Handbook of Research on Deception, Fake News, and Misinformation Online

Innocent E. Chiluwa
Covenant University, Nigeria

Sergei A. Samoilenko
George Mason University, USA

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DISSEMINATOR OF KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 5
"Too Good to Be True":
Semi-Naked Bodies on Social Media

Anke J. Kleim
University of Strathclyde, UK

Petya Eckler
University of Strathclyde, UK

Andrea Tonner
University of Strathclyde, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how body image deception is created and understood in social media. The authors focus specifically on the beach body, which is a narrower form of bodily representation online, but where deception is especially likely to occur. Focus group discussions with young adults revealed that editing and perfecting the beach body is commonplace and even normalized on social media. However, participants distinguished between celebrities and friends in expected use of manipulation and seemed to place a limit on the acceptable types of manipulation: body tan but not body shape, for example. The authors discuss the implications of these discussions and how applying deception theory in body image research can provide useful insights.

INTRODUCTION

Media images, such as of the ideal beach body, increasingly undergo digital alteration and enhancement, so that most pictures we see online represent an idealized version of reality. This trend applies to celebrities and regular users alike. In this "online appearance culture" (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014), users seem obsessed with posting, sharing, liking and commenting on pictures, and appearance seems to be of growing importance. Through these behaviors, users contribute to the normalization of unrealistic body and beauty ideals, which can be damaging to body image, self-evaluation and overall wellbeing (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015).

The beach body is an especially interesting niche in the larger body image literature, due to the high expectations placed on individuals offline and online, and the likelihood that those expectations cannot be met. Thus, the mediatized beach bodies of young people online are not only photographic versions of their real bodies, but an improved and perfected representation, which agrees with the cultural standards of the day and which sometimes is quite removed from the original. Through photo manipulation, accessorizing and body positioning, these "easy lies" (Harwood, 2014) become possible.

In this chapter, we will examine mediatized images of the beach body in the context of social media through the conceptual lenses of deception, a unique combination of concepts, which has not been explored together previously, and which can expand significantly the current range and depth of research on body image and deception. We will explore what motivates young people to engage in online deception about their beach body and how they achieve it.

BACKGROUND

Body Image and the Beach Body: An Online Culture of Perfectionism

Body image is "a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body" (Grogan, 2017). The dimensions, determinants and processes of body image are complex and multifaceted, given that a person's body parts and vital organs form fundamental components of the human self and identity (Belk, 1988). Cash (2012) differentiates between body evaluation, i.e. the (dis-)satisfaction with one's appearance, and body investment, i.e. the affective, cognitive and behavioral relevance of the body to a person's self-evaluation. In the context of the beach body, the behavioral component is fundamental for understanding how individuals try to control their bodies in order to look as perfect as possible during summer.

Body image attitudes form and develop throughout a person's life, starting in early childhood and changing across the lifespan (Cash, 2008). They are based upon four factors: personality traits, physical characteristics and changes, interpersonal experiences with family and peers, and cultural socialization (Cash, 2008). The latter is particularly important in the context of this chapter, as it is through acculturation that young children learn what is considered attractive and beautiful in society. To conform to society's expectations, individuals, most notably women, often invest heavily into their looks, and that may involve subtle forms of deception.

Historically, societies have focused on people's outward appearance and even considered it a symbol of a person's (dis-)ordered lifestyle (Bordo, 2013). A slim female body has been associated with positive socio-cultural qualities, such as success, social appreciation, and happiness (Grogan, 2017), and muscular male figures have been linked to strength and heroism. Overweight, in contrast, has been associated with negative attributes, such as lack of discipline and laziness (Murray, 2016). Equally, bodies that do not conform to beauty standards, such as fat, disfigured, disabled, or ageing figures, are marginalized and stigmatized (Wardle & Boyce, 2009). While slenderness has endured as the most salient bodily feature for women to aspire to over the decades, trends have also developed within body ideals. The 1990s were characterized by enlarged breasts and slender hips, while the 2000s saw a shift towards more voluptuous bottoms. Recently, muscularity has affected both men and increasingly women (Grogan, 2017).

The female beach body is typically portrayed as "slim, tanned, young, Caucasian, female and bikinied" (Small, 2007, p. 87), which is in congruence with the common public understandings of how a (semi-naked) body ought to look.

Clothes serve as an important means to manage appearance, for instance by covering or concealing perceived bodily imperfections (Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012). When wearing swimwear, individuals' bodies are exposed and reveal details that are normally hidden from public view. The extent to which one conforms to the common beauty norms becomes visible and assessable then. Therefore, individuals try to get "beach body ready", i.e. achieve an ideal beach physique as depicted in the media through bodily preparation techniques such as dieting, exercising, hair removal and fake-tanning, which is linked to high levels of self-surveillant and controlling behaviors. This molding of one's regular body into a "beach body" is a form of body modification, which is linked to malleability beliefs and seeing the body as a project (Small, 2007; Pritchard & Morgan, 2012).

Past investigations of the beach body have been largely limited to holiday experiences and representations in traditional media, such as magazines, neglecting contemporary digital culture and the visual trend of presenting bodies online. However, the beach body is no longer confined to the beach and now extends to a broad spectrum of digital platforms.

Media images, such as of the ideal beach body, increasingly undergo digital alteration and enhancement, so that most pictures we see online are closer to fiction than reality. Against this background, we suggest distinguishing between real bodies at the beach, i.e. semi-naked figures in swimwear in natural environments, and beach body images as displayed in media contexts, i.e. mediatized beach bodies, as they differ from each other significantly. In this chapter, we aim to look specifically into mediatized beach body images in the context of social media, a topic that has not yet been explored, but that we believe is of great importance, as it enables researchers to better understand how women mediatize images of their semi-naked bodies online.

Driven by the need to present the best possible version of themselves to others (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011; Manago, Graham, Greenfield & Salimkhan, 2008), individuals adjust the personal information they reveal through their online profiles and the way they (inter-)act with others, much of which is visual. In this "online appearance culture" (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014), users seem obsessed with posting, sharing, liking and commenting on pictures, and appearance seems to be of even greater importance than in offline life. On Instagram alone, approx. 95 million photos are uploaded every day (Lister, 2018), and in 2017, 54% of global Internet users reported that they shared private and sensitive photos and videos of themselves digitally (Statista, 2018). Beach body pictures are part of this trend. As of 23 October 2018, there have been 9,530,236 postings using the hashtag #beachbody, 1,747,138 postings using the hashtag #beachbodycoach and 64,670 postings under the hashtag #beachbodyready on Instagram alone. Some scholars have begun to analyze sexualized selfies (Hart, 2016; Miguel, 2016; Mascheroni, Vincent & Jimenez, 2015), but we know little about individuals who post pictures of themselves wearing swimwear.

While existing findings on social media and body image are somewhat inconsistent, photo-based online activities have been linked to poor body image (Meier & Gray, 2014). Since the publication of that study in 2014, photo-based activities on social media, including the taking and posting of "selfies" (a self-portrait, typically taken through a smartphone camera) and "usies" or "wesies" (photos that include others as well), have increased even further, particularly amongst teenagers (Grogan, Rothery, Cole, & Hall, 2018; McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, & Masters, 2015).

Similar to mass media images, photographs posted on social media are increasingly manipulated and digitally enhanced. Some 70% of 18-35-year-old women regularly edit their images before posting them (Renfrew Foundation, 2014). Young users in particular tend to put significant effort into their pictures before uploading them. To achieve the aspired look, they often take multiple photos before carefully selecting and closely monitoring the one they find suitable to show others (Fardouly et al., 2015).

New apps and tools to modify pictures are routinely introduced and offer many ways to creatively transform ordinary photographs: re-coloring, adding polarization effects or additional elements (e.g. film scratches, picture frame), modifying film textures and tones, or retouching unwanted appearance details (Caoduro, 2014). But the most common editing strategy, as suggested in Grogan et al.'s (2018) qualitative study, is the photographic angle, through which individuals aim to present themselves as perfect. Thereby, the focus is often on the face and unwanted body parts are covered or hidden.

Through these behaviors, users contribute to the normalization of unrealistic body and beauty ideals, which can be damaging to body image, self-evaluation and overall wellbeing (Fardouly et al., 2015). Another study found that girls who shared selfies online on a regular basis and who engaged in photo manipulation were likely to feel negatively about their bodies and to show eating concerns (McLean et al., 2015).

Apart from sharing their own pictures, social media users are exposed to other users' postings. This includes private users, such as family and peers, and professional users, such as celebrities or brands. Those postings offer orientation for what other bodies look like and what is considered beautiful, while their number of likes, shares and positive comments shows what kind of pictures and bodies receive social appraisal from others. This may increase users' desire for a similar response on social media. Regular views and comments on the profiles of social media friends, i.e. social grooming, have been linked to a drive for thinness (Kim & Chock, 2015).

Besides the many studies that have focused predominantly on the negative aspects linked to social media usage and photo-based activities, some scholars have suggested that selective self-presentation through online profiles and the extra care involved may actually improve self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2010) and posting selfies might be an empowering experience for women (Tiidenberg & Cruz, 2015). Positive feedback from other users can add to the positive sensations resulting from social media behavior (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Despite these findings, most studies have uncovered negative impacts of social media usage on body image (e.g. Eckler, Kalyango, & Paasch, 2017; Fardouly et al. 2015; Kleemans, Daalmans, Carbaat, & Anschütz, 2018).

The body positivity and body neutrality movement have begun to spread online non-idealized and unfiltered images of people with more diverse body shapes and skin colors, many of whom have disfigurements and other "imperfections" that are typically excluded from thin-idealized imagery, including beach body pictures. A recent study demonstrated that being exposed to body-positive Instagram posts positively affected young women's mood, body satisfaction and body appreciation, and seeing more of this type of content might be a promising approach to trigger positive body image in social media users (Cohen, Fardouly, Newton-John, & Slater, 2019). But despite the growing attempts at showing diversity and its obvious positive effects, many social media users seem hesitant toward showing what they truly look like. One could consider that the pressure to present an idealized version of the self and to receive positive validation from others is still stronger than the bravery to show an "imperfect" self.

DECEPTION THEORY: A NEW OUTLOOK ON THE BEACH BODY

Deception has been studied from various perspectives: psychological, sociological, linguistic, etc. We will examine deception as a communication process, which involves a sender, a message and a receiver. Typical research areas include examinations of motivations for senders to engage in deception (McCornack, Morrison, Paik, Wisner, & Zhu, 2014), the deceptive message itself (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018) or the receiver and how they perceive and respond to the deceit (Levine, 2014).

Deception is often defined as "intentionally, knowingly, and/or purposely misleading another person" and messages involve "intent, awareness and/or purpose to mislead" (Levine, 2014, p. 379). Deception can include lies, omission, evasion, equivocation and generating false conclusions with true information (Levine, 2014). In terms of online communication, deception is a common focus of research. As Toma and Hancock (2012) stated, "Concerns about online deception are as old as the Internet itself" (p. 78).

Theoretical models propose that most people tend to be honest most of the time and only a few prolific liars tell most of the lies (Levine, 2014), which has been supported by evidence (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018; Serota, Levine, & Boster, 2010). As discussed previously, we can find large numbers of digitally altered photographs and optimized online profiles in the social media landscape. But does this polishing of one's online profile or photo constitute lying? Users may not perceive this behavior as lying, because they may see the lie as a low stake normative response to online codes of conduct, something Harwood (2014) called "easy lies". Such lies, also called "light", "do not cause distress, are not seen as serious, are not regretted, are more pleasant than the truth for all parties involved … and the liar would not really care if the lie was discovered" (DePaulo et al., 1996, as cited in Harwood, 2014, p. 407).

These small and harmless lies (such as commenting favorably but undeservedly on someone's cooking or praising a child's unsuccessful art project) are often situational and occur frequently in everyday interactions with friends and family. Thus, Cole (2014) argues that situational complexity can sometimes influence the creation of deceptive messages; and intent or awareness, which are often assumed to guide deception, can occur during the process of lying or even post facto. This suggests that deception may not be as rational and top-down as many scholars believe. As Cole (2014) argues, deception is "almost certainly driven by automatic and unconscious processes" (p. 396).

Some have demonstrated that in the field of online dating users lied often but subtly in order to enhance their profiles (Hancock & Toma, 2009; Toma & Hancock, 2010). Self-presentation and self-enhancement are major motives for deceiving others in the context of online/mobile dating (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018). The authors discovered that close to two-thirds of deceptive content was driven by impression management, specifically related to self-presentation and availability. The asynchronous and editable features of online dating create the perfect conditions for deception: "Users have an unlimited amount of time to create their self-presentation and the ability to revise it to make it both flattering and believable" (Toma & Hancock, 2012, p. 79). The same can be said about social media in general and how users portray their bodies and overall persona. With these media affordances at hand, users often lead a carefully orchestrated campaign of self-presentation (Toma & Hancock, 2012) and the different genders tend to value different aspects of their appearance. Men were typically found to exaggerate their height and women to underreport their weight and intentionally post less accurate photographs (Hancock & Toma, 2009; Toma & Hancock, 2010; Toma, Hancock & Ellison, 2008). This attempt at self-optimization online is an important aspect of online culture, as it contributes to unrealistic images and an atmosphere of idealized body-centered content.

These findings have direct relevance to body image and to the beach body, where a possibly flawless appearance seems as the license to expose one's semi-naked body and to receive social approval from others. Another similarity to online dating is that the ideal beach body has long been connected with romance and successful sexual relationships (Jordan 2007, Small 2016). This refers to situations at the beach and for media contexts, where women in swimwear have been portrayed as "sexually alluring decorations", i.e. sexual objects to be looked at (Jordan, 2007, p. 94). Deception thus seems likely to occur in the context of the beach body as well.

This chapter will explore two theories of deception, which address different aspects of the communication process. The Information Manipulation Theory 2 (IMT2) focuses on the creation of a deceptive message and the motivations of the sender. It "conceptually frames deception as involving the covert manipulation of information along multiple dimensions and as a contextual problem-solving activity driven by the desire for quick, efficient, and viable communicative solutions" (McCornack et al., 2014). The theory focuses on situational triggers of deception and diverges from previous models, which see deception as top-down, intentional and conscious.

Also applicable is the Truth-Default Theory (TDT) by Levine (2014), which examines the deception process from the viewpoint of the receiver. The theory posits that when people communicate with each other, they tend to presume that their conversation partner is basically honest. This presumption of honesty makes possible efficient communication and cooperation, and in most cases is correct, as most people tell the truth most of the time (Levine, 2014). This presumption also makes people vulnerable to manipulation and deception, at least in the short-term, but the theory argues that the truth default presumption is also highly adaptive to the individual and the species, and thus will improve accuracy of detection. The theory diverges from previous work in the field by focusing its detection powers not on the behaviour or nonverbal cues of the sender of communication, but on the message itself and its context. "Most lies are detected either through comparing what is said to what is or what can be known, or through solicitation of a confession" (Levine, 2014). This focus on the message and its context is especially relevant to social media, where the sender is not seen face to face and thus, they cannot provide behavioral cues of deception. However, there are plenty of opportunities to study the message itself due to the written record that remains and the asynchronous mode of communication.

The two theories have been applied to the study of politicians dodging questions and how people respond and try to detect those behaviors (Clementson, 2018a), how politicians accuse each other of evasiveness, which may affect voters' attitudes about their dishonesty (Clementson, 2016), and the role of partisan bias when detecting politicians' deception (Clementson 2018b). TDT has also been applied to various settings for the study of how people detect deception (e.g. Blair, Reimer, & Levine, 2018).

This study is the first known attempt to apply deception theories to the field of body image. While the concept of body deception has been used previously, it was linked to social comparison theory but not to any deception theories (Hildebrandt, Shiovitz, Alfano, & Greif, 2008). TDT and IMT2 are particularly useful, as together they address different aspects of the deception process and also offer a more updated and nuanced view of deception compared to some of their predecessors (Cole, 2014; Levine, 2014; McCornack et al., 2014). We will examine the sender, the message and the receiver of this communication process in an effort to discover how body image deception is created and understood in social media. We pose the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What motivates users to engage in online deception about the beach body?
Research Question 2: How do users engage in online deception about the beach body?

STUDY METHOD

This exploratory study involves 25 undergraduate international exchange students, aged 19-23, from 19 different countries and five continents: Europe, North and South America, Asia and Oceania. The students participated in four focus groups (three groups were all-female, one group was all-male) at the University of Cologne, Germany.

They discussed their perceptions of the beach body in online and offline contexts. As 92% of participants used Facebook and Instagram every day, based on a questionnaire they filled out, we could ensure that they were familiar with the usage and content posted on social media, irrespective of their home country.

Data was collected in the summer, when the beach body topic is frequently promoted in the media. Therefore, participants would likely have been recently exposed to related pictures.

The focus groups were facilitated by a fellow student who ensured that all participants were included in the discussion and that the discussion was focused on the purpose of the study. Focus groups lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. Participants were asked to discuss six broad questions about social media, two of which will be considered as a foundation for this chapter. The first question was: "What (changing) behaviors, both offline and online, have you observed amongst your female peers when it came to achieving a beach body?" The second question was: "Please think about some typical beach body postings that you can find on your social media newsfeed, e.g. published by friends or any pages/people you like or follow. How do those postings differentiate (a) from one another and (b) from real-life situations at the beach?"

Although the questions themselves aimed to evoke various comments and experiences, those often revolved around deception, as will become evident in the following section. Additionally, each participant filled in a short survey about their demographic data and social media use. All discussions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim to allow inductive systematic analysis. See Table 1 for details on the participants.

FINDINGS

The findings below are guided by our research questions and structured around them. Based on the huge number of pictures shared online daily, one could expect users to deal with them routinely and perhaps even quickly. But our focus group discussions revealed that taking, choosing and eventually posting the "right" picture might be a lengthy process, which can involve much consideration and extra care in order to look good and receive positive feedback and appraisal from others. All groups were very clear that the ideal beach body as presented in the media, most notably on social media, differed considerably from real bodies at the beach. They thus confirmed our idea to differentiate between real and mediatized beach bodies and Grogan et al.'s (2018) suggestion that "there are disconnects between women's identity as portrayed in selfies and their 'real' offline identities" (p. 26). How exactly beach bodies are being mediatized in social media contexts and the role of deception will be discussed below.

Table 1. Focus group participants

Focus group	Name	Age	Home location	Facebook use	Twitter use	Instagram use
1	Female	n/a	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Several times a day
1	Female	22	Asia	Once/twice a day	I don't know	I don't know
1	Female	21	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Several times a week
1	Female	n/a	Asia	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Several times a day
1	Female	n/a	Europe	Once/twice a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Once/twice a day
1	Female	21	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Once/twice a day
2	Female	n/a	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Less than once/ twice a week
2	Female	22	North America	Once/twice a day	Once/twice a day	Once/twice a day
2	Female	21	Europe	Several times a day	Several times a day	Several times a day
2	Female	22	Europe	Several times a day	Several times a week	Several times a day
2	Female	21	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Once/twice a day
2	Female	n/a	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Several times a day
2	Female	n/a	South America	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Once/twice a day
3	Female	20	Oceania	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Once/twice a day
3	Female	22	Oceania	Several times a day	I don't know	Several times a day
3	Female	19	Asia	Several times a day	Several times a day	Several times a day
3	Female	20	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Once/twice a day
3	Female	n/a	Asia	Less than once/twice a week	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week
3	Female	23	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Once/twice a day
4	Male	n/a	South America	Once/twice a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Less than once/ twice a week
4	Male	n/a	Europe	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Several times a day
4	Male	20	Europe	Once/twice a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Less than once/ twice a week
4	Male	21	South America	Several times a day	Less than once/ twice a week	Less than once/ twice a week
4	Male	n/a	Europe	Several times a day	Several times a day	Several times a day
4	Male	21	Asia	Less than once/twice a week	Less than once/ twice a week	Less than once/ twice a week

Motives for Online Deception About the Beach Body

As discussed earlier, online self-optimization of one's body via presenting incorrect information or omission or leading to false conclusions is considered deception. Past literature has demonstrated how social media users generally try to present their best version online (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011; Manago et al., 2008). But the focus groups revealed that posting pictures of their semi-naked appearances seemed to be exclusively reserved for women who already had a "good" body in real life:

…you need to know that your body is almost perfect, you know, to post a picture. And you don't use Photoshop to change your shape. You can change the color of your skin or something, but you still need to have a perfect body to post these pictures. (Female 1)

Having an attractive physique thus seemed to be a pre-condition for posting a beach body picture online and possible motives for doing it could be similar to those found for online dating: self-presentation and self-enhancement (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018).

Even though modern technology, such as digital photo alteration apps, could easily transform any picture into a "perfect" version, there was still the expectation to have a good-looking physique in real life and to put effort into it. However, the asynchronous nature of social media and the extended opportunity for users to gaze at each other's photos, and in this case beach bodies, meant that the stakes for online representations were higher than in offline settings.

…I think when you're posting something on Instagram, you have to look better there because it's like a picture and you can look at it for a long time. But when you're in real life, you're always like in a move. So people are not so crazy about how they look in real life because they always look better in real life than on social media because they are like in motion all the time. And the perception of people is absolutely different as well. It's like "Okay, she or he doesn't have a perfect skin or something. So what? Nobody is perfect! So what?" But on social media it's like "Oh look, no perfect skin, oh my God!" So the perception is different. You can afford for yourself not to be perfect in real life because nobody is perfect. But in social media, you have to be like all perfect. (Female 2)

However, throughout our focus groups, females were described or described themselves, as rather hesitant toward posting beach body pictures online. One reason was culture. Participants from Korea and China emphasized that acts of posing and showing off were generally disapproved of, and social media users would rarely do it. In other countries such as Russia, posting beach (body) pictures related more to stating that one could afford beach holidays rather than to exposing an ideal body. Thus, a second motivation for posting beach body pictures related to demonstrating social status. A photo from the beach may be directly about your body, but indirectly, and maybe more importantly, about showing that you can afford a beach holiday. These findings demonstrate the importance of studying body image from an intercultural perspective and the beach body is a good case study of that.

A motive for not posting beach body pictures may, however, be the explicit expectation that they should look perfect, as discussed previously. If the photos do not conform to the socio-cultural understandings of ideal beauty, girls may feel insecure about exposing their semi-naked appearances online or fear negative public feedback. The perception of the beach body in social media contexts was rather standardized and

bodies that differ from the "beauty ideal" were not mentioned, even though many participants favored more realistic beach bodies when asked about different contexts.

How Users Engage in Online Deception About the Beach Body

Participants shared various techniques for enhancing their beach photos before and during the actual photography. Based on high expectations and awareness of being looked at and critically evaluated by others, picture taking at the beach was linked to females putting on make-up and choosing the right outfit, i.e. "fancy apparel," such as good looking and well-fitting (or even form-enhancing) swimwear and beach accessories, to prepare for a good shot. Some groups also mentioned last-minute exercising before taking a picture in order to increase muscle definition.

So the pictures online … Obviously they are never as good as in life. Because you put a filter on it, you do like ten push-ups before you take the photo, you know. It's stupid. (Male 1)

Apart from the general preparations to look good on beach body pictures, participants listed some additional procedures. The most salient were mimics or posing. It seemed particularly relevant to keep smiling, look sexy and indicate good mood, but in a grown-up and serious manner, not in a childish or funny way:

And like that means that you're like sexualizing your body and it's like the main goal. It's not like 'I'm having a fun time at the beach with my friends,' it's like 'oh, look at my really skinny bikini photos.' And I'm thinking of people who do it just to take bikini photos to show off. And the whole thing that Instagram builds is the mindset that you gonna have to post pictures like that. (Female 3)

Like, I feel like I'd rather have a funny photo with my bra or with my arse not being quite as skinny as it should, but … (Female 4)

Yeah, but then just having a good time! (Female 3)

Yes, and rather than those pictures like 'I'm serious and I'm posting', I'd rather have a funny photo. (Female 4)

As the excerpts above show, sexual objectification was perceived as normative amongst the female participants, even though they wished to differentiate from it. Showing certain mimics and moods on pictures, also described as "playing" by some participants, was perceived negatively and brings the question of why women feel the need to be smiling and in sexy poses. Reasons may be manifold and originate from each person's individual personality, but our study revealed considerable peer pressure. This supports the idea that one's body image may be influenced by family and peers through the social pressure they exert (Grogan, 2017).

This focus on mimics and poses also relates to the earlier studies on deception, which examined people's gestures, faces and other non-verbal cues for signs of cheating (e.g. Ekman, 1992). While more recent works have focused on the message rather than the sender's face to detect deception, the fact that

so many young people focus on their non-verbal cues in photos and that has now become part of the deceptive message may prompt a re-examining of senders' features and cues when detecting deception.

When it came to posing, the desire to look slim and muscular dominated across cultures, which indicates a high internalization of Western ideals. To achieve this, young people would apply different poses and flex their muscles, which confirmed the aforementioned tendency toward last-minute workouts.

So many of my friends try to show the perfect body on social media. But of course they are normal people. They don't have Photoshop and these things. But I do realize they are trying their best to look thin … like they are trying their best to look the skinniest or the strongest with lots of muscles and stuff. (Female 5)

While mimics and gestures were of particular importance, background features seemed less relevant or perhaps respondents thought of them as self-explanatory and not worth mentioning. This raises the question of whether backgrounds generally become less important if there is a (semi-naked) body in the picture and whether some kind of selective perception may occur. Future research could explore this question further.

Even with the right preparations, mimics and gestures, users may not be entirely satisfied with their pictures and optimize them further before posting. They may first pick the best shot from the series they took and then apply a filter or otherwise edit the picture. Amongst our participants, digital alteration of pictures was linked stronger to celebrities or professional advertisers than to social media "friends".

This became particularly clear in the context of advertising, where participants stated rather matter-of-factly that bikini models on adverts looked unrealistic, similar to celebrities. The digital enhancement of their social media pictures was as obvious as the fact that some of them had cosmetic surgery. Even though participants stated that it "looks like a cartoon [and] can't be real", it seemed to be accepted as part of being famous. In fact, examples were given of celebrities such as Kim Kardashian who lost many followers after posting a picture of their "real" body. Some participants felt sorry for them, whereas others made fun. Overall, it appeared that digital alteration was accepted or at least considered normal if participants did not have a personal, close relationship to the sender of the picture. These findings are in line with Grogan et al.'s (2018) qualitative study in which interviewees showed awareness of celebrities manipulating their selfies in order to look perfect.

Despite this awareness, it was repeatedly stated how comparing against better-looking people on social media made participants feel bad about their own bodies and increased their wish to look better. Our results thus support findings of previous studies on body image and social media, in which processes of upward comparison were identified as triggers of negative body image (e.g. Eckler et al., 2017; Fardouly et al. 2015; Kleemans et al., 2018).

Increased awareness of deception through digital alteration may not protect young people from negative feelings about their body or comparing against idealized images. In fact, a recent experiment on the effects of photo manipulation on Instagram showed that such photos had direct links to lower body image, even though manipulation was detected by participants (Kleemans et al., 2018). Reshaping of bodies was poorly detected, however, and the photos were still evaluated as realistic (Kleemans et al., 2018). This is an interesting finding for research aiming to identify mechanisms to trigger positive body image. It also reminds of recent findings on the use of disclaimer labels on images in traditional and social media contexts, which suggested that those had no protective effect on individuals' body dissatisfaction, even though they clearly indicated that images were edited, hence unrealistic and deceptive

(Bourlai & Herring, 2014; Tiggemann, Brown, Zaccardo, Thomas, 2017; Bury, Tiggemann & Slater, 2017; Fardouly & Holland, 2018).

The differing perceptions of our respondents indicate that deception on social media is somewhat normalized and takes place in various forms.

First, some techniques to make oneself look better on pictures might be more acceptable than others. For instance, applying filters might be considered okay and even normative, whereas slimming down via a photo-editing app may be seen as unacceptable. Similarly, Grogan et al.'s (2018) study revealed, "manipulating online 'identity' through altering the appearance of selfies was seen as a legitimate, and even necessary way to enhance perceived attractiveness" (p. 25). They identified some "socially-shared rules of self-presentation" (p. 26) through which individuals tried to conform to norms and expectations of ideal beauty. These rules contained certain no-goes though, such as posting sexually suggestive pictures. It is well imaginable that the degree of digital manipulation might also be affected by those rules.

Second, idealized images were generally linked more to celebrities than to "friends", which is interesting because as discussed earlier, photo manipulation was somewhat accepted or even normalized. This leads to the question whether users tend to perceive their friends as more trustworthy and genuine than celebrities, so that they may look at them in a less critical way or whether ordinary social media users are perhaps less likely to artificially enhance their beach body images in other ways than through "basic" adjustments such as lighting or contrasts. The existing literature provides limited findings on this relatively new research topic, so more data are needed to deepen our understanding.

The last possible stage of deception is when posting pictures online. Instagram is a photo-centric platform where users can link their pictures to certain keywords using hashtags. And even though the hashtag #beachbody is a prominent one, as stated previously, beach body pictures may not always be provided with this or another beach body-related hashtag, but with different ones. In fact, respondents in all focus groups linked postings of beach body pictures to postings related to health and fitness, claiming that these were the contexts in which they were exposed to most pictures of women in bikinis/swimwear, with many being before-and-after images. To shed light onto this, future content analysis research can investigate how these hashtags correlate.

Health and fitness are frequently used terms in social media, so that they might in fact be used to disguise one's purpose to get beach body ready:

I think in America, it's like more and more like not being beach body ready, but more like being healthy, I guess. And so… it's more like "Oh, I'm…" well I don't know, I think even some of my friends are… I know that they will say: "Yeah, I just wanna be healthy. I wanna be fit." and stuff, but then like they're like "Oh my God, I need to fit in to this pair of jeans" and they're like "Oh my gosh, I really want to look good when I go to the beach in summer"… Exactly, so in the end, that's like the ultimate goal but they kind of disguise it as "No, I just wanna be fit and healthy. (Female 6)

Another participant described how young women would post pictures of themselves wearing a bikini and with a bowl of salad in front of them. He accused them of intentionally putting the focus on food, while in fact they were only interested in exposing their beach body. This might be a way of exposing one's beach body indirectly, especially in cultures where "showing off" is perceived negatively.

While our study only scratched the surface of cultural differences in deceptive social media behavior related to the beach body, it outlines many lines of inquiry in the future for more in-depth explorations.

CONCLUSION

Past body image research has emphasized normalized behaviors in several related contexts, including body dissatisfaction and dieting (e.g. Grogan, 2017). Photo-editing strategies on social media are also perceived as normal or even expected by the online community. Young users are aware that such behaviors could classify as deceptive, but did not perceive them as negative, such as Harwood's (2014) "easy lies." When discussing friends, sophisticated manipulation such as via Photoshop use was seen as uncommon, however the discussion of celebrities and influencers was more critical of deceptive practices and participants were aware of them using Photoshop prominently, which was considered a normal part of their work.

Thus, deception appears to be the ticket for acceptance and belonging into the social media community. This is in many ways worrisome. First, if deception is normative on social media, this will likely reinforce the internalization of unrealistic and unattainable beauty ideals and will further distort users' perceptions of how bodies ought to look online and offline. For instance, more young people may be taking drastic and unhealthy measures to achieve that Photoshop body offline. Second, when thin beach body ideals are disguised under hashtags such as #health, #fitness, and #detox, the lines between healthy and unhealthy behaviors continue to be blurred. In fact, many of the messages and images under these supposedly benign hashtags are neither healthy nor harmless, as they promote weight loss over health. The deception of presenting health-risking behaviors as health-promoting ones might have particularly detrimental impacts on young people's wellbeing and is something that needs to be explored in future research.

Social media users may see their manipulation of body images as "easy lies": not serious, more pleasant than the truth, inconsequential and harmless (DePaulo et al., 1996, as cited in Harwood, 2014). But we can question the harmless nature of these "small" deceptions. As millions of social media users tweak, filter and slim down their (beach) body images before posting online, deception becomes part of the cultural norm and the unrealistic thin ideal for our bodies is maintained and strengthened, with potentially damaging consequences on people's body image (Kleemans et al., 2018).

Although deception about the (beach) body on social media may be perceived as commonplace, limits on acceptability do seem to exist. The expectation that you can only post beach body photos if you are already fit, and can manipulate and enhance your tan through filters, but not change your body shape, speaks to those boundaries. These boundaries may be broken by others routinely, but seem difficult for users to detect. As Kleemans et al. (2018) showed, adolescent users trusted the photos they saw of peers and wrongly accepted them as realistic, even though they were subject to body reshaping manipulation. This brings the question of detection of deception to the forefront of body image research.

This chapter's contribution to deception theory is in connecting it for the first time with body image research and digital manipulation on social media. It builds understanding of the means and motivations for creating "small" digital lies and offers an in-depth look of how that occurs in practice. This topic could be expanded further in several directions, which are discussed below.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Solutions for online photo enhancement could begin with discussions of deception and the "easy lies" young people tell one another online, for instance as part of education in media literacy. The assumption of harmlessness should be challenged and real consequences of the thin ideal should continue to be emphasized online and offline. Further, young people may not even perceive their online behaviors as lying, in which case a discussion about deception, its boundaries and consequences is needed. Since most people tend to tell the truth most of the time (Levine, 2014), presenting image manipulation as deception may challenge its current normalized acceptance and users' own self-image as truthful and honest.

An overall need to build a more realistic understanding of what real bodies look like is also needed. Traditional media images, such as cosmetics advertising, have long been regulated, in many countries for truthfulness. However, this particular solution could be challenging. Research has shown that disclaimer labels on manipulated social media images have been ineffective at addressing negative consequences of exposure (Fardouly & Holland, 2018). It is thus crucial to further investigate this topic and identify efficient mechanisms to warn users about misleading and deceptive media messages.

A "code of conduct" to limit the use of digitally altered images online is another option to encourage more realism online and its creation should involve policy makers, social media companies, academics and online users. "Photoshop laws" such as in France and Israel are good examples in this direction, although just like disclaimer labels, their efficiency has not yet been empirically shown. An Industry Code of Conduct on Body Image was introduced in Australia in 2009, which required diverse sized models to be used in magazines. A content analysis a year later of young women's magazines swim suit editions showed that more than half of them were upholding elements of the code (Boyd & Moncrieff-Boyd, 2011). However, the voluntary and self-regulatory nature of the code has been criticized for being too soft on the fashion industry (Seseljia & Sakzewski, 2017).

Another recent political attempt to regulate harmful online content has been Germany's social media law, which was released on 1 January 2018 to reduce hate speech and cyberbullying on social media platforms. Content moderators have been employed at so-called deletion centers to delete or block violent comments that could be harmful to the community (Bennhold, 2018). While this approach is still a relatively young pilot project which without doubt needs continuous development based on empirical evidence, it constitutes an interesting legislative initiative to monitor and regulate content shared via social media that might negatively affect its users. It is thus conceivable to expand approaches like this to detect deceiving images. However, it must of course be acknowledged that it is potentially more difficult to identify harmful visual content relating to body image. Further understanding is thus needed of health-risking visual social media content, specifically regarding the impact of media exposure on physical and mental health.

Within an environment as vibrant and fluid as the Internet, joint forces are needed to contribute toward decisive change. Brands, celebrities and online influencers should take their share of responsibility to improve the genuine depictions of bodies and lifestyles online. A long-time belief is that thinness is the most efficient advertising strategy, but past studies have highlighted that realistic models with average-size bodies may be equally efficient (e.g. Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). However, we must acknowledge that these attempts still run against mainstream media practices, where women are commonly objectified and the thin body ideal is used as a symbol of virtue, success, beauty, and more (Bordo, 2013; Grogan, 2017). As a result, these escapes from perfectionism may in themselves become promotional stunts and

instead attract attention to the "normal" state of those celebrities, which is the touched-up, staged and deceiving self.

In this regard, parallels to Dove's Campaign For Real Beauty come to mind. The campaign did launch a mainstream conversation about authenticity and staying real, but at the same time did it within the same confines of corporate culture and consumerism, and eventually some argue that it reframed, rather than challenged, the dominant ideology of beauty in order to strengthen its own brand identity among young women (Murray, 2013). In spite of this criticism, Dove remains one of the pioneers in the attempt to promote a more diverse body image through advertising.

Corporate responsibility also relates to the advertising of potentially harmful products on social media, which many celebrities engage in. In February 2019, the medical director of NHS England, professor Stephen Powis, called for social media companies to ban "damaging" ads of weight loss aids endorsed by celebrities and urged influential celebrities to act "responsibly" (NHS England News, 2019). Right now, the rules on what can be promoted on social media are few, but in 2019, the Competition and Markets Authority in the UK launched new guidance for social influencers (Competition and Markets Authority, 2019a). The agency has sent out warning letters to many celebrities, urging them to review any concerning practices, and has secured formal commitments from 16 of them to ensure compliant labeling, according to a recent press release (Competition and Markets Authority, 2019b).

All of the above initiatives need to be accompanied by ongoing research on positive body image and the identification of mechanisms that may eventually trigger body satisfaction to defend users against the internalization of unrealistic beauty ideals. Positive body image has been suggested as a powerful concept (Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010) that can be a "protective filter", used by women, to process and respond to communication in a body-preserving manner. However, there is little exploration of this positive body image in social media research. Social media can have many body positive aspects e.g. community and belonging, skill development, self-mastery, and self-acceptance. Some scholars have already argued for the importance to focus on body functionality (Alleva, Martijn, van Breukelen, Jansen, & Karos, 2015) and some recent studies suggest that yoga practices may positively affect body image (e.g. Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2018).

Body positivity and body neutrality movements may also provide solutions for unrealistic presentations, even though some have come under scrutiny for allegedly promoting obesity. The proliferation of images with people of various shapes, sizes, skin colors, and with visible blemishes that differentiate from the majority of thin-idealized bodies in the media is a crucial step on the way to fostering a more realistic depiction of how bodies actually look. The study by Cohen et al. (2019) has been a valuable academic contribution, demonstrating that exposure to body positive social media content may trigger positivity, such as higher body appreciation.

With its semi-naked and revealing appearance, the beach body is a particularly suitable theme for body positive and diversity-promoting campaigns. Fostering a more grounded understanding on social media of diverse beach bodies may be crucial in helping young people develop a more positive and self-accepting relationship to their semi-naked offline (beach) bodies. The strong connection between online and offline behavior is a particularly important aspect that needs to be explored in depth when designing new ways to diminish health-risking online deception and foster body positivity, be it in academia, policy or elsewhere.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This chapter has offered some strong initial connections between deception theory and the beach body and has raised multiple questions for future research. It demonstrated that the beach body should be studied in more depth and from various academic perspectives, as it is a prominent theme on social media, which affects people globally by sending them into annual "body panic" before summer. There is even reason to believe that body image concerns may increase during summer, when people reveal more of themselves to others. Future research should thus look more closely into individuals' body image in a seasonal context and further explore the role of social media and deception. The achievement of an ideal beach body is typically linked to a range of preparation techniques such as dieting, exercising, and hair removal. While photo manipulation might easily substitute these practices, our data showed a strong link between online and offline behavior, i.e. that there is a need to look perfect not only on social media but also in real life. Therefore, further study is needed on how online and offline behaviors relate to each another.

Future research should also increase our understanding of users' motives for manipulating their images. Self-enhancement is the logical rationale (Markowitz & Hancock, 2018) but our data indicated that further motives may be influential that relate to social status, comparisons with peer groups, need for social appraisal, peer pressure and culture-specific influences.

Another interesting line of inquiry is the assumption about truth and deception related to celebrities and friends. As our group discussions revealed, celebrities are expected to manipulate their photos constantly, but friends are perceived as more realistic and trustworthy. However, whether that is actually true remains to be confirmed through research and some studies are suggesting that this perception of the truthfulness of friends may be misleading (Kleemans et al., 2018). This also brings the question of detection of deception related to body images online, which needs further exploration.

The concept of the beach body, and related deception, could also be studied more broadly by including hashtags around fitness and health. Future content analyses can investigate how these hashtags correlate with body image photos and deception practices, and what kind of messages they communicate to users.

Finally, participants in body image research should be diversified by including more male and LGBT voices, cross-cultural aspects of research on deception and body image, especially from non-Western perspectives.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Beach-Body Ready: The annual and seasonal process of achieving an ideal beach physique as depicted in the media through bodily preparation techniques such as dieting, exercising, hair removal and fake-tanning.

Information Manipulation Theory 2: A theory which focuses on the creation of a deceptive message and on the motivations of the sender.

Mediatized Beach Body: Images of beach bodies displayed on social media and in mass media.

Real Beach Body: Semi-naked figures in swimwear in natural offline environments.

Truth-Default Theory: The theory posits that when people communicate with each other, they tend to presume that their conversation partner is basically honest.