Picture-perfect lives on social media: a cross-national study on the role of media ideals in adolescent well-being

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## Sample

1,983 adolescents (49.7% girls) aged 12 to 19 years old (M = 14.41 years) distributed across the four countries as follows:
(1) Austria: 368 adolescents (18.6% which 54.1% girls and between 13 to 19 years old);
(2) Belgium: 675 adolescents (34.0% which 43.6% girls and between 12 to 16 years old);
(3) Spain: 564 adolescents (28.4% which 54.6% girls and between 13 to 17 years old);
(4) South Korea: 376 adolescents (19.0% which 49.1% girls and 12 to 15 years old)

# Abstract

A number of studies have suggested that social media use may
be negatively related to adolescents’ well-being. One explana\_x0002\_tion for this relation may lie in the internalization of various
types of ideals displayed on social media; however, research
supporting this reasoning is largely absent. This survey study
among 1,983 Austrian, Belgian, Spanish, and South Korean
adolescents (aged 12–19, 49.7% girls) addressed this gap and
found that Instagram use was positively related to the inter\_x0002\_nalization of professional, social, sexual, and romantic ideals,
and Facebook use was positively related to the internalization
of social and romantic ideals. In turn, the internalization of
sexual ideals was related to poor mental well-being.
Furthermore, Facebook use was also directly associated with
poor mental well-being. Cross-national differences played an
important role in that South Korea significantly differed from
Austria, Belgium, and Spain in the relations between social
media use, the internalization of social ideals, and poor mental
well-being. We also found differences among Belgium, Austria,
and Spain in the relations between social media use, the
internalization of professional, social, and sexual ideals, and
poor mental well-being.

# Outcome

"Facebook use was positively related to the internalization of social and romantic ideals but not to the internalization of professional and sexual ideals. In addition, Instagram use was positively related to the internalization of professional, social, sexual, and romantic ideals. Social and romantic relationships are the main subjects of Facebook pictures and Instagram further coincide with its status as an excellent platform for adolescents to learn from observing idealized role models. Instagram use was positively related to the internalization of professional and sexual ideals, considering it's s focus on self-presentation, which encourages users to display (biased) content and be exposed to messages on professional and sexual ideals more frequently than on Facebook. The internalization constructs may only be partly explained by social media use, as personal goals are also shaped by other socialization agents, such as parents (education expectations) and peers (determining conceptions about idealized romantic relationships). Additionally, merely measuring usage oversimplifies the possible effects of social media on adolescents’ well-being; it is possible that exposure to media ideals on social media is not necessarily negatively related to mental well-being but if perceived as attainable, individuals can feel inspired and can generate positive outcomes toward well-being.
In line with the the collectivistic-individualistic and masculine-feminine distinctions between countries, South Koreans reported high
scores of internalizing social ideals, Spaniards reported to have internalized sexual ideals to a rather high extent on Instagram and Austria which is characterized as a highly masculine society post more often about their professional achievements on Facebook than Belgians." (de Lenne et al., 2020, pp. 70-74)