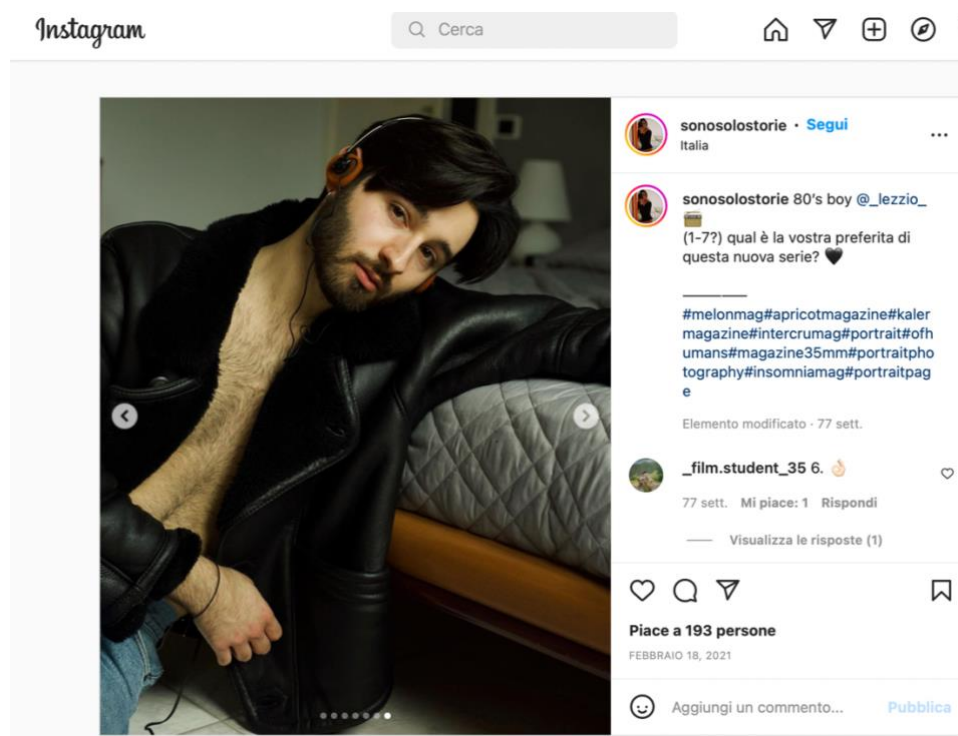


Figure 12: Instagram Post from @sonosolostorie: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLbmrAUBhF9/>

Hence, she proceeded by explaining how the fact that he is the spokesperson for this message (Figure 11) was useful to the scope of her Post. The contrast between hegemonic and inclusive masculinity carried on through the choice of this specific actor, triggered her audience and made them reflect on the true values of inclusivity. This notion also supports

the decreasing homohysteria trend on social media and among younger generations. Although it is difficult to determine whether there is a direct correlation between the decreasing homophobic attitudes and their behaviors on social media, her opinions, as a photographer and as a representative of these generations, demonstrate that the hierarchical stratification on social media and on Instagram more specifically is lower than before (Anderson & McCormack, 2014). And the direct consequence is the “inclusion” of many different masculinity types and the reducing stigmatization of traits typically associated with the feminine gender.

The fitness sector was also positively affected by the rise of social media. It is clear that there was a development in terms of values and beliefs in the fitness community, initially known for being mentally closed, homophobic, and still attached to the desire to compare our bodies to feel better. When asked to enlarge this topic, Francesco confirmed Claudia’s view by stating:

“In my opinion, the rise of social media surely “softened” the situation you just described. The possibility to let others comment made that situation less extreme: a person without feelings or respect can be criticized on social media, and he/she needs to answer those criticisms. In the past, in the gyms’ environment, the situation was as you just described, while now with social media I found these reasonings and ways of thinking much less present”

Maiello, F. (2022). Interview for thesis “Influence of Instagram’s body image advertising on young men’s self-esteem and perception of their bodies”

Once assessed the deepness and the validity of the answers obtained so far, the focus of the interview shifted to the importance of body utilization on Instagram as a communication tool. When asked to articulate the topic of the relation between body image and self-esteem in the fitness world, Francesco replied:

“The body can be a tool to overcome the difficulties that may arise in life. It is a tool that, if you train with passion and consistency, you will collect results, as in every other aspect... If you encounter problems in life, I’m not saying that the solution is working out at the gym, but do not stop and always manage to find the positive side”

Maiello, F. (2022). Interview for thesis “Influence of Instagram’s body image advertising on young men’s self-esteem and perception of their bodies”

When answering, the visual focus was on the two specific posts selected from his Instagram feed showing people's intent to never give up despite having disabilities or finding discomfort. Figure 13 and Figure 14 represent Francesco's desire to spread his view through his Instagram's feed.

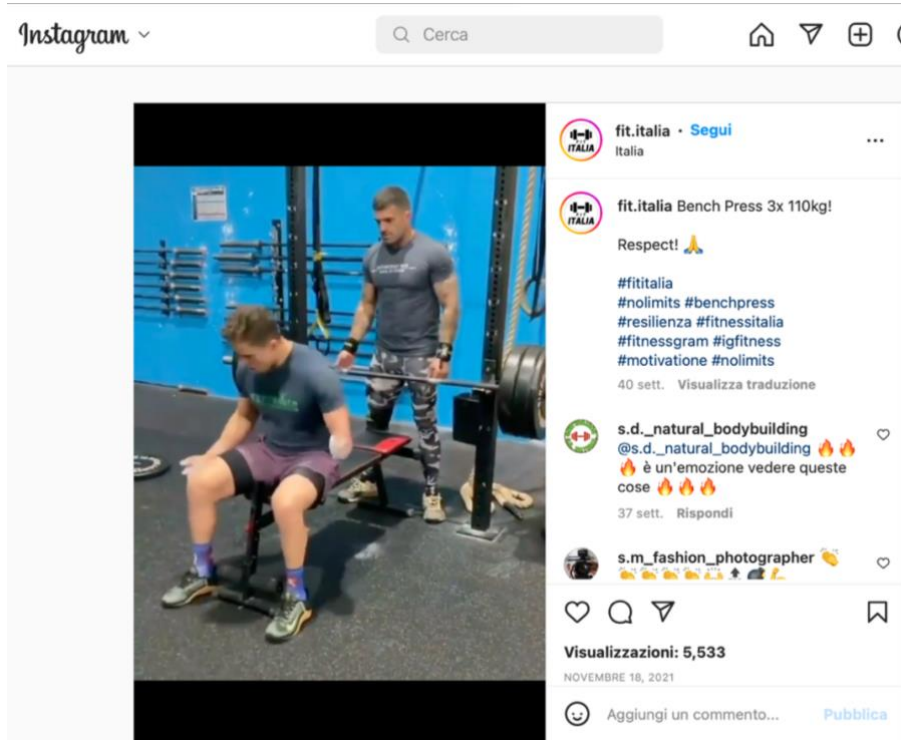


Figure 13: Instagram Post from @fit.ita: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CWbEWgUotg8/>

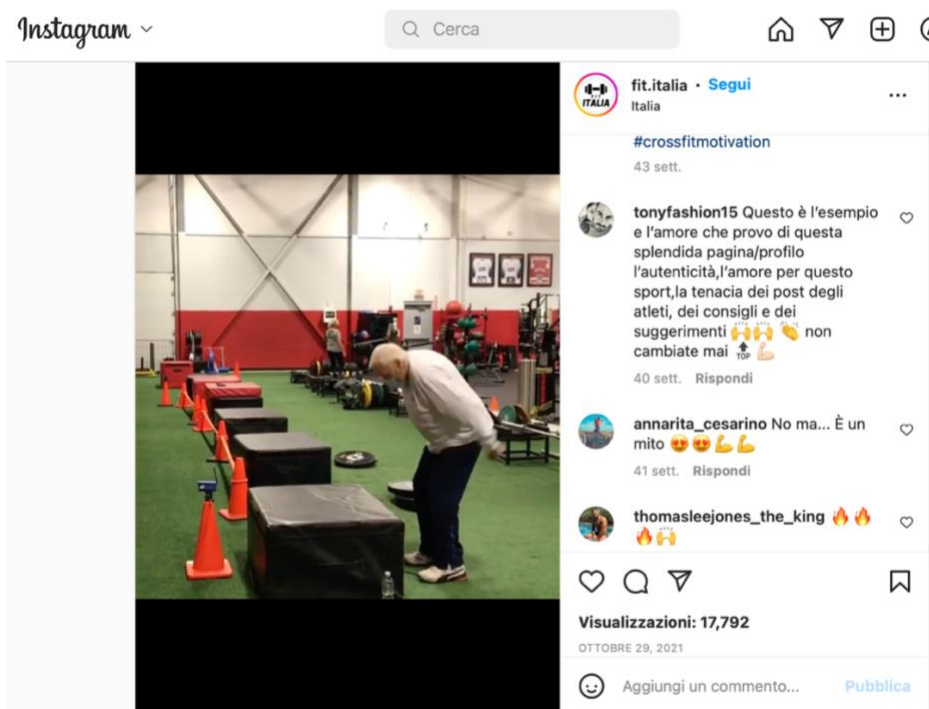


Figure 14: Instagram Post from @fit.ita: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVnqjAoD2U/>

Despite having an older audience, Instagram users belonging to Francesco's fitness sector clearly show signs of inclusivity. It is true that a post depicting a female body increases males' engagement on the page. However, Francesco admitted that he noticed passionate engagement (likes and comments), especially when dealing with such sensitive issues, as we can see in the previous comment stating "This is the example and the love I feel for this beautiful page, authentic". Contrary to the findings obtained in the photography sector, fitness users on Instagram, followers of @fit.italia, and belonging to older generations (25-44 years old) share inclusive masculine values and are instead the ones who interact the most. When posing the same question to Claudia, her belonging sector shaped the way she answered. Although both of them recognized the communicative importance of the body, she attributes more importance to different body parts than Francesco. In fact, she replied:

"Words are obviously one of the biggest communication means, but things like body, gestures and the gaze are everything to me. I give a lot of importance to the way people look at things, I believe that body has a strong communication power in that it represents our way of existing"

Verroca, C. (2022). Interview for thesis "Influence of Instagram's body image advertising on young men's self-esteem and perception of their bodies"

The data analysis section of the respective methods employed for the present dissertation highlighted, although separately, interesting points that needs to be addressed carefully and complementary in the following chapter. The researcher's aim with chapter six is to follow the guidelines imposed by the study design chosen: thus, quantitative, and qualitative results will be jointly discussed and interpreted for better comprehension of the whole topic.

Chapter 6 – Results and Discussion

As implied by the convergent parallel design adopted for the present dissertation, this chapter will be devoted to the analysis and discussion of the results achieved through the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of research. In particular, each of the research questions mentioned at the beginning of the fourth chapter will be scrutinized by mixing and interpreting the two data sources. It was necessary to reflect on data, and to discover whether the findings of the mixed approach were consistent with each other. Therefore, the discussion will start with the evaluation of the results of the first and main research question, trying to assess the degree of influence of Instagram content on the population's self-recognition. For convenience purposes, RQ2 and RQ4 will be investigated together, and the last section will be related to the analysis of the effects of Instagram's features (particularly filters and photo-editing tools) on the population of reference.

6.1 Body Image on Instagram and Self-esteem, Research Question I

After a first evaluation conducted in the qualitative data analysis section, it was clear that Claudia Verroca was perfectly aware of the importance and the consequences that a certain utilization of men's bodies on Instagram begs with itself. However, since some of her statements did not fully answer the questions posed, the research proceeded with a complementary one, more specific. To the question "After assessing what just happened with the previous contradictory Post we analyzed (Figure 11), do you think that your male audience would be able to process further similar contents in a critical way? Or do you think they can still be influenced (positively or negatively) by such use of body and masculinity?", she rather replied in a more comfortable way, stating:

"I always hope that some pictures depicting "perfect bodies" won't negatively influence my audience. On the other hand, what I try to convey is that perfection at a physical level does not exist, and that a huge amount of our work (referring to the photography sector) is modifying, adjusting, and applying filters. Therefore, critical ability should be present when I see a post and I can distinguish between what is real and what is artificial"

Verroca, C. (2022). Interview for thesis "Influence of Instagram's body image advertising on young men's self-esteem and perception of their bodies"

Figure 15 is another example of Claudia’s Instagram posts depicting males’ body from her point of view.

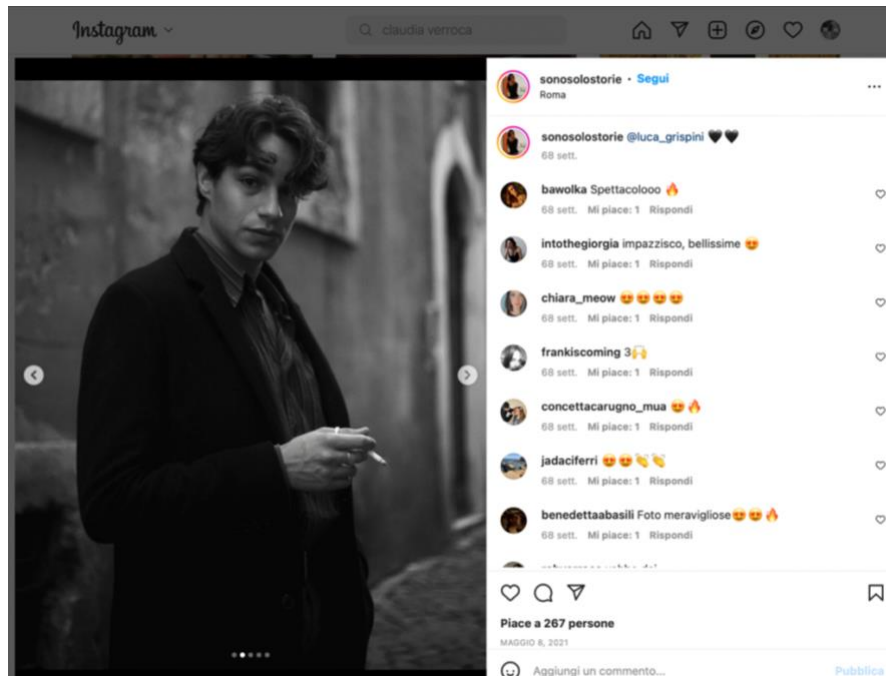


Figure 15: Instagram Post from @sonosolostorie: https://www.instagram.com/p/COm_WthUqI/

The investigation of the theoretical framework revealed that perceived authenticity of body size affects users’ attitudes. However, while such adjustments “moderate” the discrepancy between unrealistic and attainable body standards”, Shoenberger’s study highlighted the degree of attention that a photographer should have when editing photos: body size and digital enhancement can in fact negatively affect users’ self-recognition, and a reduction in perceived authenticity is said to decrease “brand” trust and self-esteem (Shoenberger et al., 2019). Claudia Verroca was aware of this relationship and of her role with respect to her community, and she confirmed that she believes her public to be able to discern and actively criticize such content. However, she concluded by stating that an individual’s interpretation is always subjective and personal, leaving the door open to some users on the platform still negatively influenceable.

Moreover, after a short discussion about the role of Influencers on Instagram, the following question asked whether she felt part of that category, as a representative of her Instagram page @sonosolostorie. However, her answer did not confirm the researcher’s beliefs. In fact, she remarked that she does not influence her audience in any way. Rather, she hopes that she

can make people reflect about some specific and sensitive topics. Her recent exhibition held at FemFest showed her desire to share stories about people that managed to establish themselves in the world through hard work and dedication. Francesco was of similar advice, as he counted on his male public’s ability to critically discern the content depicting muscular men’s bodies. According to him, when looking at a muscular and fit body, his men users would take it either as an inspiration to improve or as a basis of comparison to track their physical progress. This is partially supported by the section of the quantitative data, showing a little if not a null influence of individuals’ concern about their Instagram pictures by external users on the attitudes toward themselves. Table 23 graphically displays the data.

“I take a positive attitude toward myself”

Group Statistics

		When people take pictures of me, I think about how I will look if the pictures are posted on social media.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I take a positive attitude toward myself	2		15	3,00	,756	,195
	6		47	2,74	,846	,123

Table 23: Independent Samples Test – Attitude toward ourselves in relation to concern about people’s judgments on social media

Besides, Francesco and Claudia’s opinions were shared by respondents’ answers when it comes to comparison to others and Instagram’s insecurity, leading users to take different pictures of themselves before publishing a post. Also in this case, the average means of the two groups (taking multiple pictures more than sometimes vs taking them rarely) are almost equal when comparing themselves to others to establish self-confidence. The difference, as shown by the table below (Table 24), is only 0.16, despite the difference in the number of participants.

“I am able to do things as well as most other people”

Group Statistics

		I take lots of pictures of myself before posting one, so I can find one that looks as attractive as possible	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I am able to do things as well as most other people	>= 4		131	3,07	,861	,075
	< 4		73	3,23	,874	,102

Table 24: Independent Samples Test – Perception of personal abilities in relation to Desire to show only the best version of ourselves on Instagram

Nevertheless, the answers collected from both interviewees did not fully respect further quantitative data obtained through the survey. To some extent, despite some quantitative aspects revealing men's modest confidence with their sense of masculinity when it comes to muscles (legs, arms, and chest), it is also true that the exposition of the male population to Instagram content and the progressive time consumption of the platform is responsible for both their concern of others' judgment on Instagram (Tables 12 and 13), and for their utilization of filters and photo-editing tools to improve their physical attributes. This, in turn, reflects users' proper inability to critically analyze such content, and it affects their self-esteem in a negative way in some respects.

Moreover, previous findings on body image dissatisfaction highlight how images that show bare chests posted by influencers online were responsible for body confidence issues in men. Also, not only are men users on the platform induced to rely more on appearance to feel confident with themselves, but the effects on their levels of self-esteem make them even more vulnerable to Instagram's influence (Ahadzadeh et al., 2016). In turn, the contradictions brought by qualitative and quantitative data for the first research question must be addressed, and lead the present research wishes to increase awareness when it comes to body recognition and evaluation of content on Instagram and proposes to be of help to content creators in recognizing how much importance they hold towards their users, despite what they thought.

To a more general extent, as remarked by Francesco Maiello when narrowing the topic of the influence of body image on individuals' recognition of personal worth, it was mentioned that:

“The use of social media must be always conscious. It is easy to fall into the habit of using it as a fruition of information that, in the long-term, guides you toward exclusion from the surroundings: everything should be used with the right method. A visual platform like Instagram makes you want to stay within the app and continuously search for more images... You need to know how to use it, and not being used”

Maiello, F. (2022). Interview for thesis “Influence of Instagram's body image advertising on young men's self-esteem and perception of their bodies”

To conclude, the results obtained thanks to the mixed method approach utilized in the present dissertation shared only to some extent the findings of the literature review. If, on the one hand previous studies confirmed a negative and perceivable influence of body image type of content on Instagram on young men's self-esteem, on the other hand the present research agrees at both quantitative and qualitative levels that the degree of influence is very little, and it is responsible only to a small extent for changes in the sample's self-appreciation and attitudes toward themselves.

However, it is impossible to generalize, and data involving the consumption time of the platform are said to influence whether individuals think about external judgment of their body parts on Instagram and whether they feel unattractive when subjected to the opinion of a picture they do not like from a social media public.

6.2 Gender differences and social media approach by content producers, Research Questions II and IV

The second and fourth research questions of the present dissertation aimed at the investigation of gender differences in the response to mediatic exposure. Therefore, the following set of questions proposes to ask the interviewees' evaluation of the current masculinity trends and to observe whether the two different sectors they belong to could provide different answers on the topic.

However, despite being aware of gender differences, Claudia and Francesco's intent with their profiles [@sonosolostorie](#) and [@fit.ita](#) is not to adapt their content to the follower's preferences, but to tell a story in the first case, and to inspire people in the second one. Therefore, these answers from both of them seemingly disrupted any initial idea of differences in terms of communication or visual images on the platform. Hence, these responses did not support initially Fortman's view on the degree of effectiveness of media tools on the two genders, showing a lower influence of media platforms on men's levels of self-esteem compared to women (Fortman, 2006).

In this regard, data from independent samples T-test conducted in the quantitative section rather depicts a positive correlation between men’s body perception and their self-worth attitudes. Table 25 shows that, on average, men respondents who would like to have a better attitude toward themselves, also wish to be more muscular.

“I take a positive attitude towards myself”

Group Statistics

	I take a positive attitude toward myself	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I wish I were more muscular	>= 4	50	3,30	1,542	,218
	< 4	153	2,87	1,494	,121

Table 25: Independent Samples Test – Desire to be more muscular in relation to Attitudes toward ourselves

However, if we look more closely at the data, the correlation between these two aspects is present but not that strong. An average mean of 2.87 means that, despite having a negative self-perception, men disagree only to a little extent with the statement “I take a positive attitude towards myself”. In turn, this supports Fortman’s differences in the extent to which media can affect genders’ self-perception (Fortman, 2006): in other words, the present research agrees with the extent to which men are less influenced by the “media” compared to women. The review of the theoretical framework further confirmed this difference, as in the case of Allgood-Merten revealing a higher association between psychological attractiveness and self-esteem in girls compared to boys (Eisend & M ller, 2007).

Additionally, data from the quantitative survey support the results obtained in the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ) carried out in 2004 on young adolescents of both genders. The study investigated 8 different items assessing the degree of internalization of these attitudes, and it showed that, compared to women of the same age, men are more likely to be influenced by the belief that a more muscular body type corresponds to a stronger and better man overall (Levine & Harrison, 2004). Data from the present research in fact confirm such correlation: 62.4% of respondents answered from “Always” to “Sometimes” to the question “I think I would feel stronger if I gained a little more muscle mass”, compared to the other 37.6% answering from “Rarely” to “Never”.

Even though this should imply different communication techniques, the representative of both sectors (photography and fitness) shared a uniform opinion when approaching genders. Adaptation is not what they intend to implement in their profiles: rather, they want to convey a unique message to the entire population segment, despite admitting to being “heterogeneous”. This could be due to the business types, and it is in fact expected to be different in other sectors such as fashion, which needs to shape according to societal dictates and trends. In the case of the fitness sector, for instance, this choice may be justified by the increasingly balanced use of the two genders and the lack of distinctions in their behaviors in sports advertisements, as investigated by Camerino in his research about the evolution of body image advertising in modern times (Camerino et al., 2020). However, when going more in-depth and asking whether they perceive any recognizable difference in males’ and females’ consumption of the platform, Francesco answered:

“The female counterpart (as I can see from my page) is much more facilitated in terms of engagement on the platform. They get much more likes, comments and compliments. I clearly see a difference with a male’s post, except in particular cases as the ones mentioned before (referring to difficulties, inclusivity, and life problems)”.

Maiello, F. (2022). Interview for thesis “Influence of Instagram’s body image advertising on young men’s self-esteem and perception of their bodies”

Grounded on the same basis, Claudia replied by directly providing an example of her recent participation in the “FemFest”, a festival whose purpose is to break down the gender gap and discuss the theme of trans-feminism through any form of art:

“I recently participated in the FemFest, where I presented my own project called “Lo sguardo dell’altra”, and I noticed how big the participation gap between the LGBT community and men.... Men only represented a small percentage, and this made me think that the component of men that should not cry or manifest signs of weaknesses is still rooted.”

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She also mentioned that there were laboratories dedicated to childhood to educate future generations about inclusivity, but this did not result in any participation by men. Her pessimistic view shows how much these battles are comprehended but left there, without a proper willingness to sustain them. Once more, even though both answers accentuate gender differences in an online and offline context, the qualitative results display no sign of differentiation in terms of communication techniques or visual approach.

After clarifying their social media approach to the genders and discussing their common perception about the perceived differences between males' and females' consumption of the platform, the researcher continued by asking their take on the variability of the different age groups within the male population. Among the reasons explained in Chapter 4 justifying the choice of the age segment for the present study, there was the perceived difference between adolescents and older generations (30 years old +) at a theoretical level. The division in these two segments was sustained by Sawyer's definition of the adolescent age until 23 years old (Sawyer et. al, 2018). Also, when it comes to dealing with digital and social media stimuli like the ones coming from Instagram, the difference between these two segments might even arise. Thus, the aim of the following questions was to assess whether the difference between the adolescent phase and the elderly stage was noticeable on a social media level. Both visions on this topic, even though distinct, confirmed such differences and contributed to the analysis of the results by assessing the validity of the age choice.

Claudia revealed that her male's public engagement on her Instagram page changes depending on age. Particularly, the perceived variety between older and younger generations of men was mentioned to be wide when it comes to answers to stories, comments, and participation in the comment section. When pointing attention to the specific content types that were discussed in the first phase of the interview, she admitted that the most engaged range of age was 16-25 years old. According to her, Millennials and Generation I tend to show more signs of inclusivity concerning masculinity. Concepts such as popularity have been extensively approached in the literature review, and authors such as Morris and Anderson showed how it is now based on emotional support regardless of gender and category of belonging (as in the case of Nicola in contrast with the LGBT community) and appreciation on social media (Morris & Anderson, 2015).

On the other hand, Francesco, as a representative of the fitness industry, enlarged the topic by explaining the contrast in the perception of the same content between adolescents and a more mature segment. Even though his primary source of engagement comes from older generations, his opinions were useful in that he was still able to recognize a visible difference. This was of much help to the scope of the dissertation, since it gave the researcher the opportunity to see the theme of discussion from a different point of view. According to him, adolescents are much more influenced by the visual aspect of the content: if we take as an example a post depicting a muscular man's body, they will just focus on the image itself and see it as a goal to achieve. Users belonging to an older age group, instead, will be able to capture to a greater extent the themes behind the same image and they will concentrate on the text. And this may be due to their previous life experiences, which allow them to have a more mature consideration of online content. Figure 16 shows a post from @fit.italia and the related comments just described.



Figure 16: Instagram Post from @fit.ita: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUXNbcnDs0n/>

Contrary to the researcher's expectations, the response rate to questions observing respondents' levels of confidence in relation to muscle percentage supports Francesco's opinions on the inclusivity differences within the two age groups (Tables 26 and 27). The sample analysis's levels of confidence are still dependent on muscles and body appearance.

“I think I would feel more confident if I had more muscle”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	30	14,7	14,7	14,7
	2	43	21,1	21,1	35,8
	3	50	24,5	24,5	60,3
	4	29	14,2	14,2	74,5
	5	22	10,8	10,8	85,3
	6	30	14,7	14,7	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 26: “I think I would feel more confident if I had more muscle” (Frequencies, Percentages, Valid Percentages and Cumulative Percentages)

Accordingly, despite the progressive abandonment of traditional masculine values in young generations, a more mature segment is still less affected by the visual aspect of the content in his opinion: rather than looking at a picture of a muscular man and trying to associate themselves with him, they focus on the hard work behind that physique and seek for motivation. Adolescents, on the other hand, associate muscles with feelings of confidence, thus showing signs of traditional masculinity on average. To this regard, Francesco added:

“Something that I started noticing recently is that at the beginning my page was much more focused on the visual aspect, while now themes such as the incentive to improve and motivation are starting to get rewarded (as for engagement). This is because my public is also grown (in terms of age) with the page”

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“I think I would look better if I gained 5 kilograms in bulk”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	40	19,6	19,6	19,6
	2	53	26,0	26,0	45,6
	3	32	15,7	15,7	61,3
	4	32	15,7	15,7	77,0
	5	18	8,8	8,8	85,8
	6	29	14,2	14,2	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 27: “I think I would look better if I gained 5 kilograms in bulk” (Frequencies, Percentages, Valid Percentages and Cumulative Percentages)

6.3 Application of Instagram filters and Self-esteem, Research Question III

The last section focuses on the topic of Instagram as an advertising platform and the importance of its photo-editing features on the development of possible body confidence issues in the selected sample. The discussion started with a question related to the importance of the platform for the interviewee's professional development and then proceeded according to the rationale of the research question. Claudia's response was direct and simple: although the competition is high, Instagram allows every content creator to grow and to sponsor his ideas with an immense impression share. More specifically, she pinpointed that the consumption must be responsible, both from the creator's and the users' side. But the links with professional photographers online (only reachable on Instagram), and the possibility to be discovered by them at the same time constitute a considerable part of the development of her professional career in recent times. Francesco showed acknowledgment to a large extent of the effects that Instagram's features such as the use of filters or similar tools have on a male audience, whose self-esteem is still modifiable and exposed to many different stimuli coming from the online environment. To the question "Do you think there is a relationship between the use of filters to modify your body and self-esteem?", he firmly answered "Surely yes", and then added: "A person that modifies a part of his body or face does it because surely that part does not reflect him at that time. Hence, it comes from an unconscious uneasiness so that he will modify that specific part"

Since the researcher understood that there could be more behind that simple answer, Francesco was then asked his opinion on what factors could be leading a young man to post that modified picture that does not reflect him, rather than just not sharing it. To this, he stated that this may derive from a desire to uniform to the mass and feel part of a group that constantly propose distorted representations of themselves. These statements are sustained by the quantitative data. By comparing the means of people usually applying filters or modifying their pictures to enhance their physical attractiveness, to the ones who believe an increase in muscle would improve their aspect, the following correlation can be observed. People answering from "Sometimes" to "Always" in the first question, have an average mean of 2.61 when answering the second statement. This means that higher utilization of photo-editing tools on Instagram can be linked to higher feelings of hesitancy with body muscle percentages, since the Likert scale for the second question goes from "Always" to

“Never”. Once more, the same correlation can be detected on the opposite side: a lower concern with Instagram features before publishing a picture is associated with less desire to gain muscles to feel confident. Table 28 shows in a tabular form such correlations.

“I think I would look better if I gained 5 kilograms in bulk”

Group Statistics

	I think I would look better if I gained 5 kilograms in bulk	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Before I post pictures on Instagram, I crop them or apply filters to make myself look better	>= 4	79	2,61	1,728	,194
	< 4	125	3,46	2,153	,193

Table 28: Independent Samples Test – Utilization of filters on Instagram in relation to Muscles and Self-perception

Also, the combination of respondents answering: “To not feel excluded” and “To show off the best part of me” accounts for 11.7 %. Although it may not seem like a big portion of the total, the amount is still considerable, and it is expected to grow in the near future. When it comes to photography, Claudia also intervened by sharing her concern and attention to the utilization of Instagram and photographic tools to modify pictures before posting them, by saying:

“I can see myself on the other side, exposed to pictures of a smooth model. And this is the reason why I always tend not to use photo-editing: for instance, I do not remove cellulite and stretch marks..... Because I know that, on the other side, such a view can negatively influence levels of self-esteem. On the other hand, getting to know and talk to beautiful models gave me a sense of self-esteem and self-awareness”

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This statement is in line with contemporary research on the topic, and fully reinforces findings showing an inverse correlation between individuals’ utilization of the mentioned features and the tendency of other external users to compare with themselves (McComb et al., 2021). To contextualize, Claudia’s last sentence was referring to a wider topic that dealt with what’s behind people’s looks. According to Claudia, having the possibility to talk to such models allowed her to discover some interesting personality traits, and at the same time, an “average looking girl” can become beautiful because of her background story and her sympathy.

Finally, although modest, the influence of filter utilization on the willingness to have more respect toward themselves is still perceivable. As demonstrated by the Table below (Table 29), despite the difference in the numbers of respondents belonging to the two groups, participants that usually modify their appearance admitted a lack of self-respect compared to the ones accepting themselves as they are.

“I wish I could have more respect for myself”

Group Statistics

	I wish I could have more respect for myself	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Before I post pictures on Instagram, I crop them or apply filters to make myself look better	>= 4	59	2,93	1,990	,259
	< 4	145	3,21	2,058	,171

Table 29: Independent Samples Test – Utilization of filters on Instagram in relation to Desire to have more self-respect

To conclude, quantitative results coming from the web-based survey and qualitative opinions and thoughts from the interviews share the same view on the argument and go along with the findings of the literature review. In turn, the present research contributes to the existing literature on the topic by provide further confirmation on the relationship between the use of Instagram features to improve young men’s physical aspects and the resulting negative attitudes and feelings for themselves.

Chapter 7- Conclusions

This study proposed to answer the main research question “ How does Instagram’s body image type of content influence young men’s evaluation of their bodies and levels of self-esteem?”. In this regard, a quantitative investigation has been conducted through the use of a web-based survey, aimed at verifying the relationships among different variables (attitudes towards Instagram consumption, utilization of visual adjustment tools, evaluation of the self and comparison with other individuals, and drive for masculinity) on Italian adolescent men. Complementary to this quantitative section, qualitative interviews were used to sustain and eventually disagree or confirm the numeric data. Moreover, they were supportive in that they provided answers to the same research question from a different perspective.

The first research question was “How does Instagram’ body image type of content influence young men’s evaluation of their bodies and levels of self-esteem?”. The answers to the survey disconfirmed the strong negative correlation between body image exposure on Instagram and men’s attitudes towards themselves. Both numeric data and qualitative answers from the interviewee showed that the actual extent to which the population segment is influenced by such factors is not that strong. These results were not coherent with the initial expectations of the researcher, according to which the development of new social media patterns would have heavily influenced men’s levels of self-esteem. However, a possible explanation for such an outcome can be provided by Fortman and Eisend’s research articles of the early 2000s, analyzing gender differences in the response to mediatic exposure.

When comparing men to women, in fact, the results of the second and fourth research questions of the present research, namely “What role do gender differences play in the response to social media exposure?” and “How do Instagram’s actors (Communication Agencies, Influencers) employ these gender differences in selecting their strategies?” agreed with previous investigations showing a lower influence on men’s self-esteem and a much stronger correlation between women’s physical attractiveness and self-assurance (Eisend & M ller, 2007). In this case, the assumption of a perceived gender variance and the acknowledgment of the literature on the topic were confirmed. The researcher’s desire to

investigate the differences between these two distinct segments was therefore supported by the data obtained. Nevertheless, the results disconfirmed the initial hypothesis of a more mature and conscious younger Italian male audience compared to older generations: both quantitative and qualitative data (in particular Francesco Maiello's opinions on the two age groups) rather depicted the opposite.

Finally, this study explored the correspondence between specific visual aspects of Instagram such as the utilization of beauty enhancement filters and men's self-confidence. The third research question in fact was "How do Instagram's features contribute to the development of Body Confidence?". Quantitative data, and in particular the comparisons of the means conducted in chapters five and six and the answers from Claudia Verroca and Francesco Maiello endorsed the findings of the literature review. The comparison of the means of the survey's respondents applying beauty enhancement filters before posting a picture on Instagram and the ones who do not, demonstrated a perceived influence on the desire to have more self-respect. In addition, a correlation has been found between such behaviors on the platform and the thought of being more attractive if they only gained some kilograms of muscle mass. The third and last research question is therefore answered: the study shows a negative correlation between the two variables, and further confirms the outcomes of chapter three of the theoretical framework. The findings highlights once more the researcher's take on the topic, and the need to raise awareness on these delicate issues.

7.1 Limitations and Future Research

Although the research contributes to the literature on social media utilization and body image on young men and raise awareness on the underestimation of this reciprocal influence, the effects of items belonging to the ASMC or the DMS scales on self-esteem cannot be properly determined without a longitudinal study. Investigating these associations over time could be the next step for future studies. As for the respondents, due to the parental consent form required for respondents under 18 years old (Appendix 2), the researcher only managed to collect two answers from this sub-group, with the related modules. The number of participants, even though it represented a significant sample, only accounted for roughly 200. But in order to have a representative sample of the population of analysis and have more

precise data evaluation, the number should have been at least 385. Finally, one of the main limitations of this dissertation was the impossibility to reach and interview more communication agencies and Instagram figures with a higher follower base and influence towards them. It would be fascinating to count on more points of view, especially when it comes to a wide and open topic such as the one selected for the present study. However, given the circumstances of the time for the delivery of the thesis, the researcher had to finalize the analysis of the data, despite being aware that interviewing only two actors might affect the final results.

In future studies, the investigation and comparison of the results between different social media platforms could be performed. Also, a detailed content analysis of the profiles chosen for the interviews could enrich the view of the research and provide a more supportive qualitative basis for the numerical results. The topic of body image utilization on Instagram and its effects on levels of self-esteem and body perception is under continuous evaluation. Therefore, it would be an honor to provide further contribution by adopting these suggestions in a future study path.

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APPENDIX 1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	204	17	23	21,67	1,840
Valid N (listwise)	204				

Table 3: Age mean, SD, and Variance of respondents

“What is your highest educational level?”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Other	2	1,0	1,0	1,0
	Bachelor's degree	33	16,2	16,2	17,2
	Bachelor	68	33,3	33,3	50,5
	Master	13	6,4	6,4	56,9
	Middle School	10	4,9	4,9	61,8
	High School	78	38,2	38,2	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 4: Educational level (Frequencies and Percentages)

“Occupation”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	,5	,5	,5
	Other	8	3,9	3,9	4,4
	Unemployed	17	8,3	8,3	12,7
	Employed	49	24,0	24,0	36,8
	Student	129	63,2	63,2	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 5: Occupation (Frequencies and Percentages)

“Region of origin”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Abruzzo	1	,5	,5	,5
	Basilicata	6	2,9	2,9	3,4
	Calabria	3	1,5	1,5	4,9
	Campania	6	2,9	2,9	7,8
	Emilia Romagna	18	8,8	8,8	16,7
	Friuli Venezia Giulia	4	2,0	2,0	18,6
	Lazio	23	11,3	11,3	29,9
	Liguria	4	2,0	2,0	31,9
	Lombardia	18	8,8	8,8	40,7
	Marche	7	3,4	3,4	44,1
	Molise	1	,5	,5	44,6
	Piemonte	7	3,4	3,4	48,0
	Puglia	9	4,4	4,4	52,5
	Sardegna	1	,5	,5	52,9
	Sicilia	72	35,3	35,3	88,2
	Toscana	9	4,4	4,4	92,6
	Trentino Alto Adige	6	2,9	2,9	95,6
	Umbria	2	1,0	1,0	96,6
	Veneto	7	3,4	3,4	100,0
	Total		204	100,0	100,0

Table 6: Region of Origin (Frequencies and Percentages)

“How would you describe your family’s socio-economic status?”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		2	1,0	1,0	1,0
	High	24	11,8	11,8	12,7
	Low	26	12,7	12,7	25,5
	Middle	152	74,5	74,5	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 7: Family Income (Frequencies and Percentages)

APPENDIX 2

GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE: PARENT CONSENT FORM



Researcher's name: Francesco Giacomo Di Dia

Research Institution: Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Faculty of Human Sciences)

To be completed by the PARENT / GUARDIAN

Please circle the relevant answer

- Have you been fully informed about the Global Kids Online study? **YES / NO**
- Do you know that your child and you can withdraw from this study at any time, with no need to give a reason and without any negative consequences? **YES / NO**
- Do you know that your child's answers and your answers are confidential? **YES / NO**
- Do you agree that your child and you can take part in this study, whose results could be published (e.g., in a report or book)? Neither you nor your child will be identified in any way in these publications. **YES / NO**

If **YES to all**, please fill in the details below.

Child's name: _____

Child's date of birth: _____

School: _____

Class: _____

Signed by the parent / guardian: _____

Date: _____

Name in block letters: _____

Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Once completed the form, please send the signed word document to the following email address: francesco.didia98@gmail.com

For any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact [Francesco Giacomo Di Dia] at francesco.didia98@gmail.com; +393312835830]

APPENDIX 3

***INTERVIEW'S QUESTIONS FOR MASTER'S COURSE
"COMMUNICATION, MARKETING, AND ADVERTISING"
AT UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA***

Thesis' title: "Influence of Instagram's body image advertising on young men's self-esteem and perception of their bodies".

Student: Francesco Giacomo Di Dia

Thesis' topics: The goal is to understand how the use of the body to which young Italian men are constantly exposed on social media (in particular on Instagram) affects their levels of self-esteem and the perception of their body. Furthermore, the emerging phenomenon of the new masculinity will contribute to broaden the vision of the research, trying to understand the role of the gender of belonging in this context. The thesis will therefore consist of two research methods: a questionnaire addressed to young people aimed at understanding the point of view of the subjects of such contents, and interviews with Figures in the field of photography and fitness to analyze the perspective of creators of such content.

Modalities: The interview will take place on the platform "Zoom". Consent will be required to be able to record the entire discussion via Zoom, solely for educational purposes and to transcribe the answers obtained. The subject will be presented as a professional figure, and the Instagram Profile will be analyzed in the research methodology.

Structure:

1. General questions about the interviewee, your approach to photography /fitness and your professional development over time.
2. Questions regarding gender differences on the Instagram platform, and the communication strategies adopted for each of them. General information relating to your audience on Instagram (how it is composed, how much it is variable).

Differences between Italian and international audiences in terms of masculinity;
Analysis of specific contents to understand what message you intend to convey,
reflections on the use of the body (masculine in this case) and the impact of a type of
masculinity that deviates from more traditional values.

Links of the posts mentioned:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CLbmrAUBhF9/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CKj3QAFbtgt/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CbuYXeUs9B3/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cc-4uQbjdUM/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CamYMArja6p/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CWbEWgUotg8/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CVnnqjAoD2U/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CTo1cCx8Mm/>

3. Opinions on the use of Instagram as an advertising platform
4. Questions related to the phenomena of hybrid and inclusive masculinity and the use of photography / fitness in this area; differences in the type of interaction between the different male audience segments (30-year-olds vs younger boys between about 16 and 23 years of age); opinions on the influence of the contents that employ the body on the levels of self-esteem and self-perception.

For any kind of information on the matter, doubts or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me via the contacts indicated below.

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