



## Fencers' Social Media Awareness Levels Related to Appearance

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### Keywords

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### ABSTRACT

Appearance perception is a marketing value linked to the concept of taste. Creating an appreciation for followers is one of the most important goals of almost every sector to market products and services. Athletes around the world also use social media effectively to create a perception of their appearance through their followers. Based on this fact, the aim of the research was to determine the social media awareness levels of elite fencers related to appearance and to reach theoretical conclusions that can represent the general population by analyzing them in terms of demographic variables. The sample of the research consisted of 354 elite fencers who are actively practicing fencing and were selected by the convenience method. "The Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale" developed by Sophia Choukas-Bradley et al and the "Demographic Information Form" were used as data collection tools. Computerized statistical methods were used to analyze the data. In addition to descriptive statistics, normality tests were applied before the analysis, a t-test for independent groups for pairwise comparisons, and One-Way ANOVA / Kruskal-Wallis tests for multiple comparisons. As a result of the analysis, differences were found in terms of sex, age, and national sportsmanship variables among elite fencers' social media awareness levels related to appearance, while no difference was found in terms of educational status variables.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the concept of liking becomes more valuable, people pay attention to their appearance according to global values and criteria to become admired individuals in their circles. The most important component of the concept of liking is the concept of the body. Turner explains the concept of the body as a form of representation that is influenced by economic and political as well as cultural and social processes in every era [1]. Some of the meanings attributed to the body have changed over time, according to Rudd and Lennon [2], and the body is often associated with individual differences such as appearance, preference, power, status, and psychological well-being in modernism. As a result, individuals may encounter a variety of stimuli in their daily lives that expose them to a variety of pressures through their appearance. These stimuli primarily reach individuals through factors such as daily conversations, an increase in aesthetic operations, advertisements, magazines, and fashion [3]. Of course, the most important tool

used to reflect body image is social media. Rodgers et al. emphasized that it is related to sociocultural structure, suggesting that it mediates the internalization of social appearance ideals and social comparisons [4]. In line with these theories, people are imposed on adolescents and young adults to look fit, to be skinny, and to be fit as a result of the easy accessibility and widespread use of various communication tools related to popular culture and the internet [5]. Thus, it is possible to say that the perception of body image has become both a protective factor affecting people's emotional states and an important factor determining their relationships through social comparison [6].

Within this context, people tend to compare themselves with others in terms of body image under the influence of mass media and the internet, which are the determinants of social life [5]. Considering that the number of internet users in the world increased to 4.95 billion in 2022 and

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that it penetrated 62% of the world's population, the level of sharing among people is also understood.

Body image has turned into an image value that has gained importance in "sports", one of the channels where the concept of "body" is prominent. Recently, it has been observed that performance athletes have increased their success-oriented posts about sports on social media [7]. In fact, elite athletes face increasing demands to create a new media presence on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter [8]. The research is thought to be important in terms of testing whether the theory of "social comparison" [9] proposed by social psychologist Festinger is related to athletes' body image. The theory is based on the assumption that there is a motive for individuals to make accurate evaluations about themselves, and it explains how individuals compare themselves with other people to eliminate uncertainties about their abilities and opinions and to obtain an accurate self-definition.

The most important component of the concept of body image in sports is aesthetics. This research was designed by wondering how elite fencers reflect themselves physically to the outside world in aesthetic integrity, as do many branch athletes. Generally, society's body image expectation for athletes is that they should always be fit, physically attractive, and muscular. It is known that in ancient Greece, nudity was seen as a tool used by artists to depict various roles of men, including their heroism and status, up to and including their defeat [10] Almost every sector in the world offers its products or services through social media, presents them to consumers, and even directs the supply according to the demands. As a medium where the human body is frequently shared visually like products and services, social media has gained more importance than ever in terms of the quantification and dissemination of the value attributed to the body. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the individual can exist with the image of the body [11] and the research is considered valuable in terms of evaluating how effective the philosophy that people attach

importance to this terms of existence can be on social media.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this research, which will be conducted to examine the social media awareness levels of elite fencers related to appearance, the cross-sectional survey model, one of the general survey models, was used. The research sample included 354 fencers who were reached by convenience sampling method. "The Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale" [12]. and the "Demographic Information Form" were used to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the athletes

The Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale was developed by Sophia Choukas-Bradley and colleagues [12] to identify appearance-related social media consciousness experiences. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.90. The scale is a 7-point Likert-type scale consisting of 13 items. The scale is scored as (1) Never, (2) Almost Never, (3) Rarely, (4) Sometimes, (5) Often, (6) Almost Always, (7) Always. The lowest possible score that can be obtained from the unidimensional scale is 13 and the highest score is 91. A high score indicates appearance-related social media use disorder. Furthermore, high scores are associated with body image variables, eating disorders, and depressive symptoms and support negative body image perception [12].

### 2.1. Statistical analysis

In order to express the data obtained from the audience with numerical values, they were transferred to the computer environment and necessary statistical analyzes were performed. Before the analysis, normality test was performed for the sample group and it was determined that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, nonparametric tests were used. Therefore, in addition to arithmetic mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), frequency (f) values, chi-square test was applied and z test was used for row-column comparison.

### 3. RESULTS

**Table 1.** T-Test Results Between Scale Scores of Athletes According to Sex Variables

Gender	n	$\bar{X}$	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	T	SD	p
Women	183	46.80	17.07	.033	-.864	4.083	352	.000
Men	171	39.46	16.73	.650	-.227			

p<.05\*

When Table 1 is analyzed, it is understood that there is a significant difference between the scale scores of male and female fencers

(U=11625.000; p=.00, p<.05). It has been found that the mean scores of female fencers are higher than male fencers.

**Table 2.** ANOVA Test Results Between Scale Scores of Athletes According to Age Variables

Ages	n	$\bar{X}$	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	F	p	Tukey
18-25 (1)	191	20.65	2.37	.494	-1.099	12.50	.000	1>3; 2>3
26-35 (2)	114	29.73	2.82	.335	-1.180			
Over 35 (3)	49	40.65	3.69	.353	-1.237			
Total	354	26.34	7.55	.890	-.008			

p<.05\*

In the analysis results in Table 2, it is observed that there is a significant difference between the scale scores of the fencers according to the age variable (F=12.50; p=.000, p<.05). According to the results of the Tukey Test

conducted to determine the source of the difference, it was observed that fencers in the 18-25 age category and fencers in the 26-35 age category had higher scores than fencers in the 36 and over age category.

**Table 3.** T-Test Results Between Scale Scores According to National Athlete Status

Groups	n	$\bar{X}$	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	T	SD	p
Yes	91	38.12	15.34	.430	-.648	-3.565	177.775	.000
No	263	45.03	17.58	.234	-.830			

p<.05\*

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that there is a significant difference between the scale scores of fencers who are and are not national athletes (T=-3.565;

p=.000, p<.05). The fact that fencers who are not national athletes have higher scores than national fencers indicates the direction of the difference.

**Table 4.** ANOVA Test Results Between Scale Scores According to Fencing Branches of Athletes

Branches	n	$\bar{X}$	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	F	p	Tukey
Epee (1)	140	42.97	17.88	.412	-.595	5.628	.004	3>2
Foil (2)	122	40.06	17.57	.464	-.906			
Sabre (3)	92	47.93	14.93	.155	-.573			

p<.05\*

When Table 4 is examined, it is observed that there is a significant difference between the scale scores of fencers according to their branches (F= 5.628, p=.004, p<.05). According to the results

of the Post-Hoc test conducted to determine the source of the difference, it was seen that the scores of the fencers in the sword branch were higher than the scores of the fencers in the flute branch.

**Table 5.** T-Test Results Between Scale Scores According to Body Mass Index of Athletes

BMI	n	$\bar{X}$	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	T	SD	p
Under 21.7	8	45.44	17.93	.087	-.963	2.405	352	.017
Over 21.7	6	41.05	16.34	.544	-.338			

p<.05\*

All of the sample groups consisting of elite fencers were found to have body mass index (BMI) values (WHO, 2000) referred by the World Health

Organization. Therefore, 2 different groups were created based on the arithmetic mean of BMI values and a statistical difference was sought.

Accordingly, it was determined that there was a significant difference between the scale scores of the fencers with BMI(mean)=21.7 and above (Table 5) ( $T=2.405$ ;  $p=.017$ ,  $p<.05$ ). According to the result of the analysis, the fact that the scale

scores of the fencers with BMI (mean)=21.7 were higher than the scores of those with BMI (mean)=21.7 indicated the direction of the difference.

**Table 6.** ANOVA Test Results Between Scale Scores According to Photo-filter Usage Status of Athletes on Social Media

Groups	n	$\bar{X}$	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	F	p	Tukey
Any (1)	113	31.65	13.06	.949	1.342	64.117	.000	3>2>1
Sometimes (2)	184	45.95	16.03	.268	-.680			
Often (3)	57	57.56	14.04	-.354	-.777			

$p<.05^*$

When Table 6 is examined, it is observed that there is a significant difference between the fencers' scores on the scale according to their photo-filter use on social media ( $F=64.117$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The results of the Tukey test show that

athletes who frequently use photo filters on social media have higher scores than those who sometimes use them and that athletes who sometimes use them have higher scores than those who never use them.

**Table 7.** ANOVA Test Results Between Scale Scores According to Athletes' Frequency of Social Media Use

Groups	n	$\bar{X}$	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	F	p	Tukey
Rarely (1)	3	27.67	16.07	1.545	-	26.422	.000	3>2
Sometimes (2)	100	33.73	15.57	1.109	1.057			
Often (3)	251	47.24	16.38	.131	-.805			

$p<.05^*$

When Table 7 is examined, a significant difference was found between the scores of the fencers according to the frequency of social media use ( $F= 26.422$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The fact that the scores of fencers who frequently use social media

are higher than those who sometimes use it indicates the direction of the difference. Fencers who rarely use social media are limited to 3 people.

**Table 8.** ANOVA Test Results Between Scale Scores According to the Frequency of Sharing Self-Photographs on Social Media

Groups	n	$\bar{X}$	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	F	p	Tukey
Any (1)	53	35.77	16.73	1.145	1.330	39.150	.000	3>1,2
Sometimes (2)	202	39.51	15.90	.638	-.012			
Often (3)	99	54.90	14.55	-.568	-.421			

$p<.05^*$

When Table 8 is examined, a significant difference was found between the scale scores of fencers according to the frequency of sharing photos on social media ( $F= 39.150$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The Tukey test shows the direction of the

difference. It was found that the scores of fencers who frequently shared photos were higher than the scores of fencers who never or sometimes shared photos.

**Table 9.** Kruskal-Wallis Test Results of the Scale Scores of Athletes According to the Frequency of Reviewing Other Individuals' Profiles on Social Media

Groups	n	$\bar{X}$	Skewness	Kurtosis	SD	Chi-square	p	Tukey
Any	17	29.12	.076	-1.682	2	78.206	.000	3>1,2
Sometimes	178	36.80	.673	-.215				
Often	159	52.00	-.030	-.714				

$p<.05^*$

When Table 9 is examined, it is observed that there is a significant difference between the fencers' scores on the scale according to the frequency of reviewing other individuals' profiles on social media (Chi-

square=78.206,  $p=.000$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The fact that the scores of fencers who frequently review other people's profiles are higher than the scores of those who never or sometimes review them indicates the direction of the difference.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Many studies show that the rate of people using social media is increasing day by day [13, 14, 15]. The sports community is also affected by this trend. Accordingly, in this research, some striking findings were obtained in terms of the level of awareness of elite fencers about their own appearance and the use of social media.

As a result of the analyses conducted in terms of sex variables, a significant difference was found between the scores of the fencers on the scale in favor of female fencers (Table 1). In other words, female fencers pay more attention to their appearance on social media than male fencers. Similarly, Sophia Choukas-Bradley and colleagues [12] found that female adolescents have higher levels of awareness than boys [12]. Balcı and Tiryaki (2014) concluded that female high school students were significantly more addicted to Facebook than males [16]. Research on people's use of social media has found that women use social media to interact and spend time, while men use social media to create a social identity [17]. In Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, which guides the theoretical framework of many social psychology studies, it is known that there are various determinations that body satisfaction or dissatisfaction is an important determinant of body satisfaction or dissatisfaction by comparing one's physical characteristics with those of other people [9]. Within the framework of the theory, Haavio-Mannila and Purhonen [18] argue that body dissatisfaction is considered beautiful and attractive in modern and post-modern societies, especially when the female body is thin. It is supported by research that women compare their own bodies intending to have a slim body, which is mostly identified through the media, and that this comparison has many psychological consequences, especially body dissatisfaction [18]. In 25 meta-analysis studies investigating the ideal of a slim/thin body presented in many media outlets and the effect of this situation on body satisfaction, striking results emerged, and in 86% of the studies, it was found that comparing their own body with the ideal of a slim/thin body decreased women's body satisfaction [19]. In this context, the high scores of female fencers on the scale can be associated with the assumption that they are influenced/manipulated by the media, especially

the assumption that they post on social media with more careful scrutiny and that they are detail-oriented. In addition to all these grounds, it is clear that female fencers have a higher level of awareness about their appearance on social media than men.

In the research, significant differences were found in the statistical analysis according to the age variable of the fencers (Table 2). According to the results of the Tukey Test for the source of the difference, it was found that fencers in the 18–25 and 26–35 age categories had higher scores than fencers aged 36 and over. In other words, it was determined that the age factor affected the fencers' social media awareness levels related to appearance. While fencers over 36 years of age do not pay much attention to their appearance on social media, those under 36 do. In other words, athletes who can be considered young experience more appearance anxiety. Today, it could be said that young individuals are more active in the use of technology. Therefore, it can be considered that young fencers use technological devices and therefore social media applications more intensively. Considering that young individuals are born and raised in the digital age and prefer social media instead of traditional forms of communication, it can be claimed that young athletes have a high level of awareness of social media, with the assumption that fencers aged 18–25 and 26–35 use social media more actively than fencers aged 36 and over.

The scores of national and non-national fencers were compared and a significant difference was found in favor of non-national fencers (Table 3). In other words, fencers who are not national athletes pay more attention to their appearance on social media. Since there is no study on the appearance of national athletes on social media in the literature, the importance of this research has increased. Considering the result obtained, it may be assumed that national athletes are higher in the hierarchy of needs than non-national athletes, they are more recognizable and do not need to market themselves much. On the other hand, non-national athletes may spend more time on social media to be recognized and attract more attention. This result suggests that national athletes do not have appearance concerns on social media and do not have such needs.

In the research, the scores obtained from the scale by athletes from different fencing branches were compared with the ANOVA test, and a significant difference was found (Table 4). The results of the Post-Hoc analysis to determine the source of the difference showed that the scores of the fencers in the sword branch were higher than

the scores of the fencers in the flute branch. No similar study was found in the literature. It is accepted that the reaction and perception levels of fencers in the saber branch are faster and quicker than other fencing branches due to the nature of their branch. Considering that such professional qualities affect the character of individuals, it is a fact that these characteristics will also be reflected in their behaviors on social media. Therefore, it can be interpreted that sword fencers may be different from other fencing branches. In other words, sword fencers need to look good on social media.

Body mass index (BMI) determines the perception level of physical appearance. In other words, the BMI score can give an idea of a person's body and appearance. Therefore, it was attempted to conclude the appearance of fencers on social media by comparing BMIs. The scores of the fencers were compared with T-Test in terms of their body mass indexes. A significant difference was found between the appearance-related social media awareness levels of fencers with a BMI (mean) above 21.7 and those with a BMI of 21.7 or below (Table 5). In other words, fencers with a lower BMI have higher appearance awareness levels on social media. In other words, fencers with a low height-to-weight ratio pay more attention to their appearance on social media. In the research conducted, it can be assumed that the source of the difference in favor of fencers with a BMI below 21.7 is a social perception that their appearance and physical measurements should be proper due to the nature of the sport. The high scores of individuals with a BMI below 21.7 on the scale can be interpreted as being more affected by this social perception. Considering the finding in some studies that slim individuals attach more importance to social media appearance than overweight individuals [20, 21], it can be considered normal that fencers who are skinnier in terms of BMI have higher social media appearance concerns.

A significant difference was found in the results of the ANOVA test between the scores of the fencers based on their use of photo-filter, etc., applications in their social media posts (Table 6). The Tukey test revealed that athletes who frequently use photo filters in social media applications have higher scores than athletes who never or sometimes use photo filters. In other words, fencers who frequently use visual filters have a higher level of social media awareness about appearance than others. From the opposite point of view, the fact that individuals who care about how they look on social media use visual filters and try to show themselves as more attractive confirms the proposition. In this context,

it can be hypothesized about the current result based on Goffman's 'Spreading Impression Theory', taking into account the reality of 'duck syndrome' in social media. According to Goffman's theory, when an individual appears in front of other people, they try to express themselves by taking actions by making subtle calculations to get the desired reaction from their surroundings from time to time. On social media platforms, which are under the control of people, individuals can share in the way they want other users to see them. According to Goffman, individuals are curious about how others want to see them and how they will react. They want to keep this situation under control [22]. As much as advanced technology has its advantages, it also leads to problems. In order to express these problems, Sun defines "duck syndrome" as ducks swimming calmly when viewed from the outside, but their underwater limbs are working very fast, and there is a seeming calmness above water and intense effort underwater [23]. Similarly, when manipulated (photo-filtered) photos are shared on social media, some individuals think that they can unconsciously hide their anxiety and depressive states, even if they feel good. The problems apart from these may remain on the invisible bottom of the water, as in the duck syndrome, and they may experience momentary happiness. No similar approaches were found in the literature review related to this research. This makes the problem of the research unique. In the research, the fact that athletes use photo filters more frequently in their social media posts can be associated with their desire to always look strong, attractive, attractive, etc. Furthermore, the next stage of the proposition is that they spend a lot of time and effort to achieve this desire. Considering this situation, it can be said that fencers who frequently use visual filters in their social media posts experience "duck syndrome".

A significant difference was found in the ANOVA test between the scores of the fencers according to the frequency of using social media platforms (Table 7). According to the result of the Tukey test, it was revealed that athletes who frequently use social media have higher scores than those who sometimes use social media. It was concluded that as the frequency of fencers' use of social media increases, their knowledge about social media applications and their level of awareness about appearance increase. In other words, fencers who frequently use social media have higher appearance concerns than others. When the "Uses and Gratifications" theory, which was first proposed by psychologist Elihu Katz, is examined, the view that mass media change the behavior of society has revealed that people use

these tools for different purposes over time [24]. In this context, social media has become a medium that people can easily access and that provides personal satisfaction. Kirhan stated that people try to reach a kind of satisfaction by using social media frequently [25]. In this case, the higher level of social media awareness of fencers who frequently use social media can be interpreted as confirming Katz's "Uses and Gratifications" theory in the sample of fencers.

According to the ANOVA test, a significant difference was found between the scores of the fencers according to the frequency of sharing their own photos on social media (Table 8). According to the results of the Tukey test, it was determined that fencers who frequently share their own photos received higher scores than fencers who never or sometimes share their own photos. In other words, fencers who share frequently have a higher level of consciousness about appearance than others. In fact, the levels of social media use also differ between individuals who share frequently and those who do not. This result means that those who post frequently among fencers have higher appearance concerns. McLean and colleagues concluded that adolescent girls who regularly post pictures of themselves on social media overvalue body shape and weight, body dissatisfaction, dietary restriction, and internalization of slimness compared to those who do not [26]. There is a general belief that fencers have a good physical appearance. Having a good physical appearance may increase the frequency of sharing their own photos due to the 'self-promotion motive' [27]. From the perspective of self-presentation, it can be observed that people's desire to be approved and liked strives for the impression they will leave on other people. Considering that human beings are social, people will undoubtedly choose to emphasize any aspect of themselves that is superior. Goffman's "Spreading Impression Theory", which he refers to as a set of behaviors for the purpose of 'self-promotion' in social psychology, argues that the act of presenting oneself, symbolizing oneself as having a certain quality, is as important as actually having the desired quality [22]. Furthermore, Hortaçsu [28] bases the self-presentation of individuals, which he calls 'identity bargaining', on the realization of a certain identity in interaction with the social environment and the acceptance of a certain identity by others. For this reason, he states that the process of self-promotion can be influenced not only by personality traits but also by the social structure they are in and the unwritten rules that are valid within this structure [28]. With this approach, if the views of fencers are

evaluated within the framework of Goffman's self-promotion and Hortaçsu's identity bargaining theories, it can be interpreted that the image that athletes try to spread on social media expresses their ideal self-state, and accordingly, fencers who frequently share their own photos try to market their identities.

According to the Kruskal-Wallis test, there was a significant difference between the scores of the fencers according to the frequency of reviewing the social media profiles of other individuals (Table 9). According to the Tukey test, it was concluded that fencers who frequently review the social media profiles of other individuals have higher scores than those who never or sometimes review them. In other words, as the frequency of reviewing other people's profiles on social media increases, the person's social media appearance anxiety also increases. The act of looking at other people's profiles on social media is directly proportional to the time spent on social media. Fencers who frequently review other people's social media profiles have high levels of appearance anxiety. Based on Festinger's 'Social Comparison Theory' [9], it has been stated that individuals compare themselves with others to eliminate some uncertainties about their abilities and opinions and to obtain an accepted definition of themselves. This behavioral model may have led fencers to frequently examine the athlete's profile to compare themselves with other individuals. Taylor and colleagues listed the reasons why individuals make social comparisons as 'the need for self-evaluation,' 'the need for self-improvement', 'the need to strengthen the self', and 'the need for the relationship' [29]. Accordingly, it can be said that the reason why fencers frequently examine other people's social media profiles is to be able to compare themselves with them.

As a result, within the framework of many sociological theories and principles, when an evaluation is made on appearance concerns, the level of consciousness about appearance, and the reasons for the use of social media by athletes, it is concluded that social media is used as a supply channel in the general athlete population as well as among fencers and should be evaluated as a tool that can be used for individual marketing and sports marketing. In this way, the effective and widespread use of sociological theories, the starting point of the research, in the name of athlete supply-demand psychology and sports marketing has been tested.

## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is declared by the authors. In addition, no financial support was received.

## Ethics Committee

Data collection was initiated with the approval of Mersin University Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee dated 03/02/2021-02.

## Author Contributions

Study Design, ÜS, DK; Data Collection, ÜS, DK; Statistical Analysis, ÜS, DK; Data Interpretation, ÜS, DK; Manuscript Preparation, ÜS, DK; Literature Search, ÜS, DK. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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