

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Innovative assessment method developed for body image research**

**The Division of Psychological Methodology at the Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences (KL) developed a method to efficiently measure perceptions in real time and in the natural environment of participants. As part of a study on the topic of body satisfaction and the use of social media, which was implemented together with Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, this research method was successfully applied.**

(Krems, 23.10.2022) - Studies on the impact of digital communication on people and their emotional perceptions have become a much stronger focus of psychological studies, not least since the use of social media. A research area at the Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences (KL) is also dedicated to this topic, as digitalization and new study settings require a constant further development of research methods of data collection and in field settings, i.e. in the systematic observation of events in their natural environment. An innovative approach to this has now been developed in Krems, describes Prof. Stefan Stieger, Head of the Division of Psychological Methodology: "It is a new measurement method where we use wearables and their sensors to measure the position of the forearm in 3-dimensional space. For example, a gradual measurement can be achieved by using the angle of the forearm compared to a horizontal plane as a scale. This angle can then be stored locally on the wearable simply by pressing a button."

### **Informative use in an Experience Sampling Method study**

Social media use - especially when viewing images and videos - is consistently associated with a more negative body image. "Most of the studies on the topic are either lab-based or use cross-sectional questionnaires," Stefan Stieger describes. "To bring a new perspective to the research question, we investigated the links between everyday social media activity and body image satisfaction using what we call an Experience Sampling Method design." Together with researchers at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, the developed method was applied in an empirical field study.

Fifty participants were instructed to use the wearable to assess their current body image every time they viewed an image or video on social media for a longer period of time during a 14-day study phase. "Depending on the angle of the forearm, we were able to continuously measure satisfaction with their own body image." The results show that interaction with social media content is significantly associated with lower satisfaction of appearance, explains Stefan Stieger. "Furthermore, we found that looking at personally known people leads to stronger effects than comparing oneself to strangers. These effects remained stable even after taking into account other possible influencing factors (e.g., gender, media use behavior)."

### **Results relevant to practice**

So far, it was known that in 'real' everyday contacts to people, processes of comparison play an important role. The results of the present study show that these processes also seem to play a role in the digital space, and that this effect should not be underestimated – as in our case on the satisfaction with one's own body image. Stefan Stieger explains in detail: "To this end, we proposed various interventions and methods that limit the negative effects of social

media on body image, including reducing the amount of time one spends on social media, changing the profiles and pages one follows on social media, and a better understanding of media literacy."

**Original publication:** Stieger, S., Graf, H. M., Riegler, S. P., Biebl, S., & Swami, V. (2022). Engagement with social media content results in lower appearance satisfaction: An experience sampling study using a wrist-worn wearable and a physical analogue scale. *Body Image*, 43, 232-243. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2022.09.009>

**About Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences (2022)**

At Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences (KL) in Krems, the comprehensive approach to health and disease is a fundamental objective for research and teaching. With its Europe-wide recognized bachelor-master system, KL is a flexible educational institution that is tailored to the needs of students, the requirements of the labor market as well as the scientific challenges. Currently KL hosts about 600 students in the fields of medicine and psychology. The three university hospitals in Krems, St. Poelten and Tulln ensure clinical teaching and research at the highest quality level. In research, KL focuses on interdisciplinary fields with high relevance to health policy - including medical technology, molecular oncology, mental health and neuroscience, as well as water quality and related health aspects. KL was founded in 2013 and accredited by the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (AQ Austria). [www.kl.ac.at/en](http://www.kl.ac.at/en)

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