

**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL DESIRABILITY
IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APPEARANCE-
RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA CONSCIOUSNESS
AND FILTER USAGE RATES ON INSTAGRAM**

GÖRÜNÜMLE İLİŞKİLİ SOSYAL MEDYA BİLİNCİYLE
INSTAGRAM'DA FİLTRE KULLANIM ORANLARININ
İLİŞKİSİNDE SOSYAL BEĞENİRLİĞİN ARACI ROLÜ

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of social media with technological advancements has introduced new concepts associated with social media. One such concept can be defined as 'Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness', which refer to deliberate efforts of individuals to present themselves attractively in social media posts. This consciousness has led to increased filter use on platforms such as Instagram. In this context, the study aims to examine the positive relationship between the rise in appearance-related social media consciousness and the use of filters on Instagram. The sample for the study consisted of 351 university students, (251 of whom were female, and 100 male). Measurement tools were the "Social Desirability Scale" and the "Appearance-Related Social Consciousness Scale." One-way ANOVA, t-test, correlation analysis, and mediation analysis methods were used to analyze the data. Results revealed that women had significantly higher social desirability scores than men. In addition, significant relationships were found between social media consciousness levels, social desirability, and use of filters in Instagram photos. Social desirability was identified as a partial and moderate mediator in the relationship between social consciousness and the use of filters.

ÖZ

Sosyal medya kullanımının teknolojik ilerlemelerle birlikte artması, sosyal medyayla ilişkili kavramların ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır. Bu kavramlardan biri, bireylerin kendilerini bilinçli olarak çekici göstermeye çalıştığı sosyal medya paylaşımlarında önemli hale gelen 'Görünümle ilişkili Sosyal Medya Bilinci' olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu bilinç, özellikle Instagram gibi platformlarda filtre kullanımının yaygınlaşmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Bu bağlamda, yapılan araştırma, görünümle ilişkili sosyal medya bilincinin artışının Instagram'da filtre kullanım oranlarıyla olan pozitif ilişkisini incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini oluşturan 351 üniversite öğrencisinden 251'i kadın ve 100'ü erkektir. Çalışmada kullanılan ölçüm araçları arasında 'Sosyal Beğenirlik Ölçeği' ve 'Görünümle ilişkili Sosyal Bilinç Ölçeği' bulunmaktadır. Verilerin analizinde tek yönlü ANOVA, t test, korelasyon analizi ve aracılık analizi yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, kadınların sosyal beğenirlik seviyesinin erkeklerinkine göre anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek olduğu belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca sosyal medya bilinç düzeyi, sosyal beğenirlikle Instagram fotoğraflarında filtre kullanım oranı arasındaki ilişkiler anlamlı bulunmuştur. Sosyal beğenirliğin, sosyal bilinç düzeyi ile filtre kullanım oranı arasındaki ilişkide kısmi ve orta derecede aracı bir rol oynadığı ortaya konmuştur.

INTRODUCTION

Social media, which has recently become a significant part of many people's lives, encompasses platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook, where users can share the content they create (Lewallen et al., 2016, p. 1). The use of for various purposes social media is increasing day by day with the impact of technological developments (Erbiçer, 2020, p. 192; Işık & Kaptangil, 2018, p. 696). With this increase, social media is gaining more space in the lives of individuals and deepening its impact on society (Bekalu et al., 2019, p. 69-80).

People use social media for various purposes, including gathering information, communicating with others, enjoying themselves, and forming new relationships (Güvendeğer Doksat, 2023, p. 1). It sounds like you're describing the various activities that social media users can participate in, such as sharing original content, playing games, and communicating online, post photos and videos within the groups they create (Andreasen et al., 2017, p. 287). By creating a new interpersonal reality that provides easy access to others' photos (Nesi et al., 2018, p. 277), social media emphasizes physical appearance and offers the opportunity to share photos at any time (Fox & Vendemia, 2016, p. 593; de Vries et al., 2016, p. 213). Users, who are constantly exposed to this emphasis, strive to look more beautiful and attractive in the photos they share.

The desire to be seen and liked is based on individuals' desire to be appreciated, the need to receive positive feedback and to feel valuable (Bingöl & Çelik, 2021, p. 190). Social media stands out as an important platform in meeting these needs of people to be liked and approved (Çakmak, 2018, p. 137-152). The immediacy with which any photo shared on social media can reach a wide audience prompts individuals to be more conscious of their appearance (Deighton Smith & Bell, 2017, p. 3). Thus, physical appearance in social media posts has taken precedence over the actual reason for sharing. In addition, the digital environment leads individuals to exhibit their virtual identities and this situation causes individuals to constantly compare themselves with others (Sünbül, 2022, p. 7). These comparisons through social media lead individuals to seek high levels of social admiration (Tremolada et al., 2022, p. 2). The desire to be visible and

admired by others leads individuals to edit their photos in an effort to present themselves differently than they are on social media.

Social Desirability

As a social being, humans need to establish social relationships with others (Ayaz & Hamit, 2023, p. 38). The characteristics arising from the relationships developed by the individual in his/her social environment and the process of adaptation to the social environment reveal the concept of social admiration (Üstündağ, 2022, p. 1). Throughout human history, it has been important to be liked and to be chosen among others; therefore, people strive and worry about improving themselves (Güvendeğer Doksat, 2023, p. 1).

Social desirability represents an individual's tendency to share positive traits with others (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960, p. 353; Furnham, 1986, p. 385; McCrae & Costa, 1983, p. 882; Johnson et al., 2002, p. 1661-1666) with the desire to be acceptable in interpersonal relationships such as social acceptance, approval, popularity, social status and leadership (Özbirecikli, 2006, p. 395). It also denotes people's inclination to avoid socially undesirable traits and embrace socially desirable ones (Phillips & Clancy, 1972, p. 923).

Individuals' self-presentation is often based on conformity to social norms and others (King & Bruner, 2000: 80; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000, p. 221). Hence, individuals with high levels of social desirability often strive to portray socially desirable traits more positively (Hough, 1998, p. 209), playing games, and communicating online. They portray themselves in a more favorable manner than they actually are by exaggerating their characteristics such as attitudes and behaviors (Krumpal, 2013, p. 2030; Phillips & Clancy, 1972, p. 925). Individuals with low social desirability tend to be more realistic (McCrae & Costa, 1983, p. 883). In addition, while individuals unconsciously display a positive image, they can also realize a conscious self-presentation (Paulhaus, 1984, 1994, p. 608). In this context, social desirability can occur both consciously and unconsciously. Therefore, the relationship between social desirability and appearance and how it manifests in social media is an important issue.

Social media reinforces taboos and gender roles about how men and women should look in society (Manago et al., 2008, p.1). Young females are now encouraged to strive not only for thinness but also for a fit and toned physique (Deighton Smith & Bell, 2018, p. 5). Similarly, young males are also striving to have a more muscular appearance (Edwards et al., 2016, p. 63). Social media provides an environment that consistently emphasizes the significance of physical appearance and facilitates social comparison (Choukas & Bradley et al., 2020, p. 168). Moreover, the ability of social media to facilitate photo-based sharing has led individuals to place significant emphasis on comments regarding their physical appearance (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 339). This could be attributed to the spread of culturally defined beauty standards through comparing oneself with others and internalizing societal standards (Jones, 2004, p. 823).

Appearance Related Social Media Consciousness

The increasing awareness of social media's influence has led to the emergence of social media consciousness (Choukas Bradley, 2020, p. 166). The concept of social media consciousness was first introduced by Choukas-Bradley et al. (2018) and includes an individual's cognitive and behavioral strategies regarding their appearance on social media, as well as their awareness of how appealing their thoughts and actions appear in that context (Choukas Bradley et al., 2019, p. 2). It also emphasizes the need for individuals to have a critical perspective when producing content on social media (Karacan Doğan & Durmuş, 2023, p. 723).

Evaluating the degree of social media consciousness entails determining individuals' recognition of the relevance of their thoughts and actions to their social media audience (Bradley et al., 2020, p. 164; Öngören et al., 2021, p. 33). Within this framework, individuals with high social media consciousness are inclined to use social media content in a thoughtful and deliberate manner (Karacan Doğan & Durmuş, 2023, p. 723). Furthermore, social media consciousness can give rise to various psychological or sociological concepts and issues related to appearance. A study conducted in the US indicated that high levels of social media consciousness among women were linked to

increased feelings of dissatisfaction with one's body and symptoms of depression (Choukas Bradley et al., 2019, p. 4). In this context, it can be expected that people with high social media consciousness will also have elevated levels of social desirability lead to increased use of filters in their own photos on Instagram.

Filter Usage on Instagram

Unlike offline interactions, social media has the potential to increase individuals' appearance concerns (Cohen, Newton John, & Slater, 2018, p. 73). This situation pushes individuals to express themselves differently from their real identities on social media (Güney, 2017, p. 207-213). Thus, users try to show themselves to others by sharing their idealized profiles and images with other users (Küçük, 2020, p. 56-62).

Social media platforms allow for appearance-oriented social comparisons (Manago et al., 2015, p. 3). This may increase individuals' efforts to perfect their own photographs by comparing themselves with the idealized photographs they see on social media (Fox & Vendemia, 2016, p. 593; Kleemans et al., 2018, p. 94). Allows users to create and edit photos that they want to make look attractive by adding filters to them social media, which can increase their attractiveness (McLean et al., 2015, p. 1138).

RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

When the use of social media, which has gained an important place in our lives day by day, is examined, it can be thought that social desirability may have an effect on the relationship between appearance-related social media consciousness and filter usage rates on Instagram. Many people tend to use filters on their own photos in order to gain the admiration of others and to display a perfect image. This shows how important it is to be visible on social media and to be accepted by society. In this framework, examining the correlation between social media consciousness and the frequency of filter usage in Instagram posts, taking into account social desirability levels, is crucial. The diagram illustrating the model of this research is depicted in Figure 1.

Today, social media makes individuals more visible by increasing their efforts to leave a positive impression on

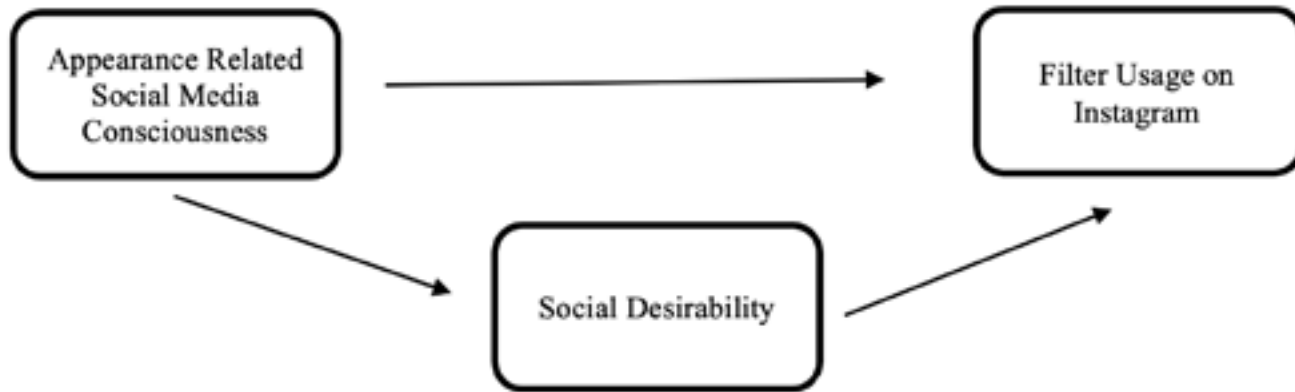


Figure 1. The Mediating Role of Social Desirability in the Relationship between Social Media Consciousness and Filter Usage Rate on Instagram

others. This situation supports individuals' tendency to exhibit behaviors in accordance with social norms and social expectations. In particular, the extent to which people with high social desirability have developed social media consciousness is important in relation to their efforts to be liked on social media and the conscious use of the filters used. The research aims to investigate whether university students' use of filters on Instagram increases with their awareness of appearance-related aspects of social media, and also examines how social desirability influences this relationship. Additionally, the study aims to reveal the interactions of these variables by analyzing the relationships between the level of social desirability, social media consciousness and the use of filters in their own photos on Instagram in terms of demographic characteristics. There are a limited number of studies that examine the relationships between social media consciousness, social desirability level and filter usage rates on Instagram among university students and reveal the role of social desirability as a mediating variable in these relationships. In this context, this study can address this deficiency in the literature and serve as a foundation for future research. Moreover, the study also explores

the influence of social desirability and social media consciousness on social media.

Hypotheses

- H1: There is a notable correlation between appearance-related social media consciousness and the extent of filter usage on Instagram.
- H2: There is a notable correlation between appearance-related social media consciousness and social desirability.
- H3: There is a notable relationship between social desirability and the rate of filter usage on Instagram.
- H4: Social desirability has a mediating role in the relationship between filter usage rate on Instagram and appearance-related social media consciousness.
- H5: The mean scores of social media consciousness differs according to demographic characteristics.
- H6: Filter usage rates on Instagram differ according to demographic characteristics.
- H7: Social desirability means scores differ according to demographic characteristics.

METHOD

In this research, the questionnaire method was used as one of the quantitative data compilation tools. Before commencing the data collection process, permission for the application was secured from Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University Human Research Ethics Committee in Social Sciences at its meeting dated 01.02.2024 and 2024/01 (Protocol No. 2024/18). Participants were chosen using convenient and snowball sampling methods and accessed the measurement tools via online links. Participants provided consent to voluntarily take part in the research. The gathered data were analyzed using SPSS 26 software. In the study, the relational survey model was utilized to reveal the relational strength between variables and to accurately describe a situation.

In this situation, correlation analysis was undertaken to investigate the relationships between the level of social desirability, social media consciousness, and the rate of filter use in self-photos on Instagram among university students. In addition, the relationship between appearance-related social media consciousness and the rate of filter use in self-photos on Instagram was evaluated according to the level of social desirability. In the study, the independent variable is social media consciousness and the dependent variable is the rate of filter use on Instagram. The relationship between these two variables and social desirability level and whether they differ according to demographic characteristics will be examined. Based on the findings and discussions of previous research, it is assumed that increasing social media consciousness is effective on increasing the rate of filter usage on Instagram.

Young individuals allocate a significant portion of their time on visually rich social media applications like Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook for activities such as socializing with friends, coordinating plans, staying informed about current events, sharing hobbies, seeking inspiration, and showcasing their creativity (Rideout & Robb, 2018, p. 18; Nesi et al. 2018, p. 271; Sherman et al. 2016, p. 1028). For this reason, the study’s sample comprises university students studying at associate, undergraduate and graduate level in Turkey, the majority of whom are young generations. The recent increase in

university students’ interest in social media and the fact that Instagram users are generally young people are among the reasons for determining the population of the study as university students. The research was conducted using random sampling technique with participants selected from different universities and different departments. A total of 352 university students studying at associate, undergraduate and graduate levels participated in the study. When the distribution of the sample group by gender was analyzed, it was determined that 251 (71.5%) of the participants were woman and 100 (28.5%) were man. Descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics of the students included in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

		Frequency (n= 351)	Percent (%)
Gender	Woman	251	71.5
	Man	100	28.5
Age	17-23	273	77.8
	24-29	57	16.2
	30-35	11	3.1
	36-59	10	2.9
Education	Associate Degree	55	15.7
	Bachelor’s Degree	261	74.4
	Master’s Degree	23	6.6
	PhD	12	3.4

Data Collection Instruments

In order to identify the demographic characteristics of the students who contributed to the research, a form including age, gender, educational status and department information was created. At the end of the demographic information form, a seven-point Likert-type scale was used to measure the use of filters in their own photos on Instagram. Then, the participants were presented with the “Social Desirability Scale” and “Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale”.

In the study, social desirability was measured through the Social Desirability Scale developed by Erzen et al.

Consisting of 15 items, this scale was prepared in a 5-point Likert format. The researchers who devised the scale indicated that the scale exhibited a two-factor structure, and that the factors demonstrated structural adequacy across various samples. Based on the findings of the exploratory factor analysis of the scale, it was found that the factor structure accounted for 49.14% of the total variance. The initial scale reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .84. (Erzen et al., 2021, p. 879). In this research, the internal consistency Cronbach's alpha coefficient computed for the entire scale was determined to be .82. Given this result, it can be concluded that the Social Desirability Scale is reliable for this study.

In the study, social media consciousness was measured by the Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMC) developed by Sophia Choukas-Bradley (2020) and adapted into Turkish by Öngören et al. Consisting of 13 items, this scale was primed in a 7-point Likert format. In the exploratory factor analysis, it was reported that the scale had a single factor structure and explained 68.14% of the variance. It was stated that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the original scale was .95 (Sophia Choukas-Bradley, 2020), and the alpha value obtained in the Turkish adaptation was .94 (Öngören et al., 2021). In this research, the Cronbach alpha value of the scale was determined as .91. Based on this result, it can be said that the ASMC is also reliable for this study.

Data Analysis

The research data were analyzed using SPSS 26 software. As an initial step in data analysis, preliminary analyses were undertaken to investigate the properties of the scales used, normality, homogeneity, assumptions of extreme values, and correlation estimates among the study variables. Formun ÜstüFormun Altı A reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to assess the reliability of the scales, revealing high reliability. Frequency analysis was employed to ascertain the demographic characteristics of the sample. The comparison of the demographic data and the mean scores of the main variables was executed with "Independent Sample t-Test"

and "One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)". Finally, the relationships between the main model variables were analyzed using Pearson Correlation Analysis.

In order to test the mediating effect of social desirability on the relationship between the level of appearance-related social media consciousness and the rate of filter use in self-photos on Instagram, which is the main purpose of the study, the analyses were conducted within the framework of the model created using the SPSS Process Macro 3.5 (Model 4) tool (Hayes, 2018). Interpreted were the results from the model using standardized path coefficients (β) and explained variance (R^2) values. In the bootstrap method, bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects were constructed at a 95% significance level with 5,000 replication samples. Signifying a significant mediation effect is a confidence interval that excludes zero.

RESULTS

First, normality, kurtosis and skewness scores were analyzed to ascertain if the collected data followed a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010, p. 113). When the results of the analysis are analyzed, it is observed that the skewness values are in the range of .391 to 1.228 and kurtosis values are in the range of -.500 to .769. These findings show that the variables are distributed quite close to the normal distribution (Fidell, 2009).

Then, a t-test was conducted to determine whether the main model variables differed according to gender. As seen in Table 2, according to the results of the independent sample t test conducted when the sample was grouped according to gender, significant disparities were identified between the mean scores of the main model variables of gender only at the level of social desirability ($t=2.5$, $p<.05$), while social media consciousness ($t=1.9$, $p>.05$) and filter use ($t=-.18$, $p>.05$) did not differ by gender. At the level of social desirability, it was determined that the mean scores of female were higher than male. ANOVA analysis conducted to determine whether the main model variables differed according to other demographic variables (age, education level) did not yield significant results.

Table 2. t-test results of the main model variables by gender

	N	Xort	SS	Sd	t	p
Social Desirability						
Woman	251	29.24	8.24	1.68	2.5	.013
Man	100	26.74	8.95			
Social Media Consciousness						
Woman	251	35.02	14.67	.001	1.9	.065
Man	100	31.80	14.81			
Filter Usage						
Woman	251	2.02	1.2	3.2	-.18	.86
Man	100	2.05	1.4			
*p<.05, **p<.01						

Table 3. Relationship between social desirability, social media consciousness and filter use

	Social Desirability	Social Media Consciousness	Filter Use
Social Desirability	1		
Social Media Consciousness	.704**	1	
Filter Use	.258**	.255**	1
*p<.05, **p<.01			

The relationships between the main model variables were examined using Pearson Correlation Analysis. As seen in Table 3, there was a positive significant correlation at the level of .71 between university students' social media consciousness levels and their social desirability levels ($p < .05$). According to this result, it can be said that as the level of social media consciousness increases, students' social desirability levels also increase. A positive significant relationship of .26 was found between students' social desirability levels and filter usage rate ($p < .05$). According to this result, it can be said that as the social desirability level increases, the filter usage rate also increases. Furthermore, a positive significant relationship at the level of .26 was found between social media consciousness and filter usage rate ($p < .05$). According to this finding, it can be said that as the social media consciousness related to appearance increases, the filter usage rate also increases. The findings show that there is a moderate and strong positive relationship pattern between the research variables.

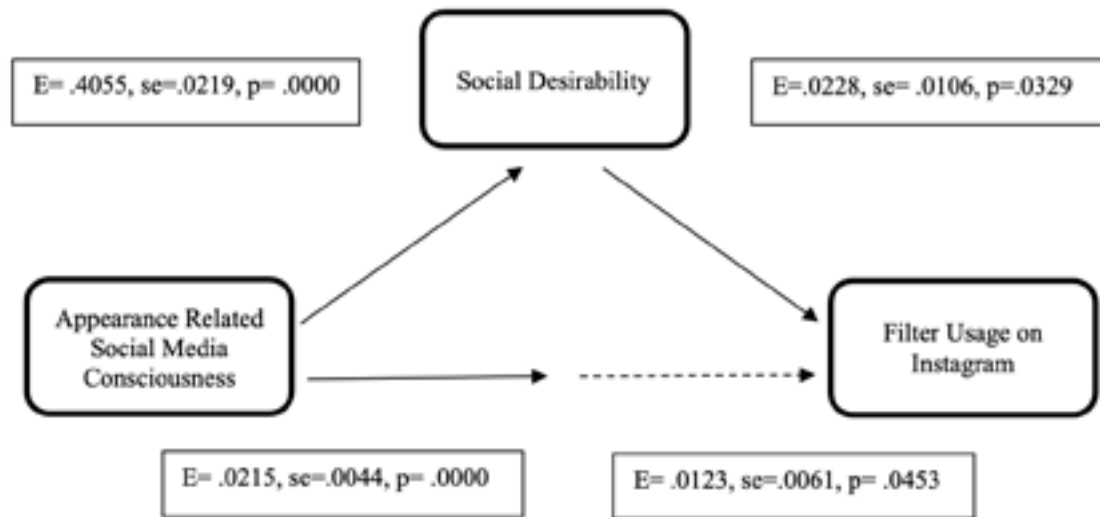
In the regression analysis conducted to determine whether there is a multicollinearity problem, the Tolerance statistic value is .505 and this value is greater than .20. VIF

(Variance Inflation Factor) values are 1.981 and below 10. Condition index value is 5.934 and this value is below 20. These results show that multicollinearity is not a problem between independent and predictor variables. Since the data are normally distributed, there is no multicollinearity problem and there are significant relationships between the variables, mediation analysis can be performed.

According to the results of the mediation analysis conducted with Hayes' Model No. 4, appearance-related social media consciousness significantly predicts the rate of filter use on Instagram (Beta=.25, E= .0215, SE=.0044, $t= 4.9240$, $p= .0000$, LLCI= .0129, ULCI= .0301). Appearance-related social media consciousness statistically significantly predicts the mediator variable of social desirability (E= .4055, SE=.0219, $t= 18.5016$, $p= .0000$, LLCI= .3624, ULCI= .4486). When social desirability is included in the model, the predictive effect of appearance-related social media consciousness on filter usage rate (Beta=.15) decreases (E= .0123, SE=.0061, $t= 2.0095$, $p= .0453$, LLCI= .0003, ULCI= .0244). These results indicate that social desirability is a partial and moderate mediating variable in the relationship between social media consciousness and filter usage rate.

Table 4. The mediating role of social desirability

	E	se	p	LLCI	ULCI
Total Effect	.0215	.0044	.0000	.0129	.0301
Direct Effect	.0123	.0061	.0453	.0003	.0244
Indirect Effect	.0092	.0046		.0006	.0187
*p<.05, *p<.01					

**Figure 2.** The Mediating Role of Social Desirability

As a result, social desirability was found to be a mediating variable in the social media consciousness and filter usage rate on Instagram. In this framework, as a result of the increase in appearance-related social media consciousness, there will be an increase in the rate of filter use on Instagram with an increase in the desire for social desirability. Social desirability has a significant effect on the relationship between social media consciousness and filter use. Ignoring the effect of social desirability will weaken the relationship between social media consciousness and filter use.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The use of social media has increased with technological advances and individuals' tendency to want to be liked socially has strengthened, making visibility on social media important. Users have started to use filters in their photos

to make themselves more attractive on social media. In this framework, this study aims to prove the relationship between the increase in social media consciousness and the increase in the rate of filter use on Instagram and to reveal the mediating role of the concept of social desirability in this process.

Young people devote the majority of their time to visual-intensive social media sites. Therefore, in this study, university students who actively use social media were selected as the sample. Young adults in the university period attach great importance to their own appearance in their social media posts in order to meet their needs to be liked, appreciated and valued by others. In this framework, social media has a significant impact on meeting individuals' desires for visibility and admiration.

The increasing use of social media has led to an in-depth

study of this field from sociological and psychological perspectives and has led to the emergence of new concepts. One of these concepts is appearance-related social media consciousness. Likewise, social desirability, which plays an important role in socialization in virtual environments, is another concept that needs to be examined. Therefore, it is crucial to concentrate on being visible on social media and being liked by others. This study presents a new model by demonstrating that social likability plays a mediating role in the relationship between appearance-related social media consciousness and filter usage rate on Instagram.

In the study, the relationships social media consciousness, Instagram filter usage rate and social desirability scores of university students were examined. The relationships between social media consciousness and Instagram filter usage rate, social desirability, and social desirability and Instagram filter usage rate were found to be positive and significant. Social desirability was proven to play a partial and moderate role as a mediating variable in the relationship between social consciousness and filter usage rate. This study shows that young people's filter use affects their body appearance-related consciousness and social desirability levels, suggesting that showing oneself differently is a social mechanism. Accordingly, individuals' consciousness about their appearance leads them to use filters in their photos in order to make themselves more attractive and to be liked.

In addition, it was discovered that the mean scores of females were significantly higher than male at the level of social admiration (Başpınar, 2021, p. 48). This finding shows that women attach more importance to their needs for admiration and social acceptance than men. According to the results of the research, the fact that women's social admiration scores are significantly higher than men's may be due to the fact that today's social changes affect women's desire to be liked more than men. As a result, the research hypotheses were supported and the results expected at the beginning of the study were largely achieved.

In the light of these findings, some suggestions can be made for future studies on similar topics. Suggestions for future studies based on the research findings can be

listed as follows. The relationship between social media consciousness and filter usage rate on Instagram can be replicated using data obtained from various participant groups, at different points in time, and with different samples. Mediating and moderating variables that may affect the level of filter use on Instagram can be added to the main model. In addition, new models can be developed in which filter use on Instagram is an independent variable and its effect on factors such as social acceptance, ostracization and aesthetic concerns can be taken into consideration. In addition, in future studies, the relationship between the variables in the main model and demographic characteristics can be examined in detail and demographic information categories can be reported in detail.

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