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محل برگزاری دانشگاه تهران

The effect of social media in promoting beauty standards

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Abstract

Beauty is concerned with physical and mental health as both are intimately related. The media is responsible for portraying beauty standards that influence both men and women. Social media features depict a double-edged sword that would influence human behaviour in, either way, the positive or negative. Many social media are equipped with various filters to meet the beauty standards as shown in the media. Society members who perceive beauty standards at the extreme level must use a filter before post their pictures online. However, in a real-life, they would spend a fortune on aesthetic correction and gymnasium to meet the beauty standard set by the media.

Keywords: beauty standards, Social media, various filters, aesthetic correction, gymnasium.

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1. Introduction

Our newest generations are unique from any other we've had in history, thanks to modern technology and social media; we are offered knowledge of the world at our fingertips, and who are we to refuse? But what also comes with a social media presence and culture, is the expectations and standards young people find themselves having to meet - the need to achieve an unachievable image. Despite what positives it might hold, damage that social media has and will continue to cause is something that cannot be ignored. The western societal image of "beauty" can be many things, but the most prominent today is that these standards all revolve around eurocentric bodily and facial features. These expectations are harmful to all young children today who have exposure to technology and communication like no generation before, but especially to POCs. The fast growing world of social media opens up a platform for young girls who find themselves being held to higher standards of beauty like never before. Although traditionally unattainable, these features are even more so for POCs, who are told from a young age that their ethnic features are unattractive and undesirable. These have been known to have lasting negative results on self-esteem, mental health, and confidence later in life. It is important to consider just how damaging it is to hold an image of beauty revolving around one's race and skin color. In a world where white women are deemed more attractive than their darker counterparts, what undeserving advantages do these women claim, and how much harm can this cause from such a young age? A study done by Umberson and Hughes in 1987 found that "people deemed attractive by society are given more professional and social opportunities from childhood through adulthood, thus giving lighter-skinned black women greater access to success than darker-skinned black women" (Mohamed et al, 2021).

Despite the maxim "beauty is only skin deep," people make inferences about a person's personality based simply on their appearance. In one study, participants viewed photographs of people varying in attractiveness. The participants believed that the attractive people had the most interesting and desirable personalities and that they would attain more prestigious jobs, have happier marriages, and enjoy a happier life overall. This seminal study provided concrete evidence for what is known as the "beautiful is good" bias. This bias reflects the idea that people, whether consciously or unconsciously, assume a person's attractiveness reflects that person's inner characteristics and results in more positive feelings and beliefs regarding attractive men and women. Beautiful people are treated more favorably in job interviews. Physical attractiveness can be the deciding factor in who is hired when two applicants are similarly qualified, and attractive individuals receive significantly higher pay than less attractive individuals. Physically attractive politicians are perceived to be more competent and are viewed more favorably than unattractive politicians. The advantages afforded by appearance start early on. Teachers judge attractive children as more likely to be intelligent and treat them more favorably. Looking good can also get people out of trouble: people give less severe punishments to attractive students who have cheated in an examination and to criminals who are found guilty of various crimes (Frederick et al, 2015). Today, Social Media is one of the most important factors contributing to the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health of an individual. With the media constantly portraying ideal beauty and body image comparisons, the decisions of men and women's beauty choices are globally affected. Social media refers to the use of websites and applications to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Technological developments have given rise to various gadgets

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including smart-phones, tablets, and laptops to robots too. Living in a digitized era, communication has now become easier and faster with the emergence of various social applications available at the click of a button. While many may agree that social media has connected individuals globally, it has also been used to set standards of beauty for males, females as well as the third gender. This in turn has been known to affect the self-esteem of individuals with regards to body image, body modification and how they view themselves in society. In order to be accepted in society females have to battle body image issues from a very young age, where thin is considered to be the ideal body type (Henriques & Patnaik, 2020).

Spending too long on social networking sites affects the mood and more likely to report poor mental health, including symptoms of depression. Depression is not the cause of the only symptom by social media. Fear of Missing out (FOMO) is a form of anxiety the user gets when scared of missing out on a positive experience or emotions that someone else is getting. Therefore, the user will be continuously engaged in social media and more likely to see that someone is having more fun and that is precisely what causes FOMO. This is one cause of being addictive to social media, Addiction to social media were shown in many studies, in our survey, we found that more than 70% of the respondent check social media at least few times daily which is considered an addiction. The mass media has a significant influence on people and especially on the younger generation. It plays an essential role in shaping the opinions and positions of young people. The young people are more isolated and do not know how to interact with society. They gradually lose their communications skills and the intimacy of face-to-face interactions. According to (Harrington, 2013), teenagers are posting selfies on social networking to get more attention from others. Young girls are more likely to be dissatisfied with their shape and weight, even if they are very healthy and balanced from this (Yamout et al, 2019).

The social comparison process involves comparing themselves with others to evaluate their attitudes, skills and traits. Indeed, individuals frequently turn to others as models for acting, thinking, and feeling to successfully coordinate economic transactions, political activity, and social relations. There is also some evidence that narratives may influence individuals' self-perceptions, motives, and behaviour in consistent ways with the storey and its characters, a process known as absorption. Women's dissatisfaction with their personal features may be influenced by the slim body ideal that circulates in Western society. Being thin is applauded, while being overweight is disliked. It should be highlighted that the slim body ideal and the thin is a good assumption are not the same thing. Similar comparisons will be more common with close friends, whereas with more distant connections, different comparisons will be more often. Close friends should be objectively more similar, but dissimilar comparisons with close friends should be avoided as well (Termizi & Herwan, 2021). Therefore, in the current research, we will examine the impact of social media on beauty standards

2. Social Media Platforms

The social media landscape evolves at an unprecedented pace. Social media research has been attentive but delayed to these developments. While almost all studies before 2017 focused on Facebook, studies examining Instagram and Snapchat have dominated research in the past years. New popular platforms, such as Tinder and TikTok, are just beginning to be examined. While there are similarities in the way that people use different platforms, there are also nuanced

differences with implications for body image. For example, experimental and cross-sectional studies suggest that use of photo-based platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat, relate more consistently than more text-based platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, to dysfunctional body image. These relationships appear to be largely similar across genders. Photo-based platforms (in which users must post an image) are proposed to be worse for body image because they are more focused on physical appearance. They present social media environments in which users are more likely to post appearance-focused content and thus subsequently are also likely to view appearance-focused content. This content provides users with more opportunities to internalize appearance ideals, self-objectify (i.e., apply an observer's perspective to their own body,) and make negative appearance comparisons. In support, women who spent time on Instagram in a lab setting were found to make more appearance comparisons than those who spent time on Facebook. Further, Instagram use, but not Facebook use, has been positively correlated with self-objectification and appearance comparisons. Recent research testing how such mechanisms mediate the links between different platforms and body image is limited, yet consistent in its support (Vandenbosch et al, 2022).

3. Social media and unrealistic beauty standards

The connection between social media and beauty standards has received a lot of attention in the recent past, and a growing body of research points to the potentially damaging effect influencers on social media have on young women's ideas about what constitutes attractiveness. According to the findings of a study conducted by Fardouly et al., degrees of body dissatisfaction in young women and the desire to improve their appearance increased when they were exposed to idealized standards of beauty presented using social media sites like Instagram. Researchers Tiggemann and Slater also came to similar conclusions when they found that young women who were exposed to thin-ideal photographs on social media platforms showed decreased levels of body satisfaction in addition to elevated degrees of anxiety and depression (Kumar, 2023).

Since the dawn of time, beauty has been an ever-present companion and an integral part of humanity. Exploring the evolution of how beauty is perceived through the centuries is an aspect of exploring society's evolution. A number of social and psychologic studies have demonstrated that facial and body consonance have a highly important role in our social life.[3] Beautiful people are considered more successful in their professional and personal life, and beauty is associated with well-being. Beauty owners are also perceived as being smarter and more intelligent. Research has demonstrated that beautiful individuals tend to marry beautiful partners, and they are more frequently hired and promoted, receiving better performance evaluations. The influence of beauty may be discovered, sometimes unexpectedly, in several areas of our life. One example can be legal sentencing: researchers have found that people considered nonattractive are more often found guilty and have received longer sentences. Nahai emphasized the power of beauty by indicating a correlation between beauty and happiness, economic advantage, trustworthiness, and confidence (Dimitrov & Kroumpouzos, 2023).

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The ideal beauty standard in 1960-1970 was thin, brown skin and wavy hair. In the 1980 era, the ideal beauty standard was smooth and soft skin. Then in the 1990 era, the ideal beauty standard was more complex and complicated. There were more criteria such as ideal body was not a thin body anymore but a curvy body which was not too thin but not too fat. Good skin was not only smooth and soft skin but also fair and bright skin. The deconstruction of women's beauty standards appears from time to time, it's like the exotic skin represented with brown skin that used to be popular among girls in the 1960 era was deconstructed with the ideal skin color and tone with yellow and bright skin. The deconstruction also appears on body shape, from the thin body to be the curvy body that is not too thin but not too fat. The interpretation of skin color and body shape change the beauty standard on society which gets the influence from media The deconstruction of women's beauty standards emerges through the trend on traditional media mass. Like in 1960-1990 the mainstream media such as television, magazine, and newspaper are to be the trend maker, then in 2000 era was shifted to social media. Social media is widely used by society from different backgrounds, thus it plays a big role to construct new beauty standards. Unlike traditional media mass, social media provides wide options and can be used by all people around the world. Several options provided by social media that are not provided by traditional media, namely: 1) users not only limited to models and celebrities, 2) users mostly only show the best version of themselves (mostly in physical aspects) like uploading the most attractive photo, 3) generally, users interact with their closest people like family, friends, and peers on social media, 4) social media provides the wide range of features like comment, share and like sections. The wide options provided by social media give many chances for people to be the trend maker and the chance to be popular. Nowadays, celebrities are not only limited to who appear on television but also the trend maker on social media which is usually called selebgram, selebtok, etc. To be popular on social media and become social media celebrities, they should have a high number of followers, likes, and repost. They should campaign a specific and interesting message on social media or follow the challenge from the viral trend to be popular. The fast news spread on social media makes something easy to be viral that usually inspires the follower to do the viral challenge or popular trend. Therefore, the dynamic change on social media can influence the deconstruction of women's beauty standards (Nurjanah et al, 2022).

In this society, media significantly shaped people's beauty ideals and perpetuated unrealistic standards of attractiveness. In this section, the paper will discuss the different impacts of various medial portrayals of unrealistic beauty standards. Advertisement and fashion have been the two essential components of perpetuating distorted body image. Advertising is crucial in projecting idealized beauty standards since it is a pervasive and compelling medium. Models and celebrities who follow particular physical standards are frequently used as brand ambassadors. Their representations allude to the consumers that their standards are easy to reach. Research like those by Grabe, Ward, and Hyde has examined how viewers' exposure to images of idealized beauty in advertising can cause them to feel unsatisfied with their bodies. Such representations encourage a consumer culture that combines the pursuit of an idealized appearance with the use of products.

The emphasis on thinness has also been an essential motif in fashion. These slender body standards, have been questioned for their propensity to accelerate body image problems. This emphasis on thinness upholds a limited definition of beauty by ignoring the diversity of body types and shapes. Popular culture, including movies, television, and other entertainment media, maintains and promotes false beauty standards. These media greatly influence young people's perceptions of themselves and others, frequently presenting beauty as a crucial quality intimately connected to success, attractiveness, and desirability. Characters that meet traditional beauty standards commonly appear in mainstream movies and TV shows. Leading actors and actresses, whose appearances are frequently extremely managed, who become cultural icons representing beauty's predominant ideals. Children who watch these values on television often may acquire the impression that they are desirable and attainable. The impact of these images is shown by research by Tiggemann and Slater, which shows that media representations of muscularity and thinness indicate more general societal norms related to our usual appearance and value. The influence of entertainment media is influential throughout adolescence and young adulthood. Identity exploration, self-discovery, and an increased sensitivity to societal norms and expectations are characteristics of these life stages. Young people are more receptive to media messages that define beauty ideals and frequently compare their appearance to these arbitrary standards. Social media and other digital channels have emerged as essential tools for spreading beauty standards in the modern era. Online personas are deliberately curated by social media influencers, celebrities, and users, who frequently present an idealized picture of themselves. Due to people's tendency to make upward social comparisons, creating well-maintained online personas impacts how people perceive beauty (Xie, 2024).

Media keep on evolving. Traditional media such as television, films and magazines are losing their popularity out to the internetbased media. Internet-based media and especially social networking sites differ from traditional media in that they allow individuals to interact with their friends in their networks. Moreover, Internet-based media are easily available on devices such as smartphones or tablets. Therefore, the amount of time that people are spending into social media is increasing quickly. Especially among teenagers, watching films and tv series online as well as connecting on social media has never been as easy as now. To date, an average person spends over 10 hours per day by using social media. That is because Internetbased media are easily available on smartphones or tablets. Media content does not mirror the reality, nevertheless the promulgated content becomes the standard against which the self and the others are judged. Previous research has demonstrated that the mass media are a powerful contributor to individual's body dissatisfaction, especially among women. Meta-analytic studies suggested that exposure to thin ideal image portrayed in magazines and on television is associated with body dissatisfaction among women. More recently, research has supported similar effects related to exposure to 'newer' forms of media, in particular the Internet social media. Time spent on the Internet, and particularly on social networking sites such as Facebook, has been related to poorer body image outcomes for both adult women and adolescent girls. This association can be due to the media

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promotion of ideal, and therefore unrealistic, standards of beauty. Even if the promoted body shape and weight are unachievable for the average person, viewers end up perceiving those ideal pictures as "reality". This leads them to consider the proposed ideal standard as the social definition of attractiveness and feel dissatisfied with themselves. Especially during adolescence, teenagers often engage in social comparisons in order to increase their body esteem. Social comparison refers to the judgment that people make about their own body compared to others. Comparing their own body to those ideal standards of beauty, promoted by media, may lead adolescents to feel dissatisfied with themselves. That is because those ideal pictures are perceived as real but are felt unattainable (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018).

There are multiple factors that affect the beauty standards in the world today, which involve women and men and the third gender individuals trying new trends to be socially accepted. The purchasing decisions of millennials are influenced majorly by social media. 72% of millennials procure beauty products based on Instagram posts and other social networks. Makeup consists of the application of cosmetic products to beautify or change the way one looks either artistically or to conceal flaws. Jang-Soon and Hye-Jin investigated 240 teenage males' preferences for makeup use. Results indicated that their appearance was one of the major reasons for their social success. The male respondents who were young, unmarried and city residents had an overall positive perception about cosmetics. With bloggers constantly advertising on social media, cosmetic products, have gained popularity. The images on social media sites are idealized and unreal, due to digital alteration thereby setting high expectations from individuals in society. Imperfections are removed by airbrushing and using other digitized apps to whiten teeth, slim waists and reduce sizes in order to be accepted as beauty ideals. These techniques may further lead to negative consequences of increased body dissatisfaction, body modification and low self-esteem issues. Unrealistic images of feminity, beauty, success and body shape promoted through social media images are associated with development of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction disorders (Henriques & Patnaik, 2020).

4. Education Initiatives and Media Literacy Programs

Media literacy has become a center of gravity for countering fake news, and a diverse array of stakeholders – from educators to legislators, philanthropists to technologists – have pushed significant resources toward media literacy programs. Media literacy, however, cannot be treated as a panacea. Media literacy is traditionally conceived as a process or set of skills based on critical thinking. It has a long history of development aligned along the dialectic between protection and participation. Contemporary media literacy tends to organize around five themes: youth participation, teacher training and curricular resources, parental support, policy initiatives, and evidence base construction. Programs like these have demonstrated positive outcomes, particularly in the case of rapid responses to breaking news events, connecting critical thinking with behavior change, and evaluating partisan content.However, media literacy programs also have their challenges. In general, there is a lack of comprehensive evaluation data of media literacy efforts. Some research shows that media literacy efforts can have little-to-no impact for certain

materials, or even produce harmful conditions of overconfidence (Bulger & Davison, 2018). For young people, media literacy can be a tool for empowerment. The process of advancing media literacy skills is known as media literacy education, and its goals are to increase awareness of media influence. This can foster an engaged attitude toward both consuming and producing media. Young people who receive such education are more equipped to evaluate media content critically and challenge authorities. They give people the abilities to realize the photo manipulation, the business motives behind advertising, and the sociocultural settings that influence media portrayals. At the same time, incorporating educational initiatives can help the influence of raising awareness of media impact. Formal education can mitigate the sociological influences. Schools can integrate media literacy classes as an interdisciplinary curriculum to discuss body image, self-esteem, and critical media analysis. These educational initiatives aim to raise awareness and foster resilience against media-driven beauty pressures. There is another path to mitigate the consequence of media exposure. When schools and institutions can help young people establish a healthy beauty standard, film companies and other institutions can eliminate the negative consequences of unrealistic beauty ideas by promoting diverse media representations. Introducing more diverse body images can effectively challenge the social norm and contribute to a more inclusive and accepting media landscape. Collaboration with the media industry is also essential in this endeavor. Encouraging responsible media practices, such as the disclosure of digital retouching in advertising, can contribute to transparency and help young people differentiate between manipulated images and reality. Media literacy and education initiatives aim to empower young individuals as critical consumers of all media products. Critical thinking can actively challenge unrealistic body standards when equipped with the tool. As long as enough people have a critical mind, media influence will substantially decrease. Aside from school and the education system, policy implications and interventions could also be extremely useful. This section discusses potential policy implications and interventions that can mitigate the sociological consequences of unrealistic beauty ideals among young people (Xie, 2024).

5. Conclusion

Social media has a significant impact on promoting beauty standards, often perpetuating unrealistic and unattainable ideals of beauty. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are filled with carefully curated images and videos that showcase flawless appearances, leading many individuals to compare themselves to these unattainable standards. This constant exposure to idealized beauty can have detrimental effects on people's self-esteem and body image. Research has shown that frequent use of social media is associated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, particularly among young people. Moreover, the rise of filters and editing tools on social media has further distorted perceptions of beauty, making it difficult for individuals to discern what is real and what is digitally altered. This can create a sense of inadequacy and pressure to conform to these unrealistic standards. On the positive side, social media has also provided a platform for individuals to challenge traditional beauty norms and promote body positivity and diversity. Influencers and content creators are using their platforms to advocate for self-acceptance and celebrate all forms of beauty. Overall, while social media can be a powerful tool for promoting beauty standards, it is important for individuals to critically evaluate the content they consume and prioritize self-acceptance and authenticity over unrealistic ideals. In recent years, notably in the beauty sector, utilising social media influencers as a marketing tool has

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increased. These influencers have an effect on the perception of young women their own attractiveness. Influencers can exploit the platforms provided by social media companies to propagate idealized body images and high beauty standards, both of which may be detrimental to the mental health of young women.

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