There is No Easy Answer: How the Interaction of Content, Situation, and Person Shapes the Effect of Social Media use on Well-being

Masur, Philipp K. ; Veldhuis, Jolanda; Bij de Vaate, Nadia A. J. D.

published in
The Social Media Debate
2022

DOI (link to publisher)
10.4324/9781003171270-12

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

citation for published version (APA)
Masur, P. K., Veldhuis, J., & Bij de Vaate, N. A. J. D. (2022). There is No Easy Answer: How the Interaction of Content, Situation, and Person Shapes the Effect of Social Media use on Well-being. In D. Rosen (Ed.), *The Social Media Debate: Unpacking the Social, Psychological, and Cultural Effects of Social Media* (pp. 187-202). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003171270-12

12

THERE IS NO EASY ANSWER

How the Interaction of Content, Situation, and Person Shapes the Effects of Social Media Use on Well-Being

Philipp K. Masur, Jolanda Veldhuis, and Nadia Bij de Vaate

Social media have become an essential part of children's and young adolescents' lives. They grow up and mature with smartphones, tablets, and computers that render access to social media platforms ubiquitous. As using Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok intensifies, it is no wonder that scholars, parents, and policy makers voice concerns about potential negative effects on children's and adolescents' physical and mental health. Whereas some scholars argue that we are "in the middle of a full-blown mental health crisis for adolescents and young adults" (Twenge as cited in Brody, 2019) and claim that social media are one of the core reasons for increases in depression and suicides in the younger generation (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin, 2018), others counter that evidence for such claims is weak and largely based on oversimplifying, cross-sectional survey investigations (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Schemer, Masur, Geiss, Müller, & Schäfer, 2021). The proliferation of particularly screen-based activities has led to an overdrawn focus on the amount of "screentime", a comparatively broad measure of an individual's engagement with electronic media as a singular factor shaping young adolescents' well-being (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Whitlock & Masur, 2019). Despite advances in related, but more specific areas (e.g., research on cyberbullying, self-presentation and body image, social media use, and social support) that engage more deeply with the activities, contents, or practices within social media, scholars continue to grapple with contradicting findings from studies with too broad measures and cross-sectional designs. It seems that there is a generally misplaced confidence in the ability to find a simple answer to a rather complex problem. This is even more surprising as longitudinal, large-scale, and meta-analytic evidence suggests that overall net effects of social media use are at best small (Meier & Reinecke, 2020; Orben, Dienlin, & Przybylski, 2019).

DOI: 10.4324/9781003171270-12

Many scholars (e.g., Beyens, Pouwels, van Driel, Keijsers, & Valkenburg, 2020; Orben, 2020; Vanden Abeele, 2020; Whitlock & Masur, 2019) have thus called for a more in-depth analysis of social media's influences on well-being that disentangles *what* (e.g., different platforms, different types of content, different online interactions) affects *whom* (e.g., males vs. females, personality types, experiences, mental health history) under *which circumstances* (e.g., time of day, presence of others, mood, motivation) and with *what effect* (positive vs. negative, supportive vs. detrimental, short-term vs. long-term) and with regard to *which type of well-being* (e.g., trait vs. state, cognitive vs. affective). In this chapter, we propose a holistic framework that takes different theoretical advances toward understanding and identifying specific boundary conditions of detrimental and beneficial media use effects into account.

Toward a Holistic Model of Social Media Use Effects on Well-being

Recently, scholars have pushed toward a person-specific media use paradigm (Beyens et al., 2020) emphasizing that we should not expect media use effects to be similar for all people. Instead, we should identify relevant personal characteristics (e.g., socio-demographics, prior mental health history, literacy) that help explain why social media effects on well-being vary from person to person. However, by focusing only on between-person differences, we may commit the *fundamental attribution error* (Ross & Nisbett, 2011) and overestimate dispositional factors' power in explaining our behaviors. Others have thus highlighted the importance of distinguishing the type of content individuals consume to explain variances in effects on well-being (Whitlock & Masur, 2019). From this point of view, watching a funny YouTube video may be less detrimental than comparing, for example, yourself with others on Instagram.

Focusing only on individual differences or only on content characteristics will nonetheless fall short of grasping the entire picture. Individuals use and experience social media within a total environment that forms a complex system of interrelated and interacting factors, which can be placed on a continuum from the micro- to the macro-level (cf. Magnusson, 1981). It would be impossible to investigate the entirety of factors that influence human behaviors, thoughts, or feelings at a given point in time. But attempting to explain variation in individuals' well-being does require us to identify more systematically where the variance stems from. Taking a situational perspective (cf. Masur, 2018, chapter 7.1) and asking what influences a person's well-being at a *given time* can help to identify relevant "groups" of factors that we should at least expect to account for some variance in well-being. In line with a long-standing tradition in psychology (Rauthmann, Sherman, & Funder, 2015), such factors can be differentiated into personal and environmental factors (see Table 12.1).

TABLE 12.1 Overview of influences on well-being at a given time

	Personal Factors	*Environmental Factors*
Non-situational (comparatively stable)	Traits, dispositional tendencies, trait-like qualities (e.g., personality)	Structural settings (e.g., culture, socio-technological environment)
Contextual (fluctuating, but recurring)	Internal perceptions (e.g., perceived duties, context-related goals)	Device- or platform-related characteristics (e.g., content, norms and practices, addictive design) and other contextual factors (e.g., typical audiences)
Situational (highly fluctuating)	Internal perceptions (e.g., feelings, situational goals, stress, mindfulness, level of energy)	Interpersonal perceptions (e.g., perceptions of others) and external perceptions (e.g., perceptions of place, location, physical cues)

Personal factors include, on the one hand, comparatively stable traits (e.g., personality, impulsivity, trait anxiety) and dispositional tendencies (e.g., opinions, attitudes, skills, long-term goals, habitual behaviors). On the other hand, they include fluctuating internal factors such as contextually activated role perceptions, situationally activated goals, and feelings (e.g., perceived stress, fear-of-missing-out). *Environmental factors* include, on the one hand, comparatively stable characteristics of the larger structural settings in which individuals find themselves in (e.g., culture, tradition, political system, economy) as well as contextual (e.g., perceptions of norms and rules), device- or platform-specific (e.g., characteristics of platforms, perceptions of practices and norms), and situationally perceived cues of the physico-social environment (e.g., other people, physical cues, place and location). Such a classification allows to characterize these factors with regard to their stability, that is, whether they remain stable and thus constant influences over longer periods of time (e.g., personality) or whether they fluctuate considerably across contexts (e.g., practices, types of content), or even situations (e.g., moods, goals). It further forces us to clearly indicate whether such a factor is a direct antecedent of individuals' well-being (e.g., negative content) or rather a moderator of such direct effects (e.g., self-esteem, mood, energy level).

Adopting such a situational perspective sharpens our ability to uncover boundary conditions for social media use effects on well-being. Also, acknowledging the interactional nature of influences on individuals' well-being reveals that social media use itself may not always be the cause for less (or more) well-being. At

times, more (or less) well-being may be caused by other factors (e.g., a predisposition for depression, a generally low self-esteem) and social media use instead increases or buffers against such effects.

In the following, we will use this framework to identify *what* aspect of social media (what conceptualizations of social media are useful to study effects on well-being?) affects *whom* (what are relevant stable person-related moderators?) under *which circumstances* (what are relevant contextual, device-specific, or situational moderators?) with regard to *which type of well-being* (do we need to focus on trait or state of well-being?).

Conceptualizing Social Media

The first question is: What exactly exerts an effect on individuals' well-being? Social media must be regarded as a form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) that focuses on connecting users and facilitating social interaction. Yet, social media is likewise an umbrella term for certain platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok) or a broader type of media that is defined by five typical characteristics (Bayer, Trieu, & Ellison, 2020; Carr & Hayes, 2015): Social media are Internet-based (i.e., online), disentrained (i.e., supporting asynchronous social interaction), interactive (i.e., social in nature), based primarily on user-generated content, and mass personal (i.e., involving broadcasting of interpersonal communication to larger audiences). Individuals use social media for various purposes ranging from active contribution to passive consumptions (Escobar-Viera et al., 2018; Thorisdottir, Sigurvinsdottir, Asgeirsdottir, Allegrante, & Sigfusdottir, 2019): active uses include communicating with other users (e.g., through status updates or dyadic channels), interacting with content (e.g., liking, commenting, and tagging), engaging in self-presentation and self-exposure (e.g., status updates and posting photos), and seeking entertainment (e.g., playing games). Passive uses include browsing content without interacting, watching videos, and looking at pictures.

Meier and Reinecke (2020) propose a taxonomy that distinguishes two overarching approaches to conceptualizing social media use: the *channel*-centered approach and the *communication*-centered approach. When using the former, scholars create "methodological buckets" by focusing on devices, platforms, or applications instead of engaging with the specific contents, activities, message characteristics that define them. The channel-centered approach thus treats social media as a "black box" and differences in how people use these media are ignored. In the literature, we nonetheless find different levels of analysis within the channel-centered approach depending on whether scholars focused on certain devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, or generally screen-based technologies), types of applications (e.g., email, messenger, SNS), branded applications (e.g., Facebook vs. Instagram), or specific features (e.g., status updates, chat functions, games, profiles).

The communication-centered approach, in contrast, focuses on possible communication processes and message exchanges on social media. It thus opens the "black-box" of the channel-centered approach (Meier & Reinecke, 2020). Within this approach, we can further distinguish analyses on the interaction level (e.g., relationship between the communicators, directionality of interaction, characteristics of particular audiences) and the message level (e.g., content characteristics, valence, communication mode, accessibility).

Inconsistencies in published findings on the effects of social media use on well-being may be in part explainable by differences in such levels of analyses. A large part of the literature has adopted a channel-centered approach by focusing on devices or branded applications. Such analyses treat social media use as a trait-like quality and are limited to measuring comparatively stable between-person differences in aggregated behavioral patterns (e.g., overall smartphone use, screentime, frequency of Facebook use). It is hardly surprising that such analyses are aimed at predicting rather stable indicators of well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, loneliness, depression). Newer studies have started to investigate how certain features or activities of social media shape well-being outcomes. For example, experience sampling studies showed that using media for different purposes (e.g., recovery vs. procrastination) also had varying influences on well-being (Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016). Similarly, active posting on Facebook had positive, yet fleeting impacts on subsequent mood (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, Brady, & Falk, 2018).

Focusing on the type of interactions that users engage in and the messages they are exposed to provides an important avenue for future research. Moving beyond methodological buckets such as devices or applications and focusing on the intricate relationships between different types of social media uses, content- and person-related characteristics, as well as contextual and situational factors will provide a nuanced insight into how social media use affects well-being. Such a paradigm shift also changes the perspective from trying to explain differences *between* people to trying to understand differences in social media use *within* people. It sounds trivial to assume that not all social media use is bad or good. Yet, current research tends to ignore this by flattening the heterogeneity of social media use into broad and artificial measures.

Who is Susceptible?

In a second step, we need to ask for *whom* certain types of social media use actually affect well-being. Valkenburg, Beyens, Pouwels, van Driel, and Keijsers (2021) have recently argued that one should not expect social media use effects to be uniform across individuals and propose a "personalized media effects paradigm". Although, we believe that a too-strong emphasis on between-person differences may not be helpful (cf. fundamental attribution error) and a paradigm shift toward "N = 1 type of analyses" (p. 74) may even be problematic as it could devalue our goal to make inferences about populations, we nonetheless agree that

a better understanding of the susceptibility of certain individuals is important and a logical extension of prior work.

When we talk about person-specific susceptibility, we aim at identifying traits, dispositional tendencies, or trait-like qualities that account for variation in the effect of social media use on well-being. For example, several studies have shown that gender might matter in explaining differences in the between-person relationships of social media use and well-being indicators such as life satisfaction (Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Orben et al., 2019). Similarly, older people seem to benefit more from actively using social networking sites (SNS) than younger people (Kim & Shen, 2020; Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016).

However, many potential trait-like moderators have not yet been studied systematically. Research suggests, for example, that impulsivity (Billieux, Linden, & Rochat, 2008), trait anxiety (Elhai, Levine, Dvorak, & Hall, 2016), or the fear of missing out (Blackwell, Leaman, Tramposch, Osborne, & Liss, 2017) are positively related to higher smartphone or social media use or even problematic social media use. Trait self-esteem is likewise related to certain types of social media use (e.g., frequency of reacting to profiles) and subjective well-being (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006) and thus a potentially important covariate in explaining social media effects on well-being. Identifying stable person-related characteristics that explain variance in social media effects on well-being will be pivotal for understanding person-specific susceptibility in future research.

However, it is important to clearly indicate whether such stable personal factors moderate between-person relationships between overall social media use and stable indicators of well-being (e.g., life satisfaction) or whether they moderate within-person relationships between different types of social media use, content consumption, or use behaviors and more fleeting indicators of well-being (e.g., affect). Disentangling interactions between stable person characteristics and varying contextual or situational factors may be particularly fruitful. For example, being exposed to a certain body ideal on Instagram may be particularly detrimental for people with a low self-esteem or younger individuals who were recently bullied for their physical appearance at school. Similarly, talking extensively to a close friend via social media could increase affective well-being after a person has had a negative experience. The context and situation matter for understanding person-specific susceptibility. An isolated focus on person-specific characteristics may hence again be oversimplifying.

Under What Circumstances Does the Effect Occur?

The third question asks what device- or platform-specific, contextual, or situational factors moderate social media use effects on well-being. By using primarily survey-based designs, we have flattened situational variance in people's social media use experiences into somewhat artificial, aggregated measures of overall use and well-being. To describe circumstances, we need to identify both personal

and environmental factors related to context, device or applications, and the situation (cf. also Vanden Abeele, 2020). The goal should be to find factors that are amenable to empirical investigation and that are present (i.e., measurable) across all situations.

First, *contexts* refer to structured social settings characterized by canonical activities, norms and rules, relationships and internal values (e.g., Nissenbaum, 2010). Contexts are thus related to social spheres related to, for example, friends, family, work, or school. Contexts vary, but their characteristics nonetheless remain comparatively stable. From this, it follows that experiences within a context will be similar (although not the same) even if dispersed in time. On social media, people likewise act in contexts. Their experiences – and thus also whether or not using social media will be a pleasant or negative experience – will also be determined by their perceptions about audiences (e.g., their friends or followers) and the norms and practices this social network prescribes or endorses. However, the types of practices and norms are also determined by *device-* or *application-specific characteristics*. Each platform allows or emphasizes certain types of interactions (e.g., liking, commenting, sharing posts) and thus leads to specific social dynamics (e.g., disclosing selfies on Instagram, sharing work-related information on Facebook, sharing private information on SnapChat) that, in turn, shape potential impacts of content, notifications, or message type on well-being. For example, whereas an Instagram user may engage in sharing a lot of photos to receive likes and comments from his or her friends or followers, assessing whether this contributes or reduces well-being is not as clear. Receiving likes on a post may be a positive experience, but posting a photo that one really likes and not receiving any likes can be a very unpleasant experience. Overall, various contextual factors including competing goals, attentional demands, and obligations (Hofmann, Reinecke, & Meier, 2016), pressure to connect and be available (Licoppe, 2004), the imagined audience (Litt, 2012), as well as application features and perceived behavioral options (cf. Vanden Abeele, 2020) could be important moderators of social media effects on well-being.

Next to contextual factors, there are *situational personal and environmental factors* that need to be considered. Situationally activated personal factors relate to internal perceptions of motives, goals, feelings, or moods. For example, a recent study has found that situational autonomy dissatisfaction moderates the within-person relationship between online vigilance and momentary perceived stress (Gilbert, Baumgartner, & Reinecke, 2021). Being mindful during instant messaging was also related to less stress and positive affect (Bauer, Loy, Masur, & Schneider, 2017). Situational goal conflict, for example, using social media to procrastinate, likewise predicts situational well-being (Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016). Situational environmental factors refer to interpersonal perceptions of others and their behaviors, as well as external perception of place, time, locations, and other physical cues. For example, where an individual is using social media might matter (e.g., at home, at work, or while on transportation) for how content is perceived. If social

media are used together with other persons (e.g., friends, partner, family), this may further change how an individual reacts to social media content, practices, or certain experiences. Dogruel and Schnauber-Stockmann (2021), for example, found that the responsiveness norms (measured as a trait-like quality) and the type of sender (e.g., close friends or family members vs. other persons) interacted in predicting the probability to respond to instant messenger messages and may thus explain momentary stress or anxiety.

In sum, we believe that identifying relevant contextual, device- or platform-specific characteristics as well as situational factors presents an important challenge for future research. Also, adopting a situational lens helps to scrutinize whether social media are indeed the cause or whether they are rather a contributing force that increases already existing downward or upward spirals related to situational well-being.

What Type of Well-Being is Affected?

Finally, we need to scrutinize what type or component of well-being is actually affected. In the previous sections, we already implicitly mentioned that we can differentiate stable (e.g., life satisfaction) and more fleeting components of well-being (e.g., positive or negative affect, moods). However, disentangling effects of the various factors described earlier on well-being requires us to differentiate indicators of well-being in more detail.

Well-being is a subcategory of mental health, which can be divided into two parts: psychopathology and psychological well-being (Meier & Reinecke, 2020). This is known as the two continua model of mental health. Psychopathology can be referred to as negative mental health, reflecting disturbance or personal distress in one's life (Lahey, Krueger, Rathouz, Waldman, & Zald, 2017; Meier & Reinecke, 2020). Psychological well-being, on the other hand, can be referred to as positive mental health and reflects a person's quality of life and overall functioning (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2018). It is important to note that, psychological well-being is not the absence of psychopathology, just as psychopathology is not just the absence of psychological well-being (Meier & Reinecke, 2020). Psychopathology is usually seen as the presence or absence of specific symptoms or disorders. Symptoms, or a set of symptoms, form the basis for the absence or presence of a disorder (i.e., depressive symptoms can form the basis of a depressive disorder). In the context of social media effects research, psychopathology is distinguished in two dimensions: internalizing and externalizing dimensions of psychopathology (Meier & Reinecke, 2020). Internalizing psychopathology refers to inward-directed behaviors, cognitions, and emotions such as anxiety and depression whereas externalizing psychopathology refers to outward-directed behavior, cognitions, and emotions such as aggression and substance abuse. Risk factors that may increase individuals' vulnerability to develop psychopathology can include,

for example, loneliness, social isolation, and low sleep quality (Meier & Reinecke, 2020).

Psychological well-being includes two dimensions: hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Hedonic well-being generally represents "feeling well" and is defined as subjective experiences of pleasure and pain at a given point in time (Huta, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Within the hedonic approach, three subcomponents of subjective well-being can be distinguished: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. Positive and negative affect tap upon the affective dimension of hedonic well-being, whereas life satisfaction taps upon the cognitive dimension of hedonic well-being. Eudaimonic well-being generally represents "doing well" and is defined as the degree to which a person is fully functioning. Eudaimonic well-being is often reflected by meaning and relevance to a broader context, personal growth, excellence, and authenticity/autonomy (Huta & Waterman, 2014).

This overview on concepts of well-being shows that simply asking whether social media use (negatively) affects well-being is oversimplifying. We have to further specify whether we mean that higher social media use leads to less (or more) psychological well-being (e.g., life satisfaction) or actually to certain psychopathologies (e.g., depression). Moreover, we have to specify whether we indeed assume that social media use has an influence on stable, person-related concepts of well-being or whether it rather affects more fleeting, state components of well-being (e.g., positive or negative affect, mood, feelings). Some components of well-being are clearly determined by many different things in an individual's life (e.g., overall life satisfaction) and may thus be less likely to be fundamentally influenced by social media use. Momentary feelings, however, could be strongly affected by particular types of uses, messages, or contents. As mentioned earlier, using an experience sampling study, Bayer and colleagues (2018) have shown that active posting on Facebook leads to positive emotional experiences right after posting but not to any long-term changes in trait mood across two weeks. We should not expect social media use to uniformly affect all types of well-being.

Effect Heterogeneity in Research on Social Media and Body Image

Studies that explicitly try to answer the question whether or not social media use affects adolescents' well-being often remain oversimplifying and neglect the various factors we outlined earlier. More specific research areas such as studies focusing on the impact of cyberbullying, self-presentation, body image representation, or online gaming provide a more nuanced picture of boundary conditions of social media use effect. In what follows, we will discuss some findings from research on idealized image presentation on social media platforms and its effects on adolescents' body (dis)satisfaction. This research area exemplifies quite vividly how acknowledging different personal and environmental factors as well

as different levels of analysis contribute to a nuanced understanding about when exposure to certain types of content or specific behaviors become detrimental for individuals' well-being.

Social media play a major role in distributing and reinforcing beauty ideals. Affordances of social media allow easy and ample access to idealized self-presentations for young adolescents (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Social media allow users to not only consume media content but also create and upload pictures and react to others' posts (Perloff, 2014), which seems to contribute to a more dispersed picture of various body sizes and appearances nowadays, the so-called body positivity trend (Lazuka, Wick, Keel, & Harriger, 2020). However, specific stereotypical portrayals of body ideals (e.g., being thin and ultra-fit for women and ultra-muscular and toned for men) and facial-ideals (e.g., having a smooth skin) are still pervading the social media landscape, often being reinforced by positive comments and likes (e.g., Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Aligning with our rationale presented earlier, however, social media users seem to respond differently to these idealized appearance depictions: abundant research has shown both detrimental effects and beneficial effects from such exposure on, for example, body (dis)satisfaction (e.g., Bij de Vaate, Veldhuis, & Konijn, 2020). Adopting the situational lens outlined earlier can help to understand differences in respective findings. Taking into account both stable and situational personal and environmental factors in fact paints a clearer picture for whom and when exposure to body ideals negatively affects well-being.

When Exposure to Body Ideals Becomes Detrimental

Many studies have shown unfavorable effects of social media use on body image perceptions (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Although more intensive use of SNS like Instagram and Facebook seemed to instigate a greater body dissatisfaction and body concerns, not all studies found such negative effects from general SNS use. Various studies have shown that specifically appearance-focused activities and engagement in appearance-related content (e.g., posting pictures of oneself and inspecting those of others) contributed to inducing body image disturbances (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Mingoia, Hutchinson, Wilson, & Gleaves, 2017). Relatedly, research into selfies as a specific form of appearance-focused online self-presentation indicated that active engagement in selfie-behaviors, such as selecting and editing selfies, was associated with increased feelings of body dissatisfaction (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, & Masters, 2015).

Social comparison tendencies play a major role in internalizing and processing idealized body portrayals in either direction (e.g., Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). On social media, comparison processes are largely *upward* in nature (Fardouly, Pinkus, & Vartanian, 2017). Studies have underpinned that online appearance comparisons with others who are considered to have a better appearance might lead to a more negative body image and dissatisfaction (Bij de Vaate et al., 2020;

Fardouly et al., 2017). However, previous studies revealed the importance to distinguish between *motives of self-evaluation* and *self-improvement* (Veldhuis, Konijn, & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2017). Both motives may lead to upward comparison, but comparison with ideal-body media figures to evaluate oneself generally leads to more negative body perceptions compared to looking at others as an inspiration for self-improvement.

These outcomes indicate that *environmental factors* such as type of content (i.e., idealized and appearance-focused visuals, selfies), practices on specifically photo-based platforms (e.g., liking and commenting Instagram, social comparison), and situational personal factors (e.g., motive) need to be considered to explain negative effects on well-being.

When Exposure to Body Ideals is Beneficial

Studies have found positive effects of exposure to body ideals. With current digital applications, people can easily create, select, and edit appearance-focused content before they show themselves online. Feeling in control of posting idealized pictures might enhance people's self-evaluations (cf. Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015), which in turn may motivate people to engage in online self-presentation and reinforce their positive self-evaluations. Experiencing higher body appreciation and self-objectification was found to be associated with greater engagement in selecting, editing, and posting selfies (Veldhuis, Alleva, Bij de Vaate, Keijer, & Konijn, 2020).

Comparing oneself with idealized media figures (upward comparison) can also instigate a higher body satisfaction (Veldhuis et al., 2017). If a person is highly motivated to "improve the self", seeing idealized bodies might rather inspire and spark feelings of attainability of having a better body. Differentiating underlying social comparison motives thus is an important *situational personal factor* that explains how users *cognitively process* idealized media fare and whether social media's impact on body image is harmful or beneficial.

Downward comparison may also explain positive effects on well-being. It occurs when people evaluate themselves against somebody who they think is worse off, that is, looks worse than they do. The *motive of self-enhancement* often underlies this process and leads to positive appraisals of one's own appearance. The literature review by Bij de Vaate et al. (2020) has indeed found such positive effects from downward social comparisons on body image.

Individual and Situational Susceptibility

Predispositions like self-esteem and appearance schematicity play a role in explaining the divergent reactions to ideal body fare, rendering those with lowered self-esteem and those who attribute more importance and meaning to one's appearance more susceptible to adverse effects (Veldhuis, 2020). *Person-related*

stable factors like age, gender, and ethnicity seem to have a guiding impact in processing ideal body media fare (e.g., Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; López-Guimerà, Levine, Sánchez-carracedo, & Fauquet, 2010). For example, especially young girls are in a developmental stage in which they undergo bodily changes, are developing their own identity, and are more open to peer influences, while also being avid consumers of media.

On a situational level, the context in which an image is presented matters as well. Particularly on social media, visual posts are contextualized by captions, comments, and likes (Perloff, 2014; Veldhuis, 2020). Empirical studies have shown that texts elucidating on ultrathin bodies as being "normal" increased viewers' body dissatisfaction whereas texts that confirmed the underweight status of such bodies decreased their body dissatisfaction (Veldhuis, Konijn, & Seidell, 2012). Likewise, ideal body depictions accompanied by self-improvement texts that the reader also could attain such a body increased feelings of body satisfaction (Veldhuis et al., 2017). Furthermore, likes are interpreted as social support expressed by peers and therefore lead to a feeling of being accepted (in case of ample likes) or rejected (in case of few likes; Rosenthal-von der Pütten et al., 2019). Hence, given the active interplay between media users in newer digital and social media formats, it is vital to further investigate social media's impact on body image perceptions in light of the *contextual and situational factors* formed by peer and verbal contexts (Perloff, 2014; Veldhuis, 2020).

Conclusion and Future Perspectives

As previous research has shown, scholars and policy makers often try to find easy answers to rather complex problems. The question of whether or not social media negatively impacts young adolescents' mental or physical health is no exception in this regard. In this chapter, we argued that social media effects on well-being vary across individuals, contexts, and situations. We urge future research to investigate the intricate combination of personal and environmental factors in explaining heterogeneity in social media use effects. We believe that taking a situational perspective to identify relevant factors on various levels of analysis and with various levels of stability is a useful starting point that helps to identify interactions between, for example, stable person characteristics (such as gender, age, literacy) and more fleeting contextual (e.g., perceptions of audiences, norms, and practices) and varying situational factors (e.g., momentary motives, goals, feelings) and how their combination affects different components of subjective well-being. Methodologically, this will require novel approaches that allow for more granular assessments of social media use behaviors as well as highly repetitive assessments of individuals' momentary well-being. Collaboration between disciplines that spurs combinations of computational assessment approaches (e.g., behavioral observation via logging), situational assessment (e.g., via experience sampling), and more

traditional questionnaire designs will allow for more precision in assessing the various factors that may explain heterogeneity in social media use effects.

Understanding specific boundary conditions of such effects, however, is not just a purely academic endeavor. For example, the fact that individuals respond in very different ways to social media content in terms of their body perceptions also holds practical implications for redirecting negative media effects through media-based body image interventions. Being such popular and pervasive venues for providing information and setting social standards, social media should be considered as effective means to (re)negotiate such standards. A one-size-fits-all approach seems generally ineffective, but considering a holistic view on social media influences, social media-based interventions can work if tailored to individual user's needs.

References

Bauer, A. A., Loy, L. S., Masur, P. K., & Schneider, F. M. (2017). Mindful instant messaging: Mindfulness and autonomous motivation as predictors of well-being in smartphone communication. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*, *29*(3), 159–165. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000225

Bayer, J. B., Ellison, N., Schoenebeck, S., Brady, E., & Falk, E. B. (2018). Facebook in context(s): Measuring emotional responses across time and space. *New Media & Society*, *20*(3), 1047–1067. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816681522

Bayer, J. B., Trieu, P., & Ellison, N. B. (2020). Social media elements, ecologies, and effects. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *71*(1), 471–497. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010419-050944

Beyens, I., Pouwels, J. L., van Driel, I. I., Keijsers, L., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2020). The effect of social media on well-being differs from adolescent to adolescent. *Scientific Reports*, *10*(1), 10763. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-67727-7

Bij de Vaate, N., Veldhuis, J., & Konijn, E. (2020). How online self-presentation affects well-being and body image: A systematic review. *Telematics and Informatics*, *47*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2019.101316

Billieux, J., Linden, M. V. der, & Rochat, L. (2008). The role of impulsivity in actual and problematic use of the mobile phone. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *22*(9), 1195–1210. https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1429

Blackwell, D., Leaman, C., Tramposch, R., Osborne, C., & Liss, M. (2017). Extraversion, neuroticism, attachment style and fear of missing out as predictors of social media use and addiction. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *116*, 69–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.04.039

Brody, J. E. (2019). The crisis in youth suicide. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/well/mind/the-crisis-in-youth-suicide.html

Carr, C. T., & Hayes, R. A. (2015). Social media: Defining, developing, and divining. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, *23*(1), 46–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2015.972282

Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Oishi, S. (2018). Advances and open questions in the science of subjective well-being. *Collabra: Psychology*, *4*(1), 15. https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.115

Dienlin, T., & Johannes, N. (2020). The impact of digital technology use on adolescent well-being. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, *22*(2), 135–142. https://doi.org/10.31887/DCNS.2020.22.2/tdienlin

Dogruel, L., & Schnauber-Stockmann, A. (2021). What determines instant messaging communication? Examining the impact of person- and situation-level factors on IM responsiveness. *Mobile Media & Communication*, *9*(2), 210–228. https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157920943926

Elhai, J. D., Levine, J. C., Dvorak, R. D., & Hall, B. J. (2016). Fear of missing out, need for touch, anxiety and depression are related to problematic smartphone use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *63*, 509–516. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.079

Escobar-Viera, C. G., Shensa, A., Bowman, N. D., Sidani, J. E., Knight, J., James, A. E., & Primack, B. A. (2018). Passive and active social media use and depressive symptoms among United States adults. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, *21*(7), 437–443. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2017.0668

Fardouly, J., Pinkus, R. T., & Vartanian, L. R. (2017). The impact of appearance comparisons made through social media, traditional media, and in person in women's everyday lives. *Body Image*, *20*, 31–39. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.11.002

Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2016). Exploring the relationships between different types of Facebook use, perceived online social support, and adolescents' depressed mood. *Social Science Computer Review*, *34*(2), 153–171. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439314567449

Gilbert, A., Baumgartner, S., & Reinecke, L. (2021). *Situational boundary conditions of digital stress: Goal conflict and autonomy frustration make smartphone use more stressful*. PsyArXiv. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/fzct9

Hofmann, W., Reinecke, L., & Meier, A. (2016). Of sweet temptations and bitter aftertaste: Self-control as a moderator of the effects of media use on well-being. In L. Reinecke & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *The routledge handbook of media use and well-being* (pp. 211–222). New York: Routledge.

Holland, G., & Tiggemann, M. (2016). A systematic review of the impact of the use of social networking sites on body image and disordered eating outcomes. *Body Image*, *17*, 100–110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.02.008

Huta, V. (2017). An overview of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being concepts. In *The Routledge handbook of media use and well-being: International perspectives on theory and research on positive media effects* (pp. 14–33). London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Huta, V., & Waterman, A. S. (2014). Eudaimonia and its distinction from Hedonia: Developing a classification and terminology for understanding conceptual and operational definitions. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *15*(6), 1425–1456. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9485-0

Kim, C., & Shen, C. (2020). Connecting activities on social network sites and life satisfaction: A comparison of older and younger users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *105*, 106222. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.106222

Lahey, B. B., Krueger, R. F., Rathouz, P. J., Waldman, I. D., & Zald, D. H. (2017). Validity and utility of the general factor of psychopathology. *World Psychiatry*, *16*(2), 142–144. https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20410

Lazuka, R. F., Wick, M. R., Keel, P. K., & Harriger, J. A. (2020). Are we there yet? Progress in depicting diverse images of beauty in Instagram's body positivity movement. *Body Image*, *34*, 85–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.05.001

Licoppe, C. (2004). 'Connected' presence: The emergence of a new repertoire for managing social relationships in a changing communication technoscape. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *22*(1), 135–156. https://doi.org/10.1068/d323t

Litt, E. (2012). Knock, knock: Who's there? The imagined audience. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *56*(3), 330–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2012.705195

López-Guimerà, G., Levine, M. P., Sánchez-carracedo, D., & Fauquet, J. (2010). Influence of mass media on body image and eating disordered attitudes and behaviors in females: A review of effects and processes. *Media Psychology*, *13*(4), 387–416. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2010.525737

Magnusson, D. (1981). Problems in environmental analyses – An introduction. In D. Magnusson (Ed.), *Toward a psychology of situations* (pp. 3–7). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Masur, P. K. (2018). *Situational privacy and self-disclosure: Communication processes in online environments*. Cham: Springer.

McLean, S. A., Paxton, S. J., Wertheim, E. H., & Masters, J. (2015). Photoshopping the selfie: Self photo editing and photo investment are associated with body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls: Photoshopping of the selfie. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, *48*(8), 1132–1140. https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22449

Meier, A., & Reinecke, L. (2020). Computer-mediated communication, social media, and mental health: A conceptual and empirical meta-review. *Communication Research*, 0093650220958224. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650220958224

Mingoia, J., Hutchinson, A. D., Wilson, C., & Gleaves, D. H. (2017). The relationship between social networking site use and the internalization of a thin ideal in females: A meta-analytic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*, 1351. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01351

Nissenbaum, H. (2010). *Privacy in context: Technology, policy, and the integrity of social life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Orben, A. (2020). Teenagers, screens and social media: A narrative review of reviews and key studies. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, *55*(4), 407–414. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-019-01825-4

Orben, A., Dienlin, T., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). Social media's enduring effect on adolescent life satisfaction. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *116*(21), 10226–10228. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1902058116

Orben, A., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *3*(2), 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1

Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social media effects on young women's body image concerns: Theoretical perspectives and an agenda for research. *Sex Roles*, *71*(11–12), 363–377. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0384-6

Rauthmann, J. F., Sherman, R. A., & Funder, D. C. (2015). Principles of situation research: Towards a better understanding of psychological situations: Principles of situation research. *European Journal of Personality*, *29*(3), 363–381. https://doi.org/10.1002/per.1994

Reinecke, L., & Hofmann, W. (2016). Slacking off or winding down? An experience sampling study on the drivers and consequences of media use for recovery versus procrastination: Slacking off or winding down? *Human Communication Research*, *42*(3), 441–461. https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12082

Rosenthal-von der Pütten, A. M., Hastall, M. R., Köcher, S., Meske, C., Heinrich, T., Labrenz, F., & Ocklenburg, S. (2019). "Likes" as social rewards: Their role in online social comparison and decisions to like other People's selfies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *92*, 76–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.10.017

Ross, L., & Nisbett, R. E. (2011). *The person and the situation: Perspectives of social psychology*. London: Pinter & Martin.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*, 141–166. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141

Schemer, C., Masur, P. K., Geiss, S., Müller, P., & Schäfer, S. (2021). The impact of internet and social media use on well-being: A longitudinal analysis of adolescents across nine years. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *26*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmaa014

Thorisdottir, I. E., Sigurvinsdottir, R., Asgeirsdottir, B. B., Allegrante, J. P., & Sigfusdottir, I. D. (2019). Active and passive social media use and symptoms of anxiety and depressed mood among Icelandic adolescents. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, *22*(8), 535–542. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2019.0079

Tiidenberg, K., & Gómez Cruz, E. (2015). Selfies, image and the re-making of the body. *Body & Society*, *21*(4), 77–102. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X15592465

Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among U.S. adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time. *Clinical Psychological Science*, *6*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702617723376

Valkenburg, P. M., Beyens, I., Pouwels, J. L., van Driel, I. I., & Keijsers, L. (2021). Social media use and adolescents' self-esteem: Heading for a person-specific media effects paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *71*(1), 56–78. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaa039

Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., & Schouten, A. P. (2006). Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' well-being and social self-esteem. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *9*(5), 584–590. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2006.9.584

Vanden Abeele, M. M. P. (2020). Digital wellbeing as a dynamic construct. *Communication Theory*. https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtaa024

Veldhuis, J. (2020). Media use, body image, and disordered eating. *International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119011071.iemp0103

Veldhuis, J., Alleva, J. M., Bij de Vaate, A. J. D. (Nadia), Keijer, M., & Konijn, E. A. (2020). Me, my selfie, and I: The relations between selfie behaviors, body image, self-objectification, and self-esteem in young women. *Psychology of Popular Media*, *9*(1), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000206

Veldhuis, J., Konijn, E. A., & Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2017). Boost your body: Self-improvement magazine messages increase body satisfaction in young adults. *Health Communication*, *32*(2), 200–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2015.1113482

Veldhuis, J., Konijn, E. A., & Seidell, J. C. (2012). Weight information labels on media models reduce body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *50*(6), 600–606. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2011.10.249

Whitlock, J., & Masur, P. K. (2019). Disentangling the association of screen time with developmental outcomes and well-being: Problems, challenges, and opportunities. *JAMA Pediatrics*, *173*(11), 1021. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.3191