Shame on Social Media Platforms: An existentialist analysis

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Master in Philosophy of Science, Technology, and Society - PSTS

University of Twente

2022/2023

Table of Contents:

Introduction

Social media platforms, exemplified by Instagram, wield substantial influence over contemporary human relationships. They fundamentally reshape self-presentation, alter perceptions of both ourselves and others, and redefine the dynamics of interpersonal interaction. Consequently, they exert a pervasive impact on relationships in general. Given the paramount role of imagery on social media, the significance of how the body is portrayed and perceived assumes paramount importance for users. Moreover, within the context of rapid social media interactions, emotions play an integral role in shaping these perceptions, particularly when images are involved.

One emotion that emerges as a linchpin within this landscape is shame. Shame is profoundly entwined with the gaze of others upon our bodies and their perceptions thereof. It also intersects with the realm of sexual relations, a domain increasingly interwoven with the digital fabric of contemporary existence. This underscores the pivotal role that shame assumes in the digital sphere, where users frequently engage in practices that markedly differ from real-world dynamics when it comes to the presentation of their bodies. This distinct brand of shame prevalent on social media platforms can potentially amplify unhealthy body image perceptions and self-esteem issues. For instance, research has shown that shame exhibits a stronger correlation with social anxiety and other mental health challenges within the digital realm (Swee et al., 2021). Consequently, delving into the distinctions between conventional shame and its digital counterpart becomes imperative.

To unravel this complex terrain, a philosophical examination of shame becomes essential. However, it is my contention that the traditional philosophical frameworks for understanding shame do not adequately encapsulate the nuances of the emotion as it manifests on social media platforms. Thus, my objective is to answer the pivotal question: "What aspects of philosophical accounts of shame must be reevaluated to comprehensively address this emotion in the digital domain?" To address this question, it is imperative to develop a profound understanding of the

presence of shame on social media platforms, with a particular focus on Instagram, which proves most pertinent in this context.

In the first chapter, I will explore questions such as "In what ways does shame manifest on social media platforms?", "What features of these platforms amplify the presence of shame?", "What are the distinct characteristics of Instagram in this regard?", and "Which mental health issues are closely linked to the emotion of shame on social media platforms, particularly among teenagers?" Once we have a clear grasp of how shame operates on social media platforms, the next step is to scrutinize "How philosophers have historically understood shame?" This entails an analysis of various philosophical accounts of shame, examining how they define and describe it, and the connections they establish between shame and morality. In this exploration, Aristotle and Nietzsche serve as notable starting points. Subsequently, I will delve into the nexus between shame and self, drawing from Max Scheler's philosophical theory of shame. This relationship, I believe, is pivotal in the context of social media platforms, where self-presentation and body perception hold central roles. Nevertheless, in this context, Sartre's perspective on the relationship between self and shame emerges as particularly pertinent, especially due to its emphasis on the visible body (Dolezal, 2012), a critical element in social media platforms like Instagram. Sartre, in his work "Being and Nothingness," elucidates how the gaze of others objectifies the self, leading to a changed self-perception. This objectification can manifest as forms of shame, as Sartre (2003) asserts, marking the realization of being not only a subject but also a subject contingent on the gaze of another subject. This dynamic bears a striking resemblance to the dynamics at play on social media platforms, where users experience altered self-perceptions due to the gaze of others (Lopato, 2015).

The third chapter, therefore, aims to address questions such as "How did Sartre analyse shame?", "Why does his perspective seem suitable for analysing the dynamics on social media platforms?", and "In what aspects is this account less applicable to this context?" As I will illustrate, this gaze significantly differs from real-world interactions, encompassing disparities in both the medium of observation, self-presentation mediums, and the quantity of observers (Cheong, 2023). Once we have explored the specific conditions under which shame manifests on social media platforms, along with identifying aspects where Sartre's theory aids in understanding this phenomenon and areas where it falls short, we can delineate a more suitable framework for comprehending shame

in the context of social media. These considerations can subsequently pave the way for healthier strategies for dealing with shame on social media platforms, along with the potential implementation of technical features to mitigate its effects.

1.Shame on Social Media Platforms

In recent years, the rapid growth of social media platforms has transformed the way people communicate and share information. While these platforms have numerous benefits, they have also given rise to new social and psychological challenges, especially for teenagers (Keles, McCrae, and Grealish, 2020). One such challenge is the experience of shame on social media, particularly on platforms like Instagram (Fitria & Febrianti, 2020). This chapter aims to explore the presence of shame on social media, the reasons why individuals may feel ashamed of showing their bodies, the features of social media that contribute to feelings of shame, especially those that are specific of Instagram, and the proven effects on mental health.

1.1 The presence of shame on social media, with a focus on Instagram

Shame is an emotion that is strongly dependent on social dynamics. Since digital technology and platforms shape many contemporary social dynamics, they are one of the most relevant places to study contemporary shame dynamics. Social media platforms, including Instagram, have become virtual landscapes where individuals showcase their lives, accomplishments, and physical appearances (Santarossa and Woodruff, 2017). The allure of sharing carefully curated moments and images has created an environment that often perpetuates feelings of shame among users. Instagram, in particular, with its emphasis on visual content and the pursuit of the "perfect" aesthetic, can amplify the experience of shame (Kleemans et al., 2018).

Instagram's pervasive influence on body image and self-esteem is evident through the prevalence of comparison and the unrealistic beauty standards that permeate the platform. Users are bombarded with images of flawlessly posed and edited bodies, meticulously crafted lifestyles, and idealized versions of beauty (Sherlock and Wagstaff, 2019). The relentless stream of these idealized images can lead individuals to feel inadequate, unworthy, and ultimately ashamed of their own bodies and lives. Moreover, shame that comes from body objectification on social media

platforms involve both male and females (Boursier and Gioia, 2022), creating an environment fully permeated by unhealthy comparisons.

Comparisons on social media platforms are inevitable, as users scroll through feeds filled with meticulously posed individuals showcasing their seemingly perfect lives (Tiggemann and Anderberg, 2020). This constant exposure to idealized versions of beauty and success can trigger excessive self-comparisons, fostering negative self-perception and reinforcing the belief that one's own body or life falls short of societal expectations. The pressure to conform to these beauty ideals and curated lifestyles can lead to a sense of strong shame for individuals who perceive themselves as not measuring up (Ramadhany and Putri, 2021).

Furthermore, Instagram's and other social media platforms' visual nature and emphasis on appearance contribute to the amplification of body shame. Users are bombarded with images that are often meticulously edited, filtered, and posed to present an unrealistic portrayal of beauty. This distorted reality perpetuates the notion that the only acceptable and desirable bodies are those that align with these unattainable standards (Boursier and Gioia, 2022). Consequently, individuals who do not fit these narrow beauty ideals may experience heightened shame and negative self-consciousness.

The pursuit of validation and external affirmation on Instagram also plays a significant role in fostering feelings of shame. The platform's metrics, such as likes, comments, and followers, serve as quantifiable measures of social acceptance and popularity (Tiggemann et al., 2018). When individuals fail to receive the desired number of likes or followers, it can be interpreted as a form of rejection or a reflection of their perceived inadequacy. This constant seeking of validation and the subsequent disappointment can fuel feelings of shame and contribute to a negative cycle of self-doubt and comparison (Santarossa and Woodruff, 2017).

In summary, the presence of shame on social media platforms, particularly Instagram, is pervasive due to the culture of body comparison, the emphasis on unrealistic beauty standards, and the pursuit of external validation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for both individuals and society to navigate the online world in a healthier and more compassionate manner.

1.2 Features of social media contributing to (body) shame

While the emphasis on visual content and the presence of metrics have already been discussed as contributing factors to body shame on social media, there are two additional features that warrant further exploration: the ability to edit and filter images, and the viral nature of social media.

The ability to edit and filter images on social media platforms has revolutionized the way individuals present themselves online (Maharani, Hawa, and Devita, 2020). With a few simple taps, users can alter their appearance, from smoothing out imperfections to creating an entirely different body shape. This accessibility to image editing tools contributes to the distortion of reality and perpetuates unrealistic beauty ideals (Kleemans et al., 2018). As individuals compare their unaltered bodies to the seemingly flawless, edited images they encounter on their feeds, they may develop a skewed perception of their own appearance. This constant exposure to digitally enhanced images can amplify feelings of inadequacy, as individuals strive to attain an unattainable standard of beauty. The pressure to conform to these fabricated images can result in heightened body shame and a negative impact on self-esteem. For example, Modica (2020) provides evidence that selfie manipulation mediated the associations between selfie posting and body dissatisfaction. In addition, the professionalization of the role of influencers has increased the quality of editing, making it even more difficult for users to understand the artificiality of images. In this way, the shame of not being able to resemble the digitally modified bodies increases, because users are led to believe that those bodies are real.

Additionally, the viral nature of social media plays a significant role in the amplification of body shame. With just a single post, content has the potential to rapidly spread and reach a vast audience. While this rapidity can be positive for sharing important messages, like in the Fort McMurray wildfire's case (Boulianne, Minaker, and Haney, 2018) it also has a downside. Negative and body-shaming content can quickly gain traction, leading to a proliferation of harmful messages and comments. When individuals are exposed to such content, they may internalize the negative messages and experience heightened feelings of shame about their bodies (Hamid, Ismail, and Shamsuddin, 2018). Moreover, the rapid dissemination of body-shaming content can contribute to increase a culture of comparison, as individuals measure their bodies against the negative judgments and critiques expressed by others. This viral aspect of social media can intensify body shame and create a hostile online environment that further perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards.

Understanding the role of image editing and the viral nature of social media in contributing to body shame is crucial for addressing this issue effectively. By promoting authenticity, encouraging responsible use of image editing tools, and fostering a supportive online community, social media platforms may help mitigate the negative impact of these features. It is important to create an environment where diverse body types and appearances are celebrated, and individuals feel empowered and confident in their own unique beauty, avoiding perpetuating those dynamics that spread shame.

1.3 Specific Instagram's relevant features

In this context, Instagram has some features that makes this platform more relevant than the other ones. None of these features is present only on Instagram, due to the fact that the platforms are constantly updated to absorb the most effective features of the other platforms. Yet, the set of these features that Instagram possesses and the social value that this platform has assumed make it overall more relevant for the analysis I want to make here.

1.3.1 The Cult of Perfection: Filtered Self-Presentation and Idealized Imagery

Instagram's feature of filters and editing tools allows users to enhance their photos, creating an illusion of flawlessness and perfection. This emphasis on presenting an idealized version of oneself fosters a culture where users feel compelled to showcase only the most curated and visually appealing aspects of their lives. However, this curated self-presentation sets unrealistic expectations for both one and others. Constant exposure to filtered and highly edited images can lead to a distorted perception of reality, causing individuals to feel inadequate and ashamed of their own imperfections and shortcomings. The pressure to live up to these artificial standards creates a cycle of comparison, self-doubt, and self-criticism, contributing to a pervasive sense of shame (Modica, 2020). This element is made even more relevant by the fact that Instagram is currently the social network that is mostly used for self-representation. The Instagram profile has taken on the role of first place of representation, so much so that it is very often the first thing people go to look at when they want to know who is that person they didn't know up to that moment. This important social role pushes even more than in other contexts towards the editing of one's own photos, as the representation of the self occurs almost exclusively through images.

1.3.2. Public Validation: Likes, Comments, and the Pursuit of Popularity

Instagram's interactive features, such as the ability to like and comment on posts, play a significant role in shaping users' self-esteem and sense of worth. The public nature of these metrics means that the number of likes and positive comments on a post becomes a measure of popularity and social acceptance. Users often find themselves seeking validation and approval from their peers through accumulating likes and positive feedback. Conversely, receiving few likes or negative comments can trigger feelings of shame, as it implies a lack of recognition or affirmation. The reliance on external validation perpetuates a culture of seeking approval from others, reinforcing the notion that one's worth is determined by the number of likes and comments received. Often, the popularity of a person (famous or not) is socially evaluated by the number of followers they have on Instagram (Ferrara, Interdonato, & Tagarelli, 2014). The same thing does not happen for other platforms such as YouTube, Tik Tok or Twitter where the number of followers is more linked to the content produced than to the popularity of the person. Furthermore, Instagram allows you to monitor in great detail various parameters relating to the response that each post has had on the followers. This data pushes users to favour contents that are successful and popular, not considering whether they are the ones that most reflect their self or what they want to show.

1.3.3 Influencers and Aspirational Content: Unrealistic Standards and Comparison

Instagram's emphasis on visual content and its influence-driven culture makes it particularly susceptible to the impact of influencers and aspirational content. Unlike other social media platforms, Instagram's design and user experience revolve mainly around images, creating a visually immersive environment that places significant importance on aesthetics and appearance. This focus on visual representation intensifies the influence of influencers and the impact of aspirational content, contributing to the amplification of shame dynamics. The visual nature of Instagram allows for a more immediate and direct comparison between users and influencers. As users scroll through their feed, they are bombarded with meticulously curated images of influencers showcasing their seemingly perfect lives (Ritch & Siddiqui, 2020). The highly selective nature of these posts creates an illusion of an ideal existence, emphasizing flawless appearances, luxurious lifestyles, and extraordinary experiences. This constant exposure to idealized images fosters a culture of comparison, fuelling feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, which ultimately contribute to the experience of shame (Modica, 2020).

Also, the nature of Instagram's visual content promotes a focus on physical appearance and the body. Influencers, many of whom are recognized for their attractiveness, often become role models for users aspiring to attain similar levels of beauty and physical perfection. The pressure to conform to these narrow beauty ideals can lead to body dissatisfaction, fostering negative body image and triggering shame in individuals who do not align with the prescribed standards. This focus on physical appearance reinforces societal beauty norms and perpetuates a culture where individuals feel ashamed or judged for not meeting these unrealistic expectations. Moreover, Instagram's algorithms and explore page algorithms play a significant role in the exposure users have to aspirational content. The platform actively promotes and suggests content based on users' interests, preferences, and engagement history. This algorithmic curation tends to favour popular influencers who already conform to the platform's aesthetic ideals, thereby reinforcing the dominance of a specific beauty standard. As a result, users are consistently exposed to content that reinforces unrealistic beauty standards, exacerbating the feelings of inadequacy, comparison, and shame.

Additionally, the rise of influencer marketing and sponsored content on Instagram further blurs the line between genuine content and advertising. Influencers collaborate with brands, promoting products and services that align with their personal brand and image. This can create an atmosphere of constant consumerism, with users being bombarded by messages suggesting that their lives would be better or more fulfilling if they were to adopt the same products, lifestyles, or experiences as their favourite influencers. According to Jin et al. (2019), the underlying implication is that without these products or experiences, individuals may feel ashamed or inadequate, further fuelling shame dynamics on the platform.

1.3.4 Image-Based Cyberbullying: Shaming in the Digital Sphere

Instagram's visual-centric platform makes it particularly susceptible to image-based cyberbullying and public shaming, amplifying the impact of such harmful behaviours. According to Zhong et al. (2016) 9% and 25% of users claim to have been bullied on Instagram, with a higher rate than other platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. The ability to easily share and comment on photos provides a means for individuals to target and humiliate others in a visually explicit manner. The relative anonymity and distance offered by the digital medium often embolden individuals to engage in hurtful behaviour that they may not exhibit in face-to-face interactions. The viral nature of Instagram's content dissemination further exacerbates the consequences of image-based

cyberbullying. Once a humiliating or embarrassing photo or comment is shared, it can rapidly circulate across the platform, reaching a large audience within a short period. Hosseinmardi et al. (2015) proved that 40% of cyberbullying comments are within an hour from the previous one, while the percentage is lower than thirty in non-cyberbullying cases. Also, the widespread exposure intensifies the impact on the individual being targeted, causing profound feelings of shame, humiliation, and social isolation.

Moreover, the permanence of online content on Instagram means that the effects of such cyberbullying incidents can endure long after the initial incident, leading to ongoing shame and emotional distress. Additionally, Instagram's culture of comparison and public validation amplifies the potential for public shaming. Users can readily engage in negative commenting, body-shaming, or targeted attacks on other users' appearance or personal lives. The public nature of these actions increases the shame experienced by the victim, as the humiliation is witnessed by a potentially vast audience. The fear of being subjected to public shaming can also create a chilling effect on users, discouraging them from expressing themselves authentically for fear of judgment and ridicule. This fear further perpetuates a culture of silence, isolation, and shame (Ferrara, Interdonato, & Tagarelli, 2014).

1.3.5 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Comparison: Coveting Others' Highlighted Lives

Instagram's feature of real-time sharing and the ability to highlight moments of one's life can amplify the fear of missing out (FOMO) and perpetuate social comparison. The platform serves as a window into the seemingly exciting and fulfilling lives of others, showcasing carefully selected and filtered moments that evoke envy and longing (Hatting et al., 2022). The constant exposure to these idealized representations of others' lives can trigger a sense of inadequacy and shame in individuals who perceive their own lives as mundane or unremarkable in comparison. Instagram's chronological feed and stories provide users with a real-time glimpse into the activities, achievements, and social interactions of their peers (Ferrara, Interdonato, & Tagarelli, 2014). This continuous stream of highlights fosters a fear of missing out on experiences, events, or social connections, leaving individuals feeling excluded, overlooked, or insignificant.

The fear of missing out intensifies social comparison, as individuals measure their own lives against the perceived excitement and success of others. This comparison can lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and shame, as individuals may perceive themselves as falling short in

terms of accomplishments, relationships, or overall happiness (Dewi & Sari, 2022). Moreover, the algorithmic curation of content on Instagram's explore page reinforces the fear of missing out and the desire for social comparison. The platform tailors the content shown to users based on their preferences, engagement history, and trending topics. As a result, users are constantly exposed to carefully selected content that highlights the extraordinary or enviable aspects of others' lives. This algorithmic curation reinforces the notion that everyone else's lives are more exciting, glamorous, or fulfilling, further intensifying feelings of shame and inadequacy.

In conclusion, Instagram's peculiar features contribute significantly to the creation and perpetuation of shame dynamics within its user base. The culture of presenting a flawless self-image, the pursuit of public validation, the influence of aspirational content, the prevalence of image-based cyberbullying, and the fear of missing out collectively shape the way individuals experience shame on the platform.

1.4 The Impact of Shame on Mental Health

Experiencing shame related to one's body on social media can have profound effects on an individual's mental health (Mereish & Poteat, 2015). The relentless comparison, self-criticism, and pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards can significantly impact a person's well-being and contribute to the development or exacerbation of various mental health issues.

Firstly, body shame can lead to the development of body image dissatisfaction, which is characterized by a persistent negative perception of one's body (Santarossa and Woodruff, 2017). Constant exposure to idealized and unattainable images on social media can fuel feelings of dissatisfaction, fostering a distorted view of one's own body. This negative body image can contribute to the development of body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), a mental health condition where individuals obsessively focus on perceived flaws in their appearance (Santarossa and Woodruff, 2017). BDD can lead to significant distress and impairment in various areas of life, including social functioning and overall quality of life.

Moreover, body shame can contribute to the development of eating disorders. The pressure to attain the "perfect" body portrayed on social media can drive individuals to engage in disordered eating behaviours, such as restrictive dieting, excessive exercise, or even extreme measures like

purging or using laxatives (Sanzari et al., 2023). These behaviours can develop into conditions such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge eating disorder, which can have severe physical and psychological consequences. Eating disorders are often rooted in distorted body image and a deep sense of shame regarding one's appearance (Nechita, Bud, and David, 2021).

Additionally, the constant exposure to idealized images and the subsequent feelings of inadequacy can lead to low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Selfhout et al., 2009; Lim & Yang, 2015). Comparing oneself to others and feeling shame about one's body can erode self-confidence and contribute to a negative self-perception. When increased be social media platforms where body comparison is constantly stimulated, such as on Instagram, this can lead to a persistent sense of worthlessness, sadness, and an increased vulnerability to developing depressive symptoms (Sherlock and Wagstaff, 2019). Furthermore, the anxiety stemming from the fear of being judged or evaluated based on appearance can contribute to heightened social anxiety. Individuals may feel a constant pressure to meet perceived beauty standards, which can lead to avoidance of social situations and a diminished sense of self-worth (Faelens et al., 2021).

The effects of shame on social media extend beyond the individual's immediate emotional well-being and can permeate various aspects of their lives. It can strain interpersonal relationships, as individuals may withdraw or isolate themselves due to shame and feelings of unworthiness. Additionally, the negative impact on mental health can hinder academic and professional performance, as the preoccupation with appearance and the internalization of shame can consume significant mental and emotional energy (Simon et al., 2001).

In conclusion, the experience of shame related to body image on social media platforms can have significant effects on mental health. It can contribute to the development or exacerbation of body image dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal. Recognizing the detrimental impact of shame and especially of body shame is crucial for promoting a healthier relationship with social media and developing interventions that foster self-acceptance, body positivity, and resilience in the face of societal beauty ideals.

1.5 Conclusion

The experience of shame on social media, particularly related to body image, presents unique challenges in today's digital age. Social media platforms have not only changed the way we communicate and share information but have also transformed the very nature of what it means to experience shame. Moreover, they have significantly increased the frequency and intensity of moments in which individuals, especially teenagers, feel ashamed of their bodies. This necessitates a re-evaluation of how we conceptualize shame and its implications on social media platforms.

Traditional philosophical accounts of shame may fall short in fully capturing the complexities of shame on social media. These accounts often focus on shame arising from personal failures or moral transgressions in physical, real-world contexts. However, shame on social media can arise from comparisons to curated and idealized images, the pursuit of external validation through metrics, and the pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. The representation of perfect bodies modified digitally generate a type of shame that cannot be assimilated to what happened before with movie stars or other type of aesthetic idols. This is because on social media platforms like Instagram everyone can modify his or her image, presenting it as natural. While historically, even if people may have felt ashamed of their bodies in front of the perfectness of those of movie stars, they know to be in front of exceptions. Instead, on social media the unrealistic beauty standard is presented by people from all the social categories. These factors significantly alter the dynamics of shame, calling for a more nuanced understanding that encompasses the digital realm.

In the next chapters, I will explore various philosophical accounts of shame and evaluate their applicability to the context of social media. Specifically, I will examine why Jean-Paul Sartre's account of shame resonates more closely with the experiences of shame on social media platforms. Sartre's emphasis on the Look of the other, the desire for recognition, and the role of self-consciousness in shaping our sense of self aligns with the unique dynamics of shame in the online realm. By delving into Sartre's account, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological and existential implications of shame on social media. This exploration will allow me to shed light on the specific challenges individuals face in navigating shame and body image issues online and provide insights into how it is possible to promote a healthier and more compassionate digital environment. Even if Sartre is in my opinion the philosopher who conceptualised shame in a way that is the most proper one to analyse this feeling on social media platforms, it is still usefull to have an historical overview of what aspect of shame were considered more relevant by those

philosophers who, in my opinion, better highlight the philosophical importance of shame. Also, by seeing other theories' weaknesses, it emerges more clearly the correctness of using existentialism for analysing shame on social media platforms.

2. Philosophical accounts of shame

In this chapter, I will embark on a deep exploration of the concept of shame, drawing insights from the works of influential philosophers. By examining the perspectives of Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Max Scheler, I aim to gain a nuanced understanding of the intricate nature of shame and its significance in contemporary society.

Building upon the insights of these philosophers, I will analyse how the advent of social media, particularly platforms like Instagram, has transformed the dynamics of shame in the modern era. Instagram's emphasis on curated images and self-presentation has created a virtual space where individuals constantly compare themselves to idealized standards, often leading to feelings of inadequacy and shame.

In this context, I will suggest that Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist theory provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding shame in the realm of social media. Sartre posits that shame emerges from the Look of others, as individuals become acutely aware of being objectified and judged. Within the context of Instagram, where the attention and validation of others play a significant role, Sartre's perspective offers valuable insights into the unique dynamics of shame in the digital age.

Through this exploration, I seek to shed light on the multifaceted nature of shame, its historical underpinnings, and its intricate interplay with the contemporary digital culture of social media. By analysing the theories of Aristotle, Nietzsche, Scheler, and Sartre, I aim to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the emotion of shame and its implications in the context of social media, with a particular focus on Instagram.

2.1 Defining Shame with Aristotle

Defining shame is a complex task due to the diverse ways in which it influences thoughts, actions, and perceptions of the world, varying across cultures. This makes it challenging to pinpoint and describe the unique characteristics of shame, particularly when comparing different cultural contexts (Wong & Tsai, 2007). However, despite these complexities, the significance of shame in all human cultures is undeniable. Aristotle, one of the ancient philosophers who extensively studied emotions, mentions shame in two of his works: the Rhetoric (Cope & Sandis, 1877) and the Nicomachean Ethics (Aristotle, 2019). In the Rhetoric, shame is defined as "pain or disturbance in regard to bad things, whether present, past, or future, which seem likely to involve us in discredit; and shamelessness as contempt or indifference in regard to the same things" (Cope & Sandis, 1877, Rhetoric 1383b15-19). Although this definition is somewhat vague, it contains key points.

Firstly, shame is described as a form of pain that arises from negative experiences across different timeframes (present, past, and future), potentially leading to discrediting oneself. According to Aristotle, who considered humans as political beings, the social dimension is crucial, and "discredit" holds significant importance within society. Utilizing the fear of this painful emotion as a motivation for moral action becomes an effective strategy in the art of persuasion, known as rhetoric. In this context, shame assumes the role of a social sanction, guiding individuals toward morality. Aristotle suggests that the value of shame depends on the age of the person experiencing it. Young people, due to their limited knowledge, are more prone to making mistakes and can benefit from the influence of shame to prevent errors. On the other hand, adults are expected to possess a greater understanding of right and wrong, rendering shame less necessary as a guiding force. However, while shame may not play a direct role in guiding moral actions for adults, it still serves as a boundary for behaviour. Behaving shamelessly is seen as indecent, and using social judgment as a guide is deemed appropriate for young individuals who are not yet fully capable of adhering to higher moral principles. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle (2019) classifies shame as not being a virtue, stating that "shame is not a mark of a decent man at all, since it is a consequence of base actions" (Nicomachean Ethics 1128b10-25). Conversely, being shameless is considered a characteristic of an indecent person. From Aristotle's perspective, shame should not serve as the primary motivation for action, but it still holds a place within moral reasoning.

In Aristotle's works, there is a subtle distinction between the terms 'aidos' and 'aiskhune,' although it is not explicitly described. Scholars have noted that besides the common word for 'shame,' 'aidos,' the Greek philosopher also used the term 'aiskhune.' While some argue that there is no clear distinction between the two terms in Aristotle's work (Grimaldi, 1988, p. 155), Konstan (2003, p. 1037) suggests that 'aidos' is used to refer to shame as an emotion, although the term 'pathos' is more extensive than its English translation, while 'aiskhune' is used to describe a 'sense of shame,' arising from specific acts or events that bring about disgrace (Konstan, 2003, pp. 1043-1044). This distinction can be exemplified through Euripides' play Hippolytus.

The tragedy focuses on two central characters: Phedra and her stepson Hippolytus. Hippolytus is portrayed as extremely chaste, preferring the goddess Artemis, associated with the hunt, over Aphrodite, the goddess of love. In order to punish him, Aphrodite causes Phedra to fall desperately in love with her stepson. When Hippolytus discovers his stepmother's feelings through a slave, he reacts with anger, driving Phedra to contemplate suicide. Before taking her own life, she leaves a written message accusing Hippolytus of raping her. This false accusation leads Hippolytus to flee the city, where he meets his demise at the hands of a sea monster sent by Artemis.

Although the tragedy predates Aristotle's work, it can be seen as a representation of Aristotelian concepts through the characters. Phedra embodies 'aiskhune,' a sense of shame arising from uncontrollable emotions, which is considered an appropriate reaction to her feelings. On the other hand, Hippolytus, being young, acts in accordance with 'aidos,' a sense of shame driven by social norms and expectations. The plot takes an interesting turn when Hippolytus experiences 'aiskhune' not for something he felt or did but for something he has been accused to do. This particular form of shame is unique and emphasizes the irrational nature of this emotion. Aristotle, either due to the irrationality of 'aiskhune' or for other reasons, does not explicitly analyse this type of shame. Instead, he argues that actions should not be driven by shame. While Hippolytus' adherence to 'aidos' is initially seen as decent, his reaction driven by 'aiskhune' ultimately leads to his downfall.

It is important to note that the portrayal of Hippolytus in the tragedy is negative, as he exhibits strong misogyny and disregards the advice to be merciful. His angry reaction towards his stepmother transforms her feelings of shame into hatred for him. This further reinforces the understanding that shame ('aidos') should not be considered a virtue. True virtues, such as clemency and justice, would have guided Hippolytus to avoid humiliating his stepmother, which

'aidos' failed to accomplish. Therefore, Aristotle's analysis does not explicitly differentiate between a positive and negative form of shame, as neither 'aidos' nor 'aiskhune' can be seen as fully positive or negative.

Assuming that Aristotle's account of shame reflects the cultural understanding of his time, and using "Hippolytus" as an illustration of that idea, we can observe how Greek culture shifted its perspective on shame. Ruth Benedict (1946) famously distinguished between 'shame-cultures' and 'guilt-cultures'. The first ones are those where actions are guided by honor, i.e. the importance of others' judgments on your morality; while the latter ones are those where morality is a personal matter and conscience is what drives individuals to make choices. According to Benedict, in Japan there is a shame-culture because what really matters is reputation, while in America there is a guilt-culture because morality is more about self-evaluation. This classification received highly critical reviews (Sakuta et al. 1986) for being oversimple, but it provides a first possible feature of shame: shame is collective. According to Doods (1951) in "The Greeks and the Irrational", Homeric society can be defined as a shame-culture because the Iliad's heroes reasoned in virtue of an idea of morality that depends on the judgement of the other components of their social group. They were guided by "aidos", i.e. shame of 'losing face' in front of their equals or inferiors (Hooker 1987). Advancing in time Greek society evolved in a guilt-culture, focusing on the importance of self-reflection. Aristotle exemplifies this shift in acknowledging the social importance of shame, but avoiding using it as moral principle, since he considered morality an individual issue.

Although the Aristotelian philosophical theory of shame offers interesting insights, it falls short in fully capturing the profound impact that the emotion of shame has on individuals. Aristotle's perspective assumes that one has the choice to not experience shame, suggesting that it is merely a matter of personal willingness to suppress this feeling. Also, he overlooks the fundamental question of why individuals feel ashamed and disregards the inherent difficulty of resisting or avoiding this emotion. Aristotle primarily focuses on addressing whether it is morally justifiable to be guided by shame, rather than delving into the deeper understanding of the underlying causes and effects of shame. As a result, while giving a good definition of shame, Aristotle's theory lacks the comprehensive utility required for the purpose of this text, which aims to comprehend the dynamics that lead social media users to experience shame. Therefore, using his perspective, we would be able to recognise shame on social media platforms and to assess in which cases it is

morally justified. But we would not be able to actively change shame dynamics in this context since there would not be any understanding on what causes this feeling online. The Hyppolitus's episode shows that it was already understood by Ancient Greeks the multiple reasons for which one can feel ashamed, even irrational ones, but Aristotle does not analyse them. In contrast, Friedrich Nietzsche takes a step in the right direction by delving further into the concept of shame's strength, its origin and its intricate relationship with the self.

Nietzsche delves into the profound impact of shame, recognizing its potential to exert a debilitating influence on human beings. He questions the societal constructs and moral judgments that give rise to shame, unveiling the ways in which this emotion can hinder individual freedom and authenticity. Nietzsche's exploration delves deeper into the subjective experience of shame, addressing the complex interplay between societal expectations, personal identity, and the self. By exploring these aspects, Nietzsche's perspective offers valuable insights into the forces that drive the experience of shame within the realm of social media platforms.

2.2 Moral Shame in Nietzsche

After the flourishing of Greek culture, Christianity emerged as the dominant moral framework in Europe. Although Christianity is generally considered a guilt-oriented culture, shame also played a significant role within it. In various works Friedrich Nietzsche associates shame with Christian morality, shedding light on its intricate relationship with human behaviour.

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche (1978) introduces the concept of shame as an essential part of human history. He portrays man as an animal with flushed cheeks, suggesting that shame has been an integral aspect of human existence. Nietzsche argues that shame has conditioned the course of humanity's development. As he explores the concept of overcoming man in the book, it becomes evident that Nietzsche believes that transcending shame is necessary. Shame, in Nietzsche's view, is the defining characteristic of slave morality, or what he refers to as the morality of pitiful individuals. In his work Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche (2003, p. 43) asserts that the pursuit of knowledge requires overcoming the obstacle of shame. He recognizes that shame can hinder the pursuit of knowledge, which is essential for surpassing the limitations of human existence.

The reason why Nietzsche considers shame an impediment lies in its connection to morality. Shame arises when one acts contrary to their moral principles, generating feelings of self-consciousness and remorse. Nietzsche sought to propose a new way of acting—one driven by the will to power rather than by the constraints of old morality. However, the persistence of shame, rooted in the moral upbringing people receive, particularly within Christianity, can hinder the expression of the will to power (Nietzsche, 1978). Overcoming shame becomes a necessary step in transcending slave morality and freely manifesting the will to power.

In On the Genealogy of Morality, Nietzsche (1999) explicitly addresses the relationship between shame and morality. He argues that when mankind felt no shame for its cruelty, life on Earth was more joyful than in the present era of pessimism. Nietzsche links the darkening of humanity's spirit to the increasing shame it feels about being human. The tired and pessimistic outlook, the distrust of life's mysteries, and the nauseating rejection of life itself are not signs of the wickedness of mankind's era. Instead, they emerge as distorted manifestations of the sickly moralizing that teach the animalistic man to be ashamed of his instincts. On the path to becoming an angel (to use a milder term), man has burdened himself with a troubled conscience and developed a critical tongue that finds not only the joy and innocence of animals repulsive but life itself distasteful. Nietzsche highlights a shift from shame about being mild to shame about being cruel. This transformation can be epitomized by the famous Christian principle of "turning the other cheek," which leads individuals to feel ashamed of their own violent nature as humans. Embracing their animality, Nietzsche argues, is what makes life more cheerful. Christian morality not only induces shame when one acts wrongly but also generates shame for being human, which gives rise to disgust and melancholy towards life (Nietzsche, 1999).

However, Nietzsche's critique does not target shame itself but rather the shame that stems from slave morality. In other cases, he exalts forms of shame that arise from different values. For instance, in "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," there is an episode where the protagonist encounters the "ugliest man" who claims that Zarathustra's shame honours him (Nietzsche, 1978). Here, shame is contrasted with pity, which others feel towards the ugliest man but not Zarathustra. Nietzsche suggests that the morality of slaves leads to the concealment of shame with pity, a disrespectful attitude towards the Other. The episode signifies that by overcoming this morality, one can experience shame as an honest emotion, expressing the desire to help the ugliest man transcend

his condition. The episode implies that slave morality, metaphysics, and the incapability to acknowledge the death of God result in weak emotions such as pity, which demonstrates false empathy for others (Nietzsche, 1978). Overcoming this morality leads to experiencing shame as an honest emotion and a step towards expressing one's power.

Nietzsche also identifies another form of shame that he considers positive, which arises from profundity. In "Beyond Good and Evil," he describes how individuals with profound thoughts that are impossible to convey may clumsily manoeuvre through life, concealing their innermost treasures (Nietzsche, 2003). The refinement of their shame necessitates such cautiousness. Those with hidden depths encounter their destiny and make crucial decisions on paths that few ever traverse, often unbeknownst to even their closest friends. Such individuals desire and insist on wearing a mask, a representation of themselves that occupies the hearts and minds of others. Even if they do not desire it, they eventually realize that a mask exists, and it serves them well. He claims that every profound spirit requires a mask (Nietzsche, 2003). This form of shame emerges from the awareness of possessing something precious that others may unwittingly damage due to their ignorance. It is a type of knowledge that demands caution. This shame compels individuals to conceal themselves, maintain silence, and don a mask to shield their profound thoughts from the judgment of others. They fear that their greatness, rather than being recognized, will be misconstrued as strangeness or madness. Understanding this form of shame allows for a more accurate judgment of those who remain closed off and unwilling to express their thoughts. The conventional perspective assumes that if someone is ashamed of communicating, it is because they have nothing worthwhile to share or lack the ability to communicate effectively. Nietzsche (2003) sheds light on the possibility that those that are ashamed may be veiling a profound form of knowledge that cannot be easily communicated.

In conclusion, Nietzsche contends that shame, in most cases, is a consequence of slave morality, which leads to disgust towards earthly life and the animalistic nature of man. However, there is another form of shame that arises from greatness, which can lead to shame towards those unable to transcend the human condition (as seen in the encounter between Zarathustra and the "ugliest man") or to the use of a social mask to conceal deep thoughts. Nietzsche also considers shame derived from profundity as positive. While shame stemming from slave morality generates pessimism, shame arising from greatness fosters optimism and an embrace of the animalistic side

of man, allowing the expression of power. By discerning the different forms and implications of shame, one can better understand the complex dynamics of morality and human behaviour according to Nietzsche's philosophy.

While Nietzsche's theory of shame presents a more intricate perspective than Aristotle's, it does exhibit some limitations that should be addressed for the purpose of this text. Notably, it emphasizes the connection between shame and one's perception of oneself and life. Nietzsche argues that shame arises from a rejection of earthly life and an excessive reliance on the hope of an afterlife. Additionally, he recognizes a positive form of shame that Aristotle overlooked, which stems from a distinct sensitivity compared to the majority of humanity. Although these aspects are highly intriguing, they fail to fully encompass the significance of the "other" in the experience of shame, maintaining an individual perspective that is not very useful in the context of social media perspective. Furthermore, like Aristotle, Nietzsche confines shame solely to a moral context, regarding it merely as a consequence of morality, thereby suggesting that changing one's moral framework is sufficient to eliminate or radically change this emotion. In this regard, it is important to note that shame extends beyond the individual's perception of oneself and the moral dimension alone. Shame is a complex social emotion that involves a sense of exposure and judgment by others. The presence of an audience, real or imagined, plays a crucial role in the experience of shame. The feeling of shame often arises when one believes they have violated social norms, expectations, or standards, and they fear the disapproval, ridicule, or rejection of others as a result. This interpersonal aspect of shame, involving the Look and opinions of others, significantly influences its intensity and impact on individuals. Furthermore, shame can manifest in various contexts beyond morality alone. While moral transgressions can certainly evoke shame, it can also be triggered by failures, mistakes, personal shortcomings, or perceived social inadequacies. Shame can be experienced in relation to one's appearance, intelligence, social status, achievements, or even vulnerability and emotional expression. It encompasses a broader range of experiences that extend beyond the sphere of morality. To fully understand shame, it is essential to consider the social dynamics and the intricate interplay between the individual and their social environment. The fear of judgment and rejection by others is a fundamental aspect of shame, and the individual's perception of the "other" significantly shapes the experience. Moreover, acknowledging that shame encompasses more than just moral dimensions allows for a more comprehensive understanding of its complexities.

In conclusion, while Nietzsche's theory of shame offers valuable insights, it falls short in fully acknowledging the role of the "other" and the broader social dimension in the experience of shame. Using his perspective, it would be possible to understand how the morality of social media platforms' users can lead them to be ashamed. Also, it would be possible to understand why some users prefer to hide or wear a mask on those platforms, highlighting that shame can also come from the feeling of having knowledge and feelings that others cannot understand. But it would not be possible to understand the role of the other users in amplifying the feeling. Also, in his theory of shame there are not any useful elements to assess why this environment leads to a higher level of shame.   In the following paragraph, we will explore Scheler's theory of shame, which represents a further advancement over Nietzsche's ideas. Scheler attributes absolute importance to the construction of the self through shame, emphasizing its role in shaping our identity and self-awareness, and highlighting the role of the body in shame (an element that the other philosophers discussed above overlooked). The following analysis shows the relevant aspects of Scheler's account, but also its incompleteness in giving the necessary elements for understanding why shame is present on social media platforms in such a high level. Moreover, it allows the reader to better understand Sartre's work on shame, that is crucial for the intent of the overall thesis.

2.3 Shame and the Self in Scheler

The first philosopher who deeply analysed shame in the twentieth century was Max Scheler in "uber scham und Schamgefühl" in 1913. Scheler begin his enquiry from the question 'what kind of feeling is shame?'. He excludes that shame is a social or sexual feeling, because we can be ashamed of ourselves (Scham vor sich selbst) even in absence of a sexual partner or any social reality (Emad, 1972, p. 362). What instead is crucial for Scheler is that any form of shame involves turning back to the Self. Therefore, it belongs to the 'family' of emotions that make you feel your own self (Emad, 1972, p. 362). For Scheler, feeling ashamed means to follow the instinct to protect the uniqueness of your own self from being absorbed by the general sphere. The boundness of shame and sex is derived exactly by the fact that sex is something we share with the general. Shame is also protection from other emotions that are dangerous if not limited, such as ambition, vanity and thirst for fame (Emad, 1972, p. 364). In this sense, shame is linked to fear: fear of being reduced to the Other and fear of not seeing your limits. From these considerations it emerges that

for Scheler shame is an individual feeling where the Self fears the reduction of its uniqueness to a general sphere such as sex.

For Scheler, the feeling of shame exclusively concerns man and brings to expression in the most explicit way his peculiar position and condition, i.e the cohabitation of a spiritual dimension with an animal one (Tedeschini, 2012, p. 11). Scheler distinguishes two forms of shame that are irreducible and derive from the two dimensions: spiritual feeling of shame (geistiges Schamgefuihl) and bodily shame (Leibesscham). The latter is characterized by the tension between vital love and drive-impulse, while in the previous one between spiritual love and vital drive. These different tensions lead to different forms of constitution of consciousness. Confusing these types of shame has led to misinterpretations of this feeling. Specifically, Scheler identifies two of them: educational, and ecclesiastical. The educational interpretation is the one that sees shame as a consequence of education (Emad, 1972, p. 365). According to Scheler, education can modify what we are ashamed of and the way we react to feeling ashamed, but it cannot generate shame that is a pre-social emotion. Also, contrary to Aristotle, for Scheler education is not positive in guiding young people's shame, but it can only have "a negative role which consists in letting the feeling of shame develop and mature freely, by preventing its violations (Verletzung) and deformation" (Emad, 1972, p. 365). Here 'negative' it is not to be intended as something not good, but as something that forbids. Education indeed prevents violating and deforming shame, that for Scheler is a feeling that should be respected. Instead, the ecclesiastical interpretation sees shame as evidence of the need for chastity (Emad, 1972, p. 366). For Scheler, sexual shame is a consequence of the sexual impulse, therefore, it cannot result in the complete repression of the same impulse that originated it. It is important to highlight that Scheler gives the body a primary role in shame. While in the authors we analysed before body was barely mentioned, Scheler claims that shame arises when the spirit gets surprised by being constrained into a body. An example provided by the German philosopher is when Adam and Eve realize to be naked and feel ashamed (Tedeschini, 2012, p. 13). In the biblical myth this episode is the passage from the paradisiac dimension to the earthly one. In this sense, Scheler intend shame as the feeling that emerge in the original condition of man, i.e the unsolvable tension between spirit and body. Again, here shame is to be interpreted as fear of the generalization: Adam and Eve are ashamed of their nudity, that is nothing but the reminder of the fact that they have a body like the other creatures (Tedeschini, 2012, p. 14). Covering the body is the natural reaction to the fear of being reduced to the Other. Such a reaction

is so typical of the human being that it is possible to feel ashamed for another human being. For Scheler, it is always a movement to the Self, but in this case the movement is directed to the Self of the Other. This happens because the Self understand the Other as a human being and it wants to protect that human being from the reduction to the general. Moreover, what is protected is the value of human beings (Tedeschini, 2012, p. 17). Shame is, therefore, the willingness to give to the Self a value that is superior to one assigned by his physical dimension.

Scheler's philosophical analysis presents several significant insights. Firstly, it encompasses a dimension that precedes morality, in which shame manifests itself. This dimension, inherent to human beings, is for him rooted in a natural fear of being assimilated into the general, reflecting the human desire to maintain distinctiveness from the community. Specifically, Scheler highlights how shame is connected to the perception of the body as something to conceal, precisely because it associates us with other creatures. According to Scheler, even if the body is what distinguish an individual, it is also what makes evident that he or she is part of a specie. Additionally, Scheler emphasizes that shame arises from the ambition to attain something higher that remains beyond reach. In this regard, his analysis provides valuable insights into understanding the dynamics that drive social media platforms. In these platforms, shame appears to be intertwined with the tension between aspiring to be recognized for one's uniqueness, the objectification of the body that reduces individuals to mere objects of comparison, and the pursuit of unattainable standards.

However, Scheler's excessive emphasis on the individual dimension of shame results in a limitation in his theory. While it serves the purpose of not reducing shame to a mere consequence of societal norms and morality, it overlooks the influence of the Look of others in shaping the personal experience of shame. Consequently, the subsequent part of the text will examine Sartre's theory of shame, which expands upon Scheler's ideas by incorporating an interpersonal dimension. Sartre's theory successfully incorporates the productive aspects of Scheler's analysis, such as the role of shame in self-construction and the significance of the body, while also considering the impact of others' perceptions on the experience of shame.

3. Existentialist View of Shame on Social Media Platforms

3.1 Introduction

This chapter delves into the theory of shame proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre, a prominent existentialist philosopher. Sartre's exploration of shame provides valuable insights into the intricate dynamics at play within social media platforms, shedding light on the underlying psychological processes and their societal implications. By examining the theory of shame in the context of social media, I aim to evaluate its relevance and discern its potential contributions to our understanding of these digital ecosystems.

Firstly, I will explore Sartre's theory of shame and its conceptual underpinnings. Sartre posits that shame emerges from the awareness of being observed and judged by others, leading to a profound self-consciousness that exposes our vulnerability. This theory provides a framework for comprehending the unique experiences of shame that individuals encounter in the virtual realm of social media, where the gaze of the audience is amplified and relentless.

Furthermore, I will examine the implications of Sartre's theory of shame for social media platforms. By analysing how shame manifests and influences user behaviour within these digital environments, we can better grasp the mechanisms that shape online interactions, such as self-presentation, identity formation, and the pursuit of validation. Specifically, I will examine the concept of authenticity, that is a key element of existentialism, but that is mainly falsely used in the social media platforms' context. Users who claim to present their selves authentically often modify the images of their body to respect some beauty standards, that is the opposite of the existentialist idea of authenticity as true expression of the self.

However, despite its potential insights, the application of Sartre's theory of shame in the realm of social media platforms is not without limitations. I will critically assess the feasibility and efficacy of utilizing this theoretical framework to address the complexities of these digital spaces. By identifying these limitations, I aim to provide a balanced perspective on the theory's practical applicability and explore potential avenues for refinement or augmentation.

In conclusion, this chapter examine the theory of shame proposed by Sartre and its value in the context of social media platforms. By elucidating the complex interplay between shame, self-presentation, and social interaction, I seek to enrich our understanding of the emotional dynamics at play within these digital ecosystems. Furthermore, by acknowledging the limitations inherent in applying this theory, I hope to foster a nuanced discussion that paves the way for future research and the development of strategies aimed at promoting healthier online experiences.

3.2 Sartre's theory of shame

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emerged in the 20th century, primarily in Europe, and it emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and the subjective experience of human beings (Aho, 2023). It is a diverse and complex philosophical approach that explores fundamental questions about human existence, meaning, and the nature of reality. At the core of existentialism is the belief that existence precedes essence. This means that individuals are not predetermined or defined by any inherent nature or essence, but rather they create their own essence through their choices and actions (Aho, 2023). Existentialists argue that human beings are responsible for defining their own values, purpose, and meaning in life. Existentialism often examines the human condition in the face of themes such as death, freedom, responsibility, choice, and the absurdity of life. It grapples with the challenges and anxieties that arise from the awareness of our mortality and the inherent uncertainty and ambiguity of existence, mainly inspired but Soren Kirkegaard's theory (Aho, 2023). Because of these peculiarities, existentialism is considered to be a philosophical approach particularly appropriate to analyse emotional difficulties in the use of social media platforms (Cheong, 2023). Specifically, Jean-Paul Sartre existentialist framework has been used by multiple scholars for this purpose (Dolezal, 2012; Lopato, 2015). For this reason, I choose his theory of shame as a lens for understanding shame's dynamics on social media platforms.

Even if it is strongly influenced by the work of the German philosopher, Sartre's conception of shame is diametrically opposed to Scheler's one. While the latter highlight the self-reference/individual dimension of shame, the French philosopher privileges the heteronomy of this emotion. In his most famous work "Being and Nothingness", Sartre dedicates a chapter to the role of the Look (Sartre, 2003, pp. 252-302). For him the Look of the Other, or the 'being-seen-by-

another', is what makes the Self aware of being not only a subject, but also an object (Sartre, 2003, p. 254). The reason for that is that if we look at the Other we see an object between other objects, and the Other sees the same objects that we see, therefore we recognize the being-a-subject of the Other who consequently must see us as objects too (Sartre, 2003, p. 256). This is what Sartre calls 'being-for-others'. In Sartre's existentialist philosophy, he explores different modes of existence that individuals experience in their relations with themselves and others. These modes are being-for-the-self, being-in-itself, and being-for-the-other (Reynolds, 2022).

Being-for-the-Self (être-pour-soi) refers to the mode of existence where an individual is conscious of their own existence and experiences themselves as a subject (Reynolds, 2022). It involves self-awareness, intentionality, and the capacity for self-reflection. In this mode, the individual perceives themselves as an agent with freedom and responsibility, capable of making choices and determining their own actions. Sartre (2003) emphasizes that human consciousness is always directed towards something (intentionality) and being-for-the-self is the primary mode of existence in which this intentional consciousness is directed towards itself. The individual experiences themselves as a conscious subject with a unique identity and a sense of autonomy.

Instead, being-in-itself (être-en-soi) refers to the mode of existence of inanimate objects or things that lack consciousness and intentionality (Reynolds, 2022). These entities simply exist without being aware of their existence or having any self-reflective capacities. They are what they are, without any inherent meaning or purpose. Sartre (2003) contrasts being-in-itself with being-for-the-self to highlight the difference between conscious, intentional existence (human consciousness) and non-conscious, non-intentional existence (inanimate objects).

Finally, being-for-the-other (être-pour-autrui) refers to the mode of existence in which an individual is aware of others and experiences themselves as an object in the eyes of others. This mode involves the intersubjective aspect of human existence, where one's self-consciousness is influenced by the perception and judgment of others (Reynolds, 2022). When individuals interact with others, they experience themselves not only as subjects (being-for-the-self) but also as objects in the gaze of others (being-for-the-other). The gaze of the other can be critical, judgmental, or indifferent, influencing how one perceives themselves and their sense of self.

In this perspective, shame is the feeling that humans have when they feel that they are judged negatively by the Look of another human being. This Look can be actual but also fictional. Sartre

provides the example of a lover spying on his partner through the keyhole who listens to the sound of someone's footsteps approaching (Sartre 2003, p. 259). While the person may not arrive at the place where the lover is located, still the lover feels ashamed. The Look was not actual, but the feeling was. According to Sartre, even in this case where the Other is only imagined by the subject the feeling of shame preserves its social dimension. It is not the presence of the Other that determines the heteronomy of shame, but it is the role that the Other plays in the subject's imagination of being caught spying. Shame is therefore inherently social since it is the feeling that emerges when the subject perceives itself as the object of the Other's Look. There is no shame without the objectification of the Self, and there is no objectification of the Self without the Look of the Other. Therefore, there is no shame without the Other's Look. To better understand the meaning of this conception of shame within Sartre's work, it is necessary to explain briefly his theory of consciousness.

According to Sartre (2003), consciousness is inherently intentional, meaning that it is directed towards something. It is always *consciousness of.* But at the same time intentionality is characterized by the Self-givenness of the experience, i.e. its being *for-itself (pour-soi).* Therefore, intentionality is both directed towards something and self-given. Being consciousness inherently intentional, it has both these qualities too. The form of consciousness that is characterised by being *pour-soi* is for Sartre pre-reflective, meaning that it exists before that the Self arrives to see itself not only as a subject but also as an object (Reynolds, 2022). Therefore, according to Sartre, there is a mode of existing where we experience life without directing the emotions to ourselves. Considering again his account of shame, claiming that shame is an intentional feeling that derives from the Other Look means that the original form of shame (the pre-reflective one) emerges by primary thinking about the Other's Look and of being the object of that Look, i.e *being-for-others*. Only after this form of shame it can emerge a reflective form where the Self subjectively reflects upon itself. As a pure subject I cannot see myself, but through the Look of the Other I am able to see myself as an object and consequently feel ashamed for what I am (Sartre, 2003, p. 260). For Sartre, shame is therefore primarily an objectifying feeling and only secondary a self-reflecting one. In this sense, it is diametrically opposed to Scheler who, as stated before, consider the Other's role collateral and privilege the Self as the main actor in shame. Moreover, to feel ashamed for Sartre it is not enough to acknowledge the Other's Look that objectifies you, but also the subject must accept the validity the Other's negative judgment: shame "is the recognition of the fact that

I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging" (Sartre, 2003, p. 261). Returning to previous example about the spying lover, to feel ashamed the lover must consider valid the negative judgment of someone seeing him spying through the keyhole. The Look of the Other has not simply the role of originating shame, but it is also considered so relevant to be fully accepted by the Self as true. As Sartre wrote:

> Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being an object; that is, of recognizing myself in this degraded, fixed and dependent being which I am for the Other. Shame is the feeling of an original fall, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault but simply that I have "fallen" into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am (Sartre 2003, p. 312)

The radicality of the heteronomy of Sartre's account of shame emerges clearly from this quote. The Other becomes the mediator for being what I am, since I recognize myself as the degraded self that the Other establishes through his judgment. While for Scheler shame is the acknowledgment of the distance between the ideal I have of myself and what actually I am, for Sartre is the acceptance of the Other as mediator of who I am. In both cases shame is linked to a fall. In the first case the Self falls from the ideal world to the concrete world. In the latter case it falls from being pure subject to become object, i.e a thing that exists only in virtue of the mediation of the Other.

3.3 Sartre in the Digital Context

Sartre's theory of the View of the Other, as expounded in his seminal work "Being and Nothingness," provides a comprehensive framework that can effectively account for shame episodes on social media platforms. Sartre's account offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of shame applicable in the digital realm, highlighting the role of self-consciousness, the desire for recognition, and the Look of others in shaping our experiences of shame.

One of the key aspects of Sartre's theory is the notion of self-consciousness, which he posits as an essential element in the constitution of the self. In the context of social media, individuals are constantly engaged in self-presentation, crafting their online personas and carefully selecting the images and content they share with others. This process of self-presentation, driven by a desire for

recognition and validation, exposes individuals to the potential Look and judgment of others. Sartre argues that shame arises when one becomes aware of being objectified or evaluated by the other's Look. On social media, this objectification occurs through the act of posting images, inviting others to view, and potentially scrutinize one's physical appearance. The fear of being judged or falling short of societal beauty ideals can generate intense feelings of shame, as individuals become acutely conscious of their perceived flaws or shortcomings.

Moreover, Sartre emphasizes the role of the other in the formation of our self-concept. According to his theory, we rely on the Look of others to provide us with a sense of identity and to validate our existence. On social media platforms, this desire for recognition and acceptance is magnified, as individuals seek external validation through likes, comments, and follower counts (Tiggemann et al., 2018). When the response to one's posts falls short of expectations, it can elicit feelings of shame and inadequacy. The act of comparing oneself to others and perceiving oneself as not measuring up to the idealized images and curated lifestyles showcased on social media further intensifies the experience of shame. Moreover, Sartre's emphasis on the seen body (Dolezal, 2012) is very appropriate for understanding the Instagram context, where the body is mostly perceived through the visual dimension. For these reasons, I want to use his theory to address the emergence of shame in the online context.

3.3.1 Through a digital keyhole

To properly apply Sartre's theory to the context of social media platforms, especially Instagram, I want to follow step by step the narrative of the French author about the episode of the voyeur and the keyhole. This episode is used by Sartre to explain the role of shame in the construction of the self. Therefore, I want to adapt every part of the episode and its meaning for Sartre to Instagram. In this way, similarities and differences between his account and online shame's dynamics can emerge clearly.

The first element of the episode narrated by Sartre (2003, 259) to be analysed is the setting: a man is looking at his lover through the keyhole of her apartment because of jealousy. According to Sartre, the man does not perceive himself to be actually there. Meaning that his attention is not on his condition, but on what is happening on the other side of the door. This is what Sartre calls 'non-

thetic self-consciousness' (2003, p. 259). The keyhole and the door are both instruments and obstacles to see the scene on the other side. Nothing really matters to the subject but the act of seeing what happens inside the room. The subject is not present to himself, and he's lost in the world, i.e. in the situation. Translating it in the digital context, we can imagine a subject that uses Instagram as a pure instrument/obstacle to see what people and friends are doing. While he does it, he is not aware of the way he appears in that moment, and neither he cares about the instrument that he is using. The only thing that matters for him is the scene that happens on Instagram. It is not important for the purpose of this analysis to say if the reason for which he uses Instagram is shameful, as for the voyeur. This is because on this type of social media platforms shame is usually related to the user's perception of his body's image, and it is rarely related to reason for which he is on the platform. What instead is central for this analysis is that there is a preliminary stage in using these platforms in which users are not actually aware of the presence of their self on the platform. They just use platforms as a pleasureful way of spending free time, without caring in the first place about the possibility of exposing themself to the judgment of others. This may be called a 'shameless' stage of the using process of social media platforms. Conceiving this stage would have been impossible if I would have chosen to use Scheler's theory instead of Sartre's one. Indeed, according to Scheler there is not any possibility to be in a stage where you cannot feel shame, since it is an inherent condition of the human. Instead, in my opinion, it exists a preliminary stage where users are naïve and interact with platforms as free spaces in which they spend pleasureful free time. Only in a second moment, i.e when it emerges the importance of the judgment of the other people, users start to feel ashamed. This one of the main reasons for which I think that Sartre's theory is more fitting for understanding shame on social media platforms than Scheler's one.

Indeed, the second element of the voyeur's episode by Sartre that is very important to analyse is the hearing of footsteps. In the Sartre's episode, suddenly, the voyeur feels ashamed because of the sound that creates the possibility of being seen by another person. The eventual Look of the Other makes him ashamed, and the feeling of shame makes him aware of his situation, making the self present to himself. Actually, it is the feeling of shame that reveals to him the Other's look and that his self is at the end of that look. The self becomes the object of his 'un-reflective consciousness', i.e the consciousness of something external. This is very peculiar within Sartre's theory because usually only the reflective consciousness, i.e. the one that is inner-directed, can

have the self as object. But in this case the self is not an object in itself, but an object for the Other. In simple words. he sees himself because somebody sees him. Also, because of the undeniable authenticity of the feeling of shame he recognizes to be that self that is seen by the Other. This does not mean that the subject actually knows the situation in which he is, but that he is able to *live* it through shame. He does not know himself; he lives himself as who the Other sees. Even the instruments change their role, switching from something he can use according to his freedom to something that is seen by the Other in a way that cannot understand (Sartre, 2003, p. 261). Applying it to Instagram, the subject perceives something that makes him ashamed. It can be both a picture of a body that makes him ashamed of his picture, or something more direct as a comment under his post that insult him. It does not really matter for this text's purpose what is the equivalent of the footstep, what actually matters is that suddenly the user becomes aware of his situation on the platform. Shame gives him a view of himself and of what he does on Instagram. He recognises to be that self that is (or could be) seen by the Other, because he feels ashamed of the situation in which he is. Even Instagram switch from being a mere instrument for looking what others do to being what the Other sees of yourself. In a practical sense, shame makes him feel that his Instagram profile, his comments and everything else he does on the platform are not simply actions to interact with the platform, but also that all of them are view by other users in a way that he cannot fully perceive. The user suddenly realises to be an environment that shapes the way people see him or her, giving at the same time awareness of the actual condition in which platforms' users are but also shame for the eventual other people's judgments. In the sense, the second stage is the switch from a naïve and shameless way of interacting with social media platforms to an aware and shameful one.

The consequence of these elements is that the subject's freedom becomes dependent on the Other. He cannot avoid recognising to be what the Other sees. His/her shame is the confession of it. But what he/she is ashamed of is neither what he/she was nor what he/she did. It is something more uncertain. Sartre (2003, p. 262) use the metaphor of the shadow to explain it. The subject is not ashamed of his or her actions directly, as a shadow that corresponds exactly to him. It is more like a shadow that is projected on random objects, taking unpredictable forms. This is because the object of the shame is what the Other sees, therefore it is something conditioned by the Other's freedom. But it does not mean that it is an image or representation of the self, as the metaphor of the shadow may suggest. It is his actual 'being', because it is what he/she is ashamed of. Putting

this analysis in the digital context, being ashamed on Instagram makes the user aware of being dependent on the unpredictable look of the Other. He/she is free to express himself and to make experiences on Instagram only within the boundaries of what others see. This is because shame make him or her feel to be what they see. But since these boundaries are unpredictable, his/her being on Instagram is always conditioned by the awareness of the randomness of how he or she is seen, and therefore what he or she is. The unpredictability of being, in virtue of the unpredictability of what others can see as you, is obviously amplified by the digital context. This because on the one hand the number of Looks is way bigger than in other contexts, and on the other hand the level of knowledge about who are those who look at you is extremely lower than in the real world. Consequently, the user in feeling ashamed on platforms as Instagram realises to be conditioned by an unlimited number of Looks that shapes who he in the most unpredictable ways.

Overall, Sartre's theory is able to account for many aspects of the shame's dynamics on Instagram. First, it gives a possible scenario of what is like to be in social environments without being fully aware of it. Then, it provides an explanation for the strength of shame on social media platforms, i,e. the shock that shame produces in making users suddenly aware of their digital self. Finally, it draws the consequence of this shock, that is the acknowledgment of being in an environment where you cannot fully be in control of who you are.

3.4 The question of authenticity

After having analysed Sartre's theory of shame in its descriptive elements, it is now important to delve into the normative ones, and into their relevance for the digital domain. In 'being and nothingness', Sartre (2003) indicates that humanity's task should be to live an authentic existence, characterized by the awareness that its being is not a thing-in itself but also a thing-for -self, i.e. the awareness of his or her freedom. Key point in Sartre's theory, as opposed to authenticity, is the importance of avoiding bad faith. Bad faith can be understood as a kind of self-deception, where you believe yourself or another person to be an something while all along one is actually something else (Somogy and Guignon, 2023). An example of bad faith is acting as if one were a mere object, and thereby denying one's own freedom. Therefore, authenticity is the opposite, i.e the true intention of trying to understand one's actual condition (Somogy and Guignon, 2023).

In the context of social media, authenticity has been studied, particularly with celebrities and influencers, and has been found to involve projecting a carefully cultivated vulnerable image while the truth is that they were accepting objectification (Dowden, 2017). This behaviour can be considered as bad faith, contradicting claims of authenticity. Cheong (2023) argues that treating authenticity as an end goal on social media is what leads to Sartrean bad faith in our interactions with others. He points out that social media platforms often promote authenticity as a core value, but defining its essence becomes problematic since on social media platforms authenticity is considered an end to be presented to others rather than an ongoing process. However, ideals of authenticity continue to shape social media usage. An interesting study analysed posts with hashtags like #nofilter and #liveauthentic on Instagram, supposedly linked to authenticity (Cheong, 2018). It revealed that a significant percentage of posts were carefully curated to project specific images, contradicting the notion of true authenticity. The content mainly focused on positive depictions of humans, like selfies and body images, aiming to invoke pride and avoid shame from others. While actually they were contributing to the re-iteration of those dynamics that generate shame through unhealthy beauty standards.

For these reasons, it is necessary to create an environment within social media platforms where authenticity is the end and not the means. Declaring that you want to be authentic just to hide the artificiality of the images that represent your body only fuels the dynamics of shame. As long as the aim pursued on the platforms is the economic and social recognition of gaining followers by flaunting a 'perfect' life, the dynamics of shame cannot be stopped. Instead, we must follow what Sartre indicates as authenticity. Which means using these platforms as an opportunity to express one's self freely, in the constant search for self-knowledge. Indeed, authenticity must be the goal of using social media platforms. Potentially, they could be an extremely thriving place for free self-expression. Platforms like Instagram give great scope to the representation of how one sees oneself. Furthermore, they could make it possible to get in touch with thousands of people who express themselves authentically (if this actually happens), stimulating users who enter the platforms to also express their authenticity or at least to pursue it.

What therefore emerges from Sartre's analysis is that, as previously mentioned, coming into contact with the gaze of the Other can be a traumatic moment, because it is experienced through the feeling of shame, but it can also push towards the awareness of one's own freedom. Freedom

in the gaze of the Other makes me understand that I can be free. In this sense, if the gaze of the Others on social media platforms is only an objectifying gaze, shame is an end in itself, with all the social and mental health ethical consequences that I have analysed previously. If, on the other hand, the gaze of the Others in these platforms is the look of those who have authenticity as their goal, it can lead users to become aware of their own freedom and therefore to pursue authenticity. As stated above, within the second stage of using platforms, together with shame it emerges awareness. So, the social media platforms' tendency to create shameful dynamics should be transformed into an opportunity to increase users' awareness. In the first stage, users are naïve and do not fully understand that they are exposing many aspects of their life in an environment that poses significant risks. In this sense, Sartre's theory pushes us to acknowledge that even if high levels of shame are very dangerous for social media platforms' users, still shame can be seen as opportunity for avoiding a naïve and irresponsible way of using these platforms.

3.5 Limitation and improvements of Sartre's theory applied to Social Media Platforms

However, Sartre's theory when applied to the context of social media has limitations that are due to the peculiarity of digital shame. The digital realm introduces distinctive dynamics that influence the experience of shame. Firstly, the mediated interactions and the absence of immediate physical presence in online interactions alter the dynamics of shame, introducing anonymity and detachment that can mitigate the intensity of shame or reshape its manifestations. Additionally, social media platforms involve exposure to an entire network of peers, influencers, and celebrities, contributing to a culture of comparison that exceeds the scope of Sartre's theory, which primarily centres on the Look of a singular other. Indeed, the main element that differentiates the social media platforms' context from the Sartre's episode, and therefore from his theory, is the omnipresence of the Look of the Other (Cheong, 2003, p. 7). While it is possible to imagine a preliminary state where the subject is not aware of this gaze (what I called the 'naive stage'), once the subject becomes aware of the eventual Look through shame, this state in the digital domain becomes permanent. He or she knows that in any moment someone could be looking at him or her on Instagram. This can lead to a shame/pride loop (Lopato, 2016), where because of the omnipresent Look the user fells ashamed constantly and reacts using social media platforms in a way that is guided by pride, e.g. editing pictures to appear in a way that is more in line with beauty standards. This loop is very hard to exit, and it pushes people to perpetuate shame dynamics,

increasing the number of people who modify their image to follow those unreachable standards, and as a consequence pushing others to do the same.

The key problem is that in this condition it is very hard to perceive the Look of the Other as authentic, since it is not even an actual Look. It is only the awareness of the permanent possibility that someone is looking at you. Sartre's theory that it possible to understand one's freedom through the free Look of the Other is plausible in the real world, but in the digital context it seems very unrealistic. The high number of Looks makes these Looks dehumanized and too distant from the users to allow them to perceive to be like those that look at them. In this environment, the Look of the Other appears to be always as objectifying, and never as authentic. Therefore, Sartre's account needs to be improved to deal with the omnipresence of the Look.

Moreover, as noted by post phenomenology philosophical theories from the first half of the century, such as existentialism, lack understanding of the mediating role of the technology (Introna, 2007). Unfortunately, there is no opportunity in this text to further explore the contribution that post phenomenology could make in expanding Sartre's theory of shame, as this would take up too much space. Further studies could go in this direction from the analyses conducted in this text. Instead, what can be emphasized here is that common to other thinkers of his time is Sartre's mistake of underestimating the role that subjects' surroundings and technology play in conditioning emotions. In the voyeur example it is clear how the role of the keyhole is absolutely marginal. The only analysis made by Sartre is that for the non-thetic consciousness the objects are not actually there. This is an interesting point, as we can see that people are often not fully aware of using technology while they are on social media platforms. For Sartre, shame is what triggers the realisation of the actual situation. But what is the role of the technology in the feeling of shame? Sartre does not answer to this question. It is possible to interpret the role of the keyhole as the object that makes the situation shameful. The voyeur is ashamed to be seen in that situation because he is using the keyhole as a mean to view without been seen. Without the instrument of the keyhole that would be imposed, and therefore the situation would not have been shameful. This interpretation may be plausible, but still, it does not account for the entire role of technology on social media platforms. Indeed, users may be ashamed when they realise that someone could know that they are using social media platforms as means to control someone else. But this is only one of the multiple possibilities in which shame is present on social media

platforms. More than being ashamed of using technology, the users usually are shamed or feel ashamed through the technology itself. As I showed in the first chapter, social media platform's features, especially those of Instagram, trigger shame through an environment that exacerbate body comparisons. Also, social pressure of appearing on Instagram has been proven to be an important reason for shame on this platform. Overall, focusing on the interpersonal dimension, i.e. the relationship between the self and the Look of the Other, Sartre overlook the importance of the context in triggering emotions such as shame. Especially in contexts where the potential and actual looks of the others are so many like on social media platforms, more than the relationship with the Other it is crucial the relationship with the technology that mediate the relationship with all these others' looks. Therefore, an improvement to Sartre's theory is needed to properly account for shame on social media platforms. This improvement mainly consists of the acknowledgement of the relevance of technology in shaping shame dynamics.

As stated in the second chapter, Aristotle defined shame as "pain or disturbance in regard to bad things, whether present, past, or future, which seem likely to involve us in discredit; and shamelessness as contempt or indifference in regard to the same things" (Cope & Sandis, 1877, Rhetoric 1383b15-19). Given the analysis showed in this chapter, it is possible to improve this definition defining shame as pain in regard to real or perceived bad thing, whether present, past, or future, which involve us in discredit from the look of the other, and that is strongly connected to the environment's social norms where we behave. From this re-definition emerges the importance of not assuming that dynamics that in the real world are not particularly shameful will be the same on social media platforms. Designers of these platforms should study and understand the peculiar shame dynamics on digital platforms to try to mitigate them. For example, they could enable anonymous reporting of content that is potentially harmful or offensive. This can encourage users to report without fear of retaliation. Also, it is important to invest in better content moderation systems, including AI and human moderation, to detect and remove content that promotes shame, bullying, or hate speech promptly. As well as make the algorithms used for content recommendation and visibility more transparent. Users should have a clear understanding of how and why content appears on their feeds. Moreover, they could provide users with guidance on responsible social media use, teach them how to identify and report harmful content, as well as how to maintain healthy boundaries, offer resources for users who may be struggling with shame or mental health issues due to their experiences on the platform, and create features that encourage

positive interactions (for instance, Instagram's "like" button could be replaced or supplemented with options for users to express a wider range of emotions or reactions, promoting empathy and understanding). Other solutions could be to implement content warning labels for sensitive or potentially triggering content so that users can then choose whether or not they want to view such content, to promote features that encourage users to connect in real life which can foster a sense of community and reduce the isolation that can lead to shame, as well as avoiding shame dynamics peculiar of the digital environment by including real life moments in social media relationships, to allow users more control over their own content and how it's shared, to make the platform more inclusive by considering the needs and experiences of diverse user groups, including those who are more likely to face shame or harassment, to collaborate with researchers and organizations to study the impact of social media on mental health and develop evidence-based strategies to reduce shame and promote well-being, and to conduct regular audits and assessments of the platform's policies and their effectiveness in reducing shame episodes making adjustments based on the findings. Obviously, all these suggestions are not supported by enough evidence or scientific studies to be taken as definitive, but they are intended to be as examples of how it is possible to reduce shame dynamics in social media platforms when this emotion is considered to be deeply connected to the environment and not only to the people who are involved in the social dynamics. This does not mean that users are not relevant in shame dynamics. This analysis still considers Sartre's account to be extremely valid and acknowledges the primary role of the Look of the Other in triggering the feeling of shame. But the medium where the Look is perceived must be not considered to be neutral and irrelevant. Instead, the medium must be considered the first factor can modify the way the Self perceives the Look of the Other. Therefore, by modifying the medium, i.e the social media platforms, it is possible to mitigate shame dynamics that deeply affect the users' social life, self-understanding, and mental health. In this way, not only it is changed the way users behave on social media platforms, but also the way users perceive to be looked, that I showed (thank to the inputs from Sartre's account of shame) to be of capital importance in shame dynamics. Already through the analysis conducted in the first chapter, the importance that certain features of social media platforms, especially Instagram, have in amplifying or generating shame had emerged. Now, thanks to a greater understanding of what shame is from a philosophical perspective through multiple authors, and in particular through the analysis of Sartre's theory of shame in Being and Nothingness, it is clear that action must be taken on the environment and

design of the technology to reduce the social and health effects of this strong feeling on users of social media platforms. In particular, thanks to Sartre, it emerged that shame has its strength in the way people perceive to be looked, more than in what they actually do. Therefore, to reduce shame dynamics experts should design social media platforms in a way that does not put users in the condition of feeling to be looked negatively, focusing on users' perception of other users' gazes.

4. Conclusion

In this text I argued that the prevalence of shame on social media platforms, particularly Instagram, is extensive due to the culture of comparing bodies, the emphasis on unattainable beauty standards, and the desire for external validation. Comprehending these dynamics is vital for individuals and society to navigate the online world in a healthier and more compassionate manner. Specifically, understanding the role of image editing and the viral nature of social media in perpetuating body shame is crucial for effectively addressing this issue. By promoting authenticity, encouraging responsible use of image editing tools, and fostering a supportive online community, social media platforms can help mitigate the negative impact of these factors. It is essential to create an environment that celebrates diverse body types and appearances, empowering individuals to feel confident and embrace their unique beauty, thereby avoiding the perpetuation of shame-inducing dynamics. I showed that this is particularly important because experiencing shame related to body image on social media platforms can significantly impact mental health, contributing to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal. Recognizing the detrimental effects of body shame is crucial for cultivating a healthier relationship with social media and implementing interventions that promote self-acceptance, body positivity, and resilience against societal beauty ideals. Therefore, I claimed that it is necessary to reevaluate how we conceptualize shame and its implications on social media platforms. However, traditional philosophical explanations of shame fail to fully capture the complexities of shame on social media. These explanations often focus on shame arising from personal failures or moral transgressions in real-world contexts. Nonetheless, shame on social media can stem from comparisons to carefully curated and idealized images, the pursuit of validation through metrics,

and the pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. These factors significantly alter the dynamics of shame, necessitating a more nuanced understanding that encompasses the digital realm. I showed the limitations of traditional philosophical accounts of shame in understanding social media platforms in this text through the analysis of Aristotle's and Nietzsche's accounts, which solely focus on the moral aspects of shame and the question of whether it is morally right to be guided by shame. In contrast, I argued that Max Scheler's theory proves more useful due to its emphasis on the relationship between self and shame. Firstly, Scheler's theory encompasses a dimension in which shame manifests before morality, rooted in the innate fear of assimilation into the general and the human desire to maintain distinctiveness from the community. Specifically, Scheler highlights how shame is connected to perceiving the body as something to hide, as it associates us with other creatures. Additionally, Scheler emphasizes that shame arises from the ambition to attain something beyond reach. In this regard, Scheler's analysis provides valuable insights into the dynamics driving social media platforms. On these platforms, shame appears intertwined with the tension between aspiring to be recognized for one's uniqueness, objectifying the body as a mere object of comparison, and pursuing unattainable standards. However, I showed that Scheler's excessive focus on the individual dimension of shame limits his theory. While it avoids reducing shame to a mere consequence of societal norms and morality, it overlooks the influence of others' gaze in shaping the personal experience of shame. Consequently, I warranted an examination of Sartre's theory of shame as it expands on Scheler's ideas by incorporating an interpersonal dimension. Sartre's theory successfully incorporates the productive aspects of Scheler's analysis, such as the role of shame in self-construction and the significance of the body, while also considering the impact of others' perceptions on the experience of shame. Indeed, I claimed that Sartre's theory effectively explains many aspects of the dynamics of shame on Instagram. Firstly, it presents a plausible scenario of being in social environments without full awareness. Furthermore, it provides an explanation for the intensity of shame on social media platforms, namely the shock that arises from suddenly becoming aware of one's digital self. Lastly, it acknowledges the consequence of this shock, namely the realization of being in an environment where one cannot fully control their identity. Moreover, Through the concept of authenticity, I have shown how Sartre's normative model can suggest a way to decrease the dynamics of claimed authenticity on social media platforms. In fact, he argues that humanity's task is to pursue the awareness of one's own freedom, expressing the self. Currently in social networks authenticity is

used as a means to make posts more attractive but it is often not really pursued, creating a shame/pride loop that pushes users to contribute to shame dynamics. If instead it were the true purpose of users of platforms such as Instagram, a virtuous circle could be generated in which the authentic gaze of the Other is an opportunity for the self to understand its own freedom. If people expressed themselves on social media platforms without feeling social pressure to appear perfect, showing their bodies without filters and modifications, other users would also feel no shame in showing themselves authentically, or at least be stimulated to do so. They in turn would stimulate others to show themselves as they are, not feeling pressure to meet unattainable standards of beauty. Yet, I have shown that this theory has limitations related to the specific characteristics of digital shaming compared to the real one. In particular, it does not acknowledge the relevance of technology in shaping shame dynamics. Social media platforms' designers should acknowledge this relevance and adapt their design to avoid the perpetuation of shame dynamics directly related to the way social media platforms are made. Studies that will delve more deeply into this topic can show in detail what technical countermeasures can be taken to change both the way users behave on social media platforms and the way they perceive themselves, but more importantly, the way they believe they are viewed. In fact, I believe that probably the most important lesson that is possible to learn from this analysis is that the feeling of shame on social media platforms depends mainly on how users believe other users may judge them by looking at images of them, and that this perception depends more on how the platforms are designed than on how users actually behave. While Sartre's theory gave more importance to the relationship between the subjects involved, this text highlighted the importance of the medium in shaping the perception of the others' looks that generate shame. I suggested possible improvements of social media platforms that take into account the peculiar dynamics of shame on these platforms, but they cannot be considered to be valid until more scientific evidence of the validity of these solutions is provided.

5. References

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