



How False Social Media Beauty Standards Lead to Body Dysmorphia

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ABSTRACT

Social media apps, owing to their technological advancements and applications of photo editing tools, have digitalized the female body and in doing so have led to the creation of unrealistic beauty ideals. Social media along with cultural factors created a socio-digital construct in which an attractive and successful woman embodies European features. Repeated exposure to this kind of imagery has made women feel uncomfortable in their bodies. Objectification of young women to such an extent has created an environment where an increasing number of women are suffering from body image issues, such as body dysmorphic disorder. A mental health condition, whereby people utilize most of their time worrying about perceived flaws in their appearance. The excess of this disorder can lead to poor self-esteem, self-harm, depression, and even suicide. It is most common in teens and young adults. This study investigates the patterns of toxic social media trends, how they are being integrated into society and why young women are falling prey to them. The research methodology comprised of a mixed-method approach. It was conducted in two stages: the first half consisted of a Google survey which was shared online with Facebook Female-centric groups besides Instagram and WhatsApp. In the second stage, in-depth interviews of eight women, belonging to different backgrounds of fitness trainer, psychologist, feminist writer, model, nutritionist, and three students from the age groups of 18, 21, and 24 were sampled. The reason for opting mixed method was to strengthen the study and enhance its authenticity through in-depth interview analysis.

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1. Introduction

Social media is a powerful tool of the century. Through its distinctive platforms and apps, it can influence and alter the mindset of a large populace within a short span. Infusion of cultures, globalization, downfall of dictatorships, worldwide movements, and campaigns has all been massively influenced by social media activism. One of the features that have made social media so popular is its ability to provide a platform to its viewers and educate them beyond conventional means. It equips people with new and old narratives regarding themselves and their surroundings which are outside their native wisdom. Indeed, online media has been a game-changer in many ways, but upon critically examining its role from feminist's perspective regarding the female body image; a detrimental impact has been witnessed. As social media platforms underwent technological advancements, the apps developed built-in features that could digitally alter the overall appearance of an individual. It made them (the individuals) look picture-perfect.

The cosmetic and media industry spent millions of dollars to showcase the ideal feminine body to promote their products worldwide. Social media along with traditional cultural factors created a socio-digital construct in which the ideal attractive woman embodies European

features consisting of fox eyes, big lips, a petite frame with curves, fair skin, and lush straight hair. This reconstructed ideal image was promoted so excessively that women began to trade their authentic selves for “reel” bodies that represented what they wanted to be. Unfortunately, this ideal beauty standard has led women to become uncomfortable with their bodies thus has led to rising cases of body dysmorphia. It is diagnosed as a mental health disorder in which one is dissatisfied with a perceived flaw in their appearance which may or may not be noticeable to other people. People suffering from this disorder spend a lot of their time worrying about their flaws to such an extent that it gets in the way of their ability to live normally. The severity of this disorder can lead to deterioration of cognitive performance, body dissatisfaction, severe depression, and suicidal thoughts. Social media influencers who are established as micro-celebrities with a large following have perpetuated a culture of intense body image dissatisfaction along with pre-existing social traditions.

The most popular global influencers—the Kardashians, a multi-billionaire family owes their success to the capitalization of unattainable beauty ideals. For decades, they have brain-washed young women into thinking that the Kardashian figure can be attained by rigorous workouts, and a well-balanced diet. The truth entails that they have gone through multiple surgical and cosmetic procedures to attain their looks and constantly edit their pictures to make people buy their skin-wear and makeup products (Kato, 2022). The Kardashians have also promoted misinformation regarding diet culture, which has led to many teens making problematic choices. The family has also used cultural appropriation which has had a detrimental effect on black women (Stevens, 2021). Pakistani influencers have also contributed to dangerous ideals of beauty. These influencers consisting of celebrities and bloggers have capitalized on the insecurities of women regarding their bodies. In collaboration with big brands, they have integrated the need for a fair skin and a thin body. The influencers also came up with their own makeup brands, promising the public that using them would get a certain kind of skin while in reality the brands consisted of alarming chemicals and were not good for all skin types.

An Instagram influencer (Influencer A) instructed teen girls to get a white complexion by combining an alarming proportion of ammonia and hydrogen peroxide to bleach their skin. Another influencer, who is also a TV actress, Influencer B (names of the influencers have been kept anonymous due to confidentiality issues) with a following of 6.9 million was heavily criticized for photo-shopping various parts of her body and appearing to have an unrealistically thin waist. The actress also had very problematic takes on body-shaming and weight gain. Going so far as to say that husbands who taunt their wives regarding their weight are absolutely right and that is how one loses weight. She has also body-shamed a Bollywood actress for gaining weight after pregnancy. Another Pakistani actress and influencer (influencer C) advocated for an extreme crash diet that made her lose 17kgs. The fad diet made her instantly lose eight kilograms in just the first week. The diet consisted of consuming only egg whites, vegetable juices, and tea. She publicized her weight loss journey without considering the dangers the diet posed to the health of her followers. Having many young followers on her Instagram account, the diet started trending and a lot of young girls tried it. The diet was extremely restrictive. Such kinds of fad diets lead people to develop a dysfunctional relationship with food, especially carbs. Influencer C kept on promoting the diet on TV besides online media.

Around 50 million people in Pakistan suffer from mental health disorders, which is around 20 percent of the population. Detailed studies have shown that women are at a higher risk of suffering from mental health illnesses than men. Obesity and body dysmorphia are some of the leading causes of depression among Pakistani women. In order to understand the growing emergence of body dysmorphic disorder, it is paramount to analyze the issue with details that will provide ground-breaking insights. To understand why this disorder is prevalent among Pakistani women, and how the use of social media acts as a catalyst for it. It is pertinent to investigate the socio-cultural factors that have contributed to this disorder. Though in the past significant studies have been carried out on body dysmorphia, yet majority of them adopted the quantitative method which has failed to provide a comprehensive in-depth analysis of the issue in the long run. Qualitative analysis is the need of the hour as it will lead to a different perception of the subject matter. Thus, this research aims to study the issue both quantitatively and qualitatively to cover different aspects of it thoroughly.

2. Literature Review

Zhang, Wang, Li, and Wu (2021) conducted research examining the link of social media usage to disordered eating behaviors. According to him, social media users accounted for 72% of the world's population and the number was expected to rise annually. From 2008 to 2016, social media platforms became more diverse, therefore, increasing online audience engagement and the mode of interaction on social media sites.

Gender plays a huge role in determining online behavior and preferences frequently, teenage girls are likely to have more Instagram and Tumblr accounts than teenage boys (Wilksch et al., 2019 as cited in (Zhang et al., 2021)). It was found that females' tendency to compare with celebrities and online friends had a closer relationship with body-image dissatisfaction which led to a stronger drive for the ideal body type among females. Likewise, Thomas (2021) further explained that women edited and manipulated their selfies to present a socially acceptable image of their bodies to the world; individuals who frequently self-edited their pictures expressed facial dissatisfaction when exposed to photoshopped images of other women. The rise of unrealistic appearance expectations set by influencers can damage one's self-image. "If unable to reach the unrealistic levels of attractiveness constantly seen online, the burden imposed by social comparison can contribute to mental health issues" (White et al., 2006; Boers et al., 2019 as cited in Thomas et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Henriques and Patnaik (2020) in their article titled "Social Media and its Effect on Beauty" examined the linkage between social media platforms and emerging beauty trends. Purchasing decisions regarding beauty products were directly influenced by social media. Around 72 % of millennials choose beauty products based on Instagram posts, out of which the majority of the products are cosmetic-related. This was the direct result of bloggers constantly advertising these products on social media. Upon further evaluation, it was revealed that social media posts encouraged individuals to engage in body modifications to preserve their distinct self-identity. Sexual motivation was also one of the reasons cited.

"A survey conducted in an American university found that 60 % of American women who had piercing involved tongue, lips, nose, navel, genitals, and eyebrows besides the earlobe piercing, suffered from regular bacterial infections, constant bleeding, and trauma. Slight exposure to body modification had led to increasing searches on tattoos." Diving deeper, Bauer (2020) further investigated the relationship dynamics between social media bloggers and influencers with that of the general audience. Social media bloggers and influencers were found to be more relatable to women understudy than traditional models. A majority of them were high school or college students, thus this very fact established the reliability factor (Bauer, 2020).

Social media users viewed them as distant friends. The study found that women, suffering from low self-esteem after spending hours on social media sites, reported having a greater desire to look like influencers. Women also internalized the thin ideal after being exposed to social media sites. Similarly, Rydying et al (2019) found that women on Facebook displayed a greater degree to change their face, hair, and skin. A deeper study indicated that time allocated to photo-based activity on Facebook led the way to body image disturbances, lower self-esteem, and negative thin-ideal internalization. A two-part study discovered that female individuals, who were heavy users of Instagram, experienced a range of physiological outcomes such as, self-esteem and physical appearance anxiety. Instagram also made the users dependent on the validation of others, hence harming their self-worth. The case also noted that Instagram did not alone glorify thin-idealization; rather socio-cultural factors and self-internalization also played a key role (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).

Ahmed (2019) investigated further into socio-cultural factors and found that literature on body dissatisfaction showed that women across all cultures experienced it but the ideal body type varied from culture to culture. However, frequent exposure to traditional ideal beauty and body standards influenced body image and led women to frequent boosts of disordered eating (Viladrich et al., 2009 as cited in Ahmed 2019). Social media worked as a catalyst that triggered women to have concerns regarding their appearances. Similarly, Fardouly, Willburger, and Vartanian (2017) in the study titled "Instagram Use and Young Women Body Concerns and Self-Objectification" explains that Instagram is the most popular site which is used by young women

across the globe. It influences self-objectification in two ways: it is categorized as an image-based social media site, where 80 million pictures are uploaded every day" (Instagram, 2016). Since Instagram uses filters and body enhancing edits in its operations, these two functions of Instagram have been linked to self-objectification, and body dissatisfaction issues. (Myers and Crowthers 2009 as cited in Fardouly et al., 2017).

Ali et al. (2013) assert that Pakistan has strong socio-cultural pressures embedded within its society. Physical attractiveness is important for both genders but more so for women. A cross-sectional study of 180 women was conducted at Ziauddin University in Karachi. The prevalence of body dysmorphic disorder was found to be 6.11%, which was higher than previous studies done in Pakistan. The frequency of body image dissatisfaction was 67.8%. The main areas of concern were bodily proportions, hair, teeth, and skin. Exposure to 'thin, ideal bodies' in the media had a direct impact on women's image of themselves leading to several physical and mental health issues. Correspondingly, Anschutz et al (2016) write in their study that Instagram has been the topic of concern in public debate circles. Criticism has been leveled that the photo-sharing application administers retouching techniques that produce the perfect picture. Celebrities and models have been accused of manipulating their pictures and enhancing their features. This trend is considered problematic, as it leads to young girls wanting to achieve an unrealistic ideal (Sullivan, 2014 as cited by Anschutz et al., 2019)

Furthermore, Coy-Dibley (2016) in her research article "digital dysmorphia" asserts that media holds great power over imagery. The industry, as a whole thrives and flourishes at the cost of women's insecurity. It turns a hyper-critical, eye towards female bodies and amplifies their perceived faults, which as time progresses, integrates into the fabric of society. Adding to that, Calogero (2012) have documented that a hypersexual society constantly objectifies women based on their physical appearance. This study has shown that it has a detrimental effect on women's emotional experiences. Women are twice as more likely to succumb to depression than men. This data holds true for women ranging across all ethnic groups. Constant objectification leads to body shaming and deteriorating interpersonal relationships. Interestingly enough, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) presented the objectification theory. It highlighted the mental health risks that accompanied, as the mass media sexually objectified women and presented them as mere commodities. Unipolar disorder, depression, sexual dysfunction, body shame, anxiety, and disordered eating were common manifestations.

3. Theoretical Framework

A theory can be explained as a supposition of ideas, accepted facts, and propositions that aim to provide an explanation of a course of action or behavior by observing a phenomenon. In this research, the theory proposed is backed by a significant feminist theory rooted in psychology i.e. Objectification theory.

3.1. Objectification Theory

The objectification theory was first coined by professors of psychology, Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in 1997. The theory entails in a socio-cultural context. Mass media, as a whole creates or leads to an establishment of an environment, where female bodies are objectified on the basis of aesthetic and feminine attributes. As magazines, newspapers, television, and billboards bombard the audience with digitally-altered pictures of women supporting flawless, pore-free skin, an hourglass figure, and European facial features, they program women to internalize and accept an outside perspective of their physical selves. This self-objectification leads to consequences that can be harmful to the individual. Women, who objectify themselves regularly, have been reported to have lower body esteem, anxiety issues, disordered eating, higher levels of body shame, symptoms of depression, and decreased cognitive performance.

4. Methodology

4.1. Hypotheses

The hypotheses are given as follows;

- H1: Social media beauty standards are a catalyst for triggering body image issues such as, body dysmorphia disorder in young women.
- H2: Unrealistic beauty ideals have been ingrained in the minds of young women by social media influencers.

- H3: Excessive usage of social media has led to poor self-esteem in young women.
 H4: Constant use of social media picture-enhancing tools leads to body anxiety among women.

The research methodology comprised a mixed-method approach. It was conducted in two stages: the first half consisted of a Google survey which was shared online with Facebook female-centric groups besides Instagram and WhatsApp. There were 25 questions in total. In the second stage, in-depth interviews of eight women, belonging to different backgrounds of a fitness trainer, psychologist, feminist writer, model, nutritionist, and three students from the age groups of 18, 21, and 24 were sampled. The reason for opting mixed method was to strengthen the study and enhance its authenticity through in-depth interview analysis.

4.2. Sample Size

The universe of the study was social media users in Karachi. Further the population entailed female youth of Karachi. The sample size for the survey was 100 respondents belonging to the age group ranging between 15 and 28 years.

4.3. Sampling Technique

Random sampling technique was used keeping in mind that the women selected should be from the age groups of 15 to 28, and all of them should be active on Facebook, and Instagram platforms.

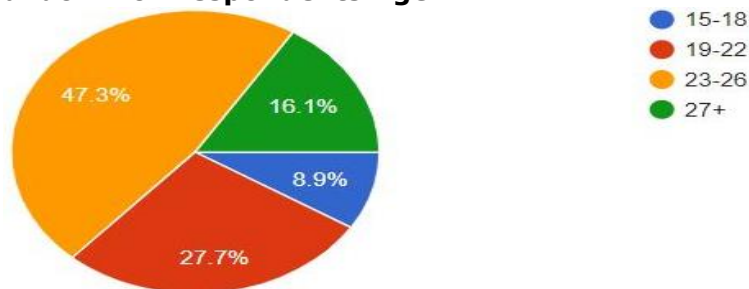
4.4. Variables

A variable is an idea, thing, event, or phenomenon which is to be measured in a study. This specific study will consist of two variables, an independent and a dependent one. An independent variable is manipulated to make the dependent variable change. In the research social media beauty standards are the independent variable and body dysmorphia is the dependent one. It will be analyzed upon further research whether social media trends that idealize unrealistic beauty ideals act as a catalyst for cases of body dysmorphia or not.

5. Findings and Analysis

This study has been able to provide an insight into understanding how and why women develop body image dissatisfaction. It explains the urge women feel to fit into a certain type of beauty ideal, which takes a toll on their physical and mental health. The study also raises awareness regarding cultural and societal attitudes, which push women into feeling insecure about their bodies. The exploratory sequential design has been used in this research to analyze data obtained from the mixed-method approach. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis helps in understanding how prevalent this phenomenon is and how it's being integrated into the minds of Pakistani women. A survey of 113 women followed by an in-depth interview of eight women from relevant fields was conducted. Three women belonged to Lahore, three to Karachi, and two were from Gujranwala. Expert opinion was taken from the likes of a nutritionist, psychologist, and fitness trainer, which added value to the research. The anonymity of the eight interviewees was completely respected, the conversations were recorded anonymously through phone calls, and each comprised for 11 to 40 minutes.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Respondents Age



In figure 1, majority of the respondents i.e. 47.3 % belonged to the age groups of 23 to 26, followed by the second highest number i.e. 27.7 % belonging to 19 to 22 years and 16.8 % percent of the respondents were older than 27 while 8.9 % were young teens falling between 15 and 18. It was observed that age played a significant role in determining how deep the

impact of social media beauty standards and influencers had on these women. In figure 2, majority of the respondents i.e. 81.3% were single, while the remaining 18.8% were married.

Figure 2: Breakdown of Marital Status

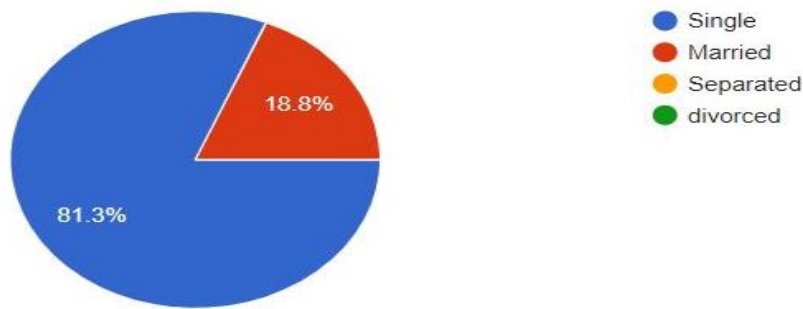
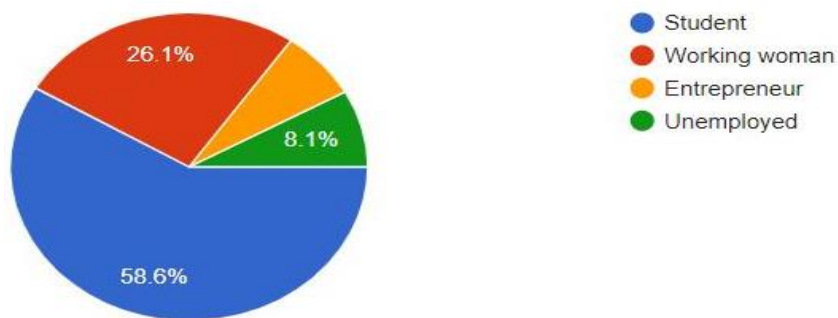


Figure 3: Breakdown of Occupation of Respondents



Student’s i.e. 58.6% were the majority followed by 26.1% of working woman, while 8.1 % of respondents were unemployed and the remaining 7.2% were entrepreneurs.

Figure 4: Breakdown of Educational Qualification of Respondents

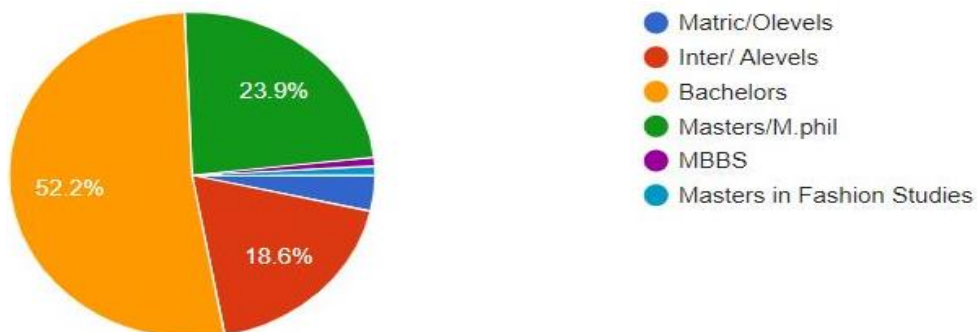
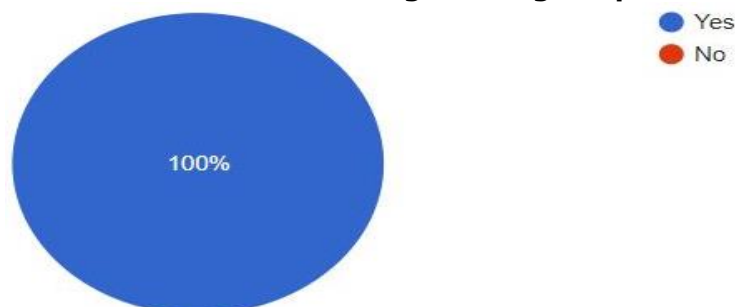


Figure 4 was diverse in terms of the educational qualification of respondents. Those who had completed bachelor’s degree i.e. 52.2% were the most dominant, followed by a percentage of 23.9 % in Masters \M.Phil. and 18.6 % of respondents had completed Inter\A levels while 3.5% of respondents had completed their Matric/ O Levels. Around 0.9 % of respondents were MBBS, while another 0.9% had done their Master’s in Fashion Studies.

Figure 5: Breakdown of Social Media usage among Respondents



In Figure 5, it is evident that all 100% respondents used social media frequently. Figure 6 shows that around 50.4 % of respondents were on social media apps for 3-4 hours, 26.5 %

used social media for 5-7 hours, 12.4 % of respondents consumed social media for more than 8 hours, and a small portion, i.e. 10.6 % consumed social media for 1-2 hours. Figure 7 shows that approximately 48.2% of the respondents admitted that they sometimes altered their images followed by 27.7% of respondents who did not. Only 12.5 % of respondents didn't alter their photos while 11.6 % of respondents admitted doing it in the past. The overall majority of respondents had posted digitally altered images of themselves.

Figure 6: Breakdown of Social Media Consumption

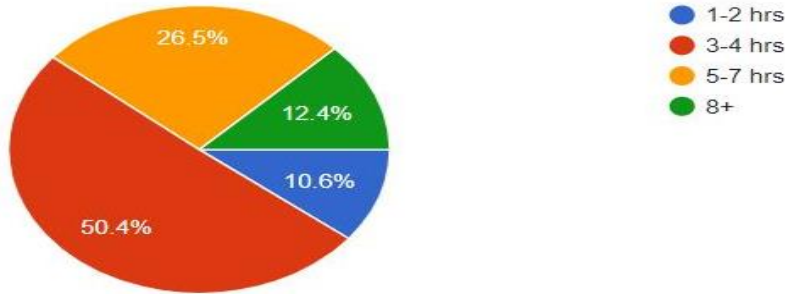


Figure 7: Breakdown of Digitally altered pictures Respondents' Post of themselves

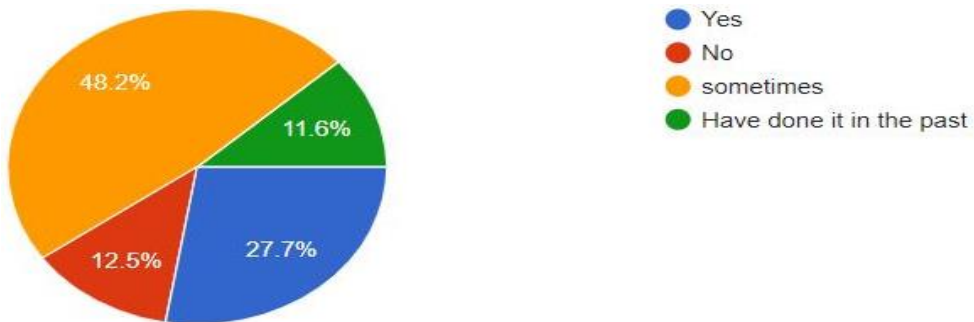


Figure 8: Breakdown of how Respondents digitally altered the Images

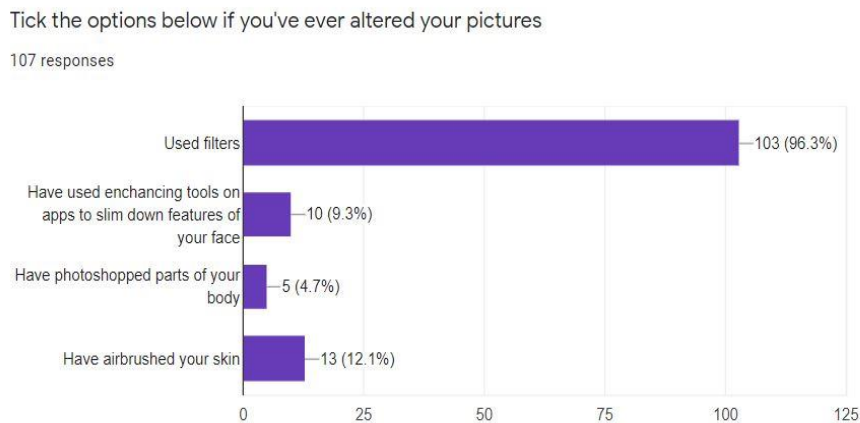


Figure 8 shows that around 96.3% of respondents used filters on their pictures, and about 12 % admitted to airbrushing their skin for pictures. Approximately 9.3% used enhancing tools on apps to slim down their face while 4.7% admitted to photo-shopping parts of their bodies.

Figure 9 shows that around 68.8 % of respondents felt that their social media portrayed a realistic representation of themselves, while the other 31.3 % felt otherwise. In figure 10, a big majority of the respondent's i.e. 91.1 % believed that social media celebrities did promote unattainable body image on social media while 8.9% of respondents disagreed with the notion.

Figure 9: Breakdown of Realistic Representation of Respondents on Social Media

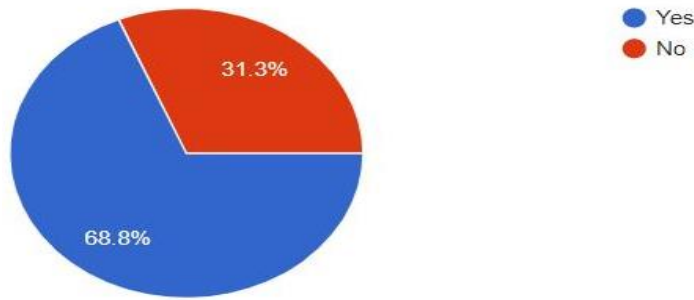
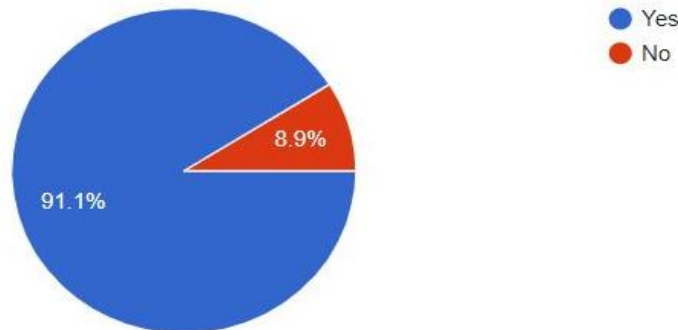


Figure 10: Breakdown of unattainable body Image created by Social Media Influencers



In response to the above question, some of the sample responses were attained as follows:

Figure 11: Breakdown of Respondent’s views on the Ideal Beauty Standard for Women in Pakistan

What according to you is the ideal beauty standard for women in a Pakistani society

97 responses

- different ethnic groups often hold different beauty ideals.
- There is no such thing as ideal
- Skinny, fair, clear skin, hairless women
- Slim figure and fair skin
- For me if I find someone attractive would not be due to some specific feautres or beauty standards I made in mind but a girl being so beautiful I wont find her beautiful nd a normal girl would become attractive for me.Depends a person how they carry their selves also matters
- Faur complexion, tall and healthy
- Fair complication
- We are often told "should be thin, thick and fat girls are just plain ugly (eating disorder? What's that?), not short but definitely not tall, should not have broad shoulders, silky straight hairs, fair skinned, skin like glass, should be delicate"
- In a Pakistani society, ideal beauty standards are fair complexion, slim and smart, height
- In pakistani society,white colour and slim women are the beauty standards whereas i think as long as your healthy it's perfectly okay!and one should say no to racism!
- Having fair complexion and slim body
- Slim and fair
- I think there is no standard of beauty, your personality defines who you are
- Being thin with fair complexion
- Every woman is ideal
- Skinny or hour glass depending on who you ask.

Any woman with a healthy fit figure and should have a good sense of working with her best features physically, personality wise and facially. Make the most of what Allah has given and be at peace and embrace your bodies. A WELL DRESSED PERSON CAN COVER MANY FLAWS.

Be satisfied with who you are, social media is creating extreme stress for women. I stopped using social media because I went into depression of not being pretty and smart.

White skin tone

Thin fair big eyes

if you're too 'skinny' or too 'fat' it's become a problem and it's as if you need to be in the middle ground, which is impossible and impractical

Tall, fair, slim, all beauty and no brains, straight long black hair stuff

Gora rang

Fair skin

Fair complexion

To be who they are. To accept the variety and diversity of looks naturally given to us.

Pakistani Society has created this mindset that a beautiful girl with fair complexion ,nice heighted slim fit is ideal beauty.

That a woman should be fair, pretty and slim.

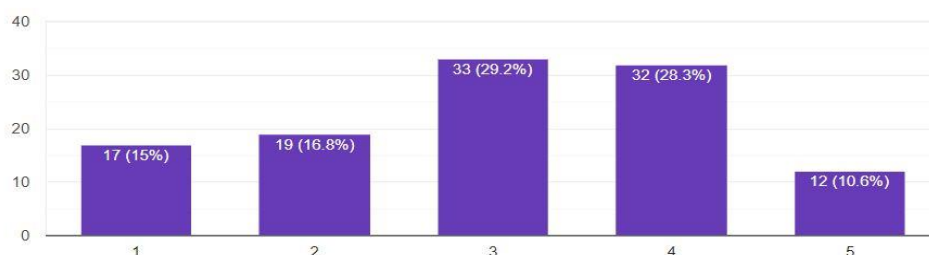
Nothing is ideal. A person should have a fit & healthy body & their dressing sense & taste in dressing up should be improved

Fair skinned, slim, tall, long hair but i may add the ideal beauty that should ne incalcatred in the mind on this generation is that everything you are born with is the ideal beauty of you. God has created you in the best most beautiful way possible

Analyzing the above responses, it is evident that the answers varied regarding the ideal beauty standard for Pakistani women. Common elements include fair skin, large eyes, and slim proportioned figures which were found in the majority of the responses.

Figure 12: Comparison of Appearance to others on Social Media

I often compare my appearance to someone else's on social media (Instagram, snapchat ,Facebook)
113 responses



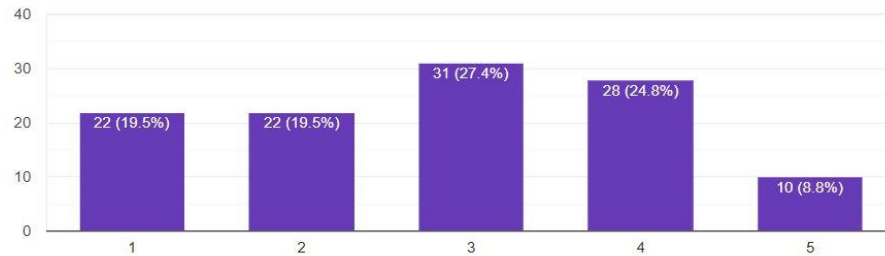
Majority of the respondent's, i.e. 29.2 % remained neutral when asked if they compared their appearances to other people on social media. Around 28.3 % of respondents agreed that they did compare their appearances. Another 16.8 % of respondents disagreed and 15%

strongly disagreed. While 10.6 % of respondents strongly agreed that they made comparisons on social media.

Figure 13: Envying Appearance of Social Media Celebrities

I envy physical appearance of social media celebrities (models , influencers , actresses) on social media apps

113 responses

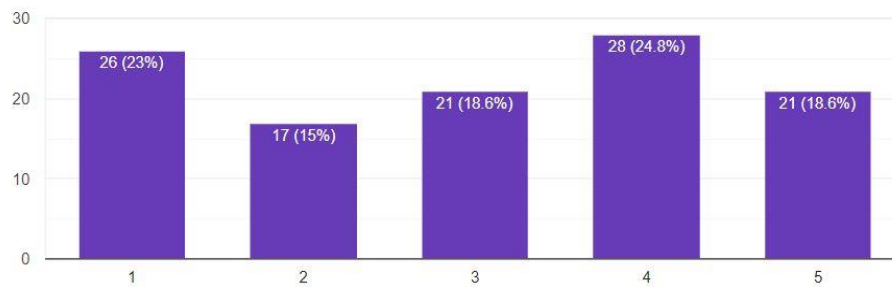


A majority of respondents i.e. 27.4 % remained neutral followed by a 24.8 %, who agreed that they envied appearances of social media celebs. Around 19.5% of respondents strongly disagreed with the notion and another 19.5 % disagreed as well. A small portion of 8.5 % strongly agreed that they envied the physical appearances of social media celebrities.

Figure 14: Pressure to Lose Weight

I feel pressured to lose weight after using social media

113 responses

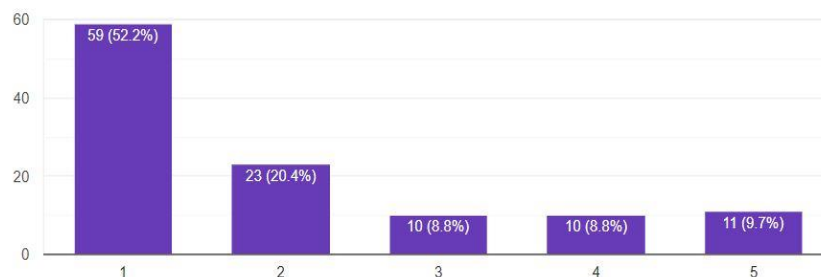


A majority of the respondents i.e. 24.8 % felt the pressure of losing weight after spending time on social media and agreed with the notion. An interesting data was observed that 23 % of respondents strongly disagreed with the notion, while 18.6 % of respondents remained neutral and another 18.6% of respondents strongly agreed with the notion. Around 15 % disagreed with the notion. Overall the data indicated that respondents did feel a certain kind of pressure to lose weight after being on social media apps.

Figure 15: Following Social Media Celebrities as an Inspiration to Lose Weight

I have followed social media celebrities as an inspiration to lose weight

113 responses



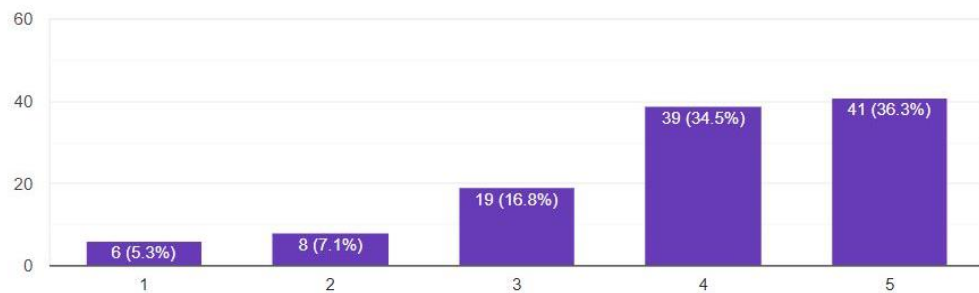
Majority of the respondents i.e. 52.2 % strongly disagreed with the statement, 20.4 % simply disagreed as well. Around 9.7 % of respondents strongly agreed. The respondents who remained neutral constituted 8.8 % and those who agreed also constituted 8.8 %. The data

from the graph clearly showed that the majority of the respondents didn't look up or took inspiration from social media celebrities to lose weight.

Figure 16: Social Media Celebrities Promote Unhealthy ways of Attaining Beauty

I believe social media celebrities have promoted unhealthy ways of attaining beauty

113 responses



Approximately, 36.5 % of respondents strongly agreed that social media celebrities promoted unhealthy ways of attaining beauty. Another 34.5% of respondents agreed with the notion. Around 16.8 % felt neutral, 7.1 % disagreed, and 5.3% of respondents strongly disagreed. The data clearly indicated that an overwhelming majority of respondents believed that social media celebrities usually act irresponsibly and use their platforms to promote unattainable beauty standards.

Figure 17: Women on Social Media with toned Bodies make me Feel Bad

Pictures of women with toned bodies on social media makes me feel bad about mine

113 responses

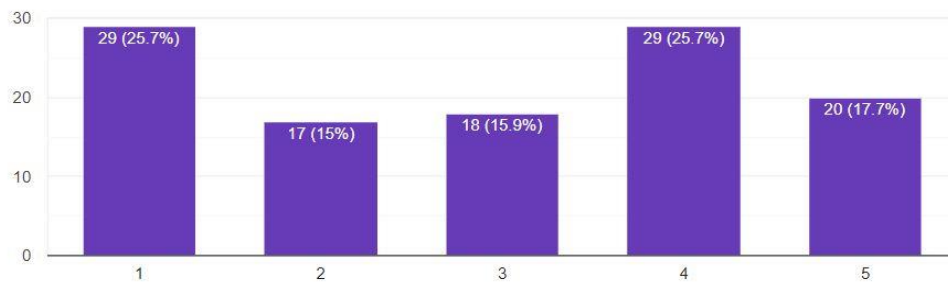
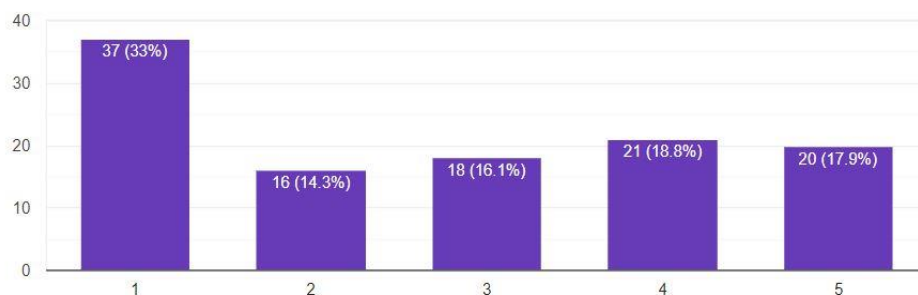


Figure 17 shows an interesting graph where 25.7% of respondents agree with the notion and 25.7% of respondents strongly disagree. Around 17.7 % of respondents strongly agree, 15.9 % remained neutral and 15 % disagreed. While analyzing the data (adding the percentiles) majority of respondents accepted that they feel bad about their bodies after being exposed to social media.

Figure 18: Un-tagging Photos when not Looking Good in them

I "untag" photos on my profile when I dont look good in them

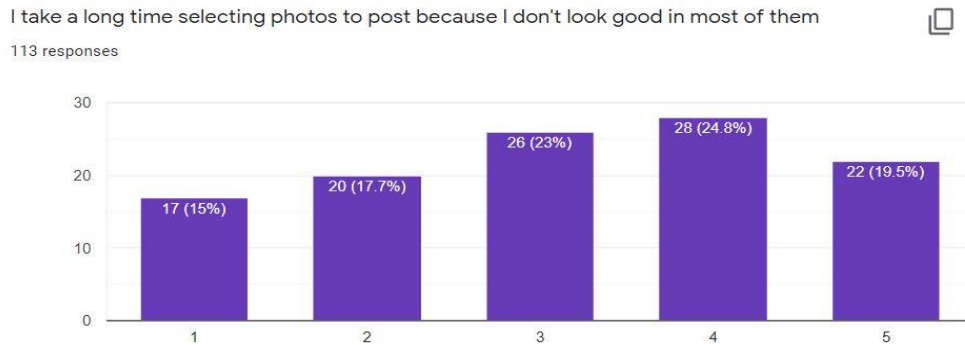
112 responses



Majority of respondents i.e. 33 % strongly disagreed, 18.8 % agreed followed by 17.9 % who strongly agreed. Another 16.1 % of respondents remained neutral, and a small portion

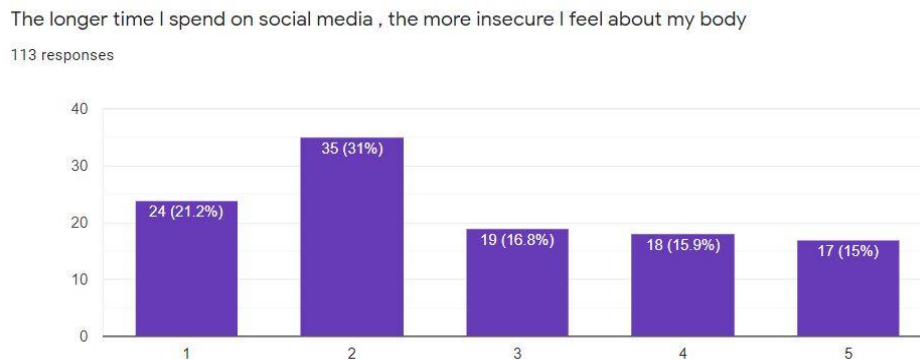
of 14.3 % of respondents disagreed. The data clearly indicated that respondents didn't feel the need to un-tag their photos if they didn't look good in them.

Figure 19: Taking long time in selecting Photos because of not Looking Good in Most of them



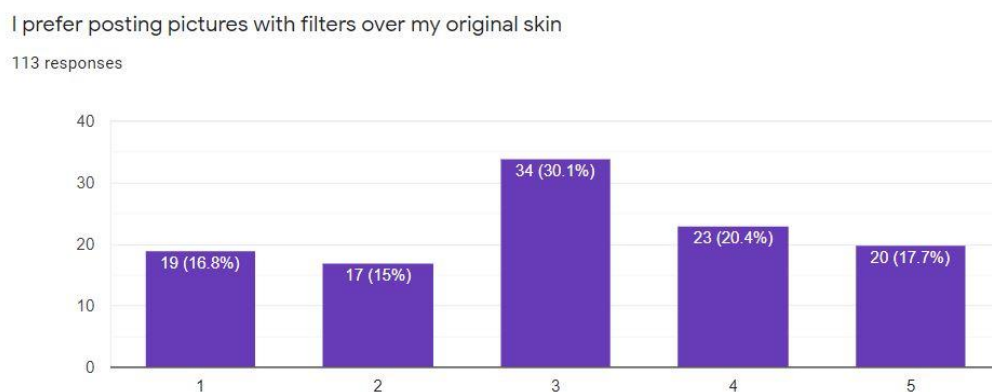
The majority of the respondents i.e. 24.8 % agreed with the idea, 23 % remained neutral followed by 19.5 % who strongly agreed with the notion. Around 17.7 % disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed. The graph shows that social media does create an atmosphere where people believe they must always look attractive.

Figure 20: Feeling Insecure about One's body after Spending time on Social Media



The majority of the respondents i.e. 31% disagreed with the statement, and 21.2% strongly disagreed. Approximately 16.8 % of respondents remained neutral, while 15.9% agreed with the statement and 15% strongly agreed.

Figure 21: Preferring Filters over Original Skin



A major chunk of 30.1 % of respondents stayed neutral while 20.4 % and 17.7% agreed and strongly agreed respectively with the notion. Another 16.8 % strongly disagreed and 15% disagreed as well. The data was found to indicate that majority of respondents preferred filters over original skin. Figure 22 states that the data obtained clearly showed that respondents felt the need to always look their best on social media apps. Around i.e. 32.7 % agreed with the notion, 22.1 % strongly agreed, 17.7% remained neutral while 15 % disagreed and 12.4 % strongly disagreed.

Figure 22: Always feeling the Pressure to look best on Social Media Apps

I feel social media pressures me to always look my best

113 responses

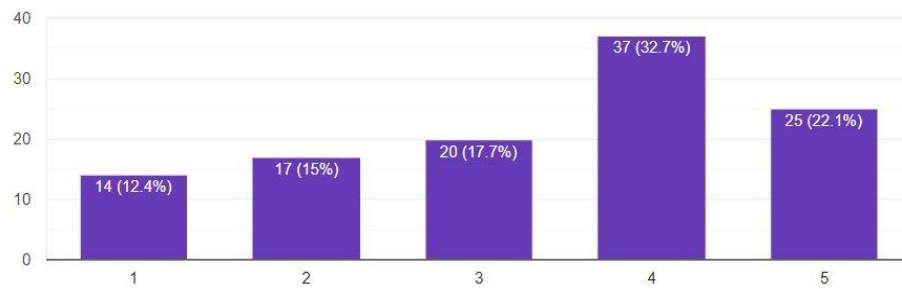
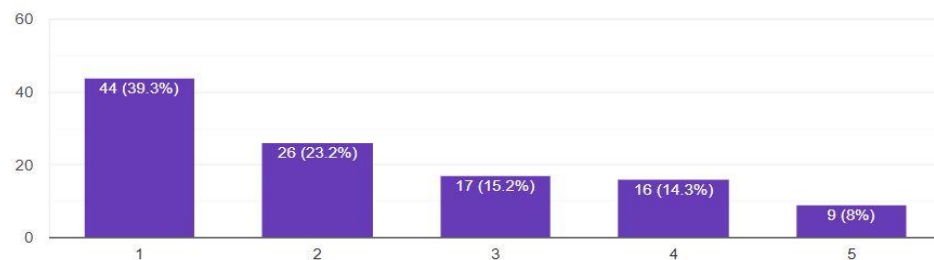


Figure 23: Having the option, I would go for Cosmetic Procedures

If I had the option , I would get work done (cosmetic procedures) on my body or face

112 responses

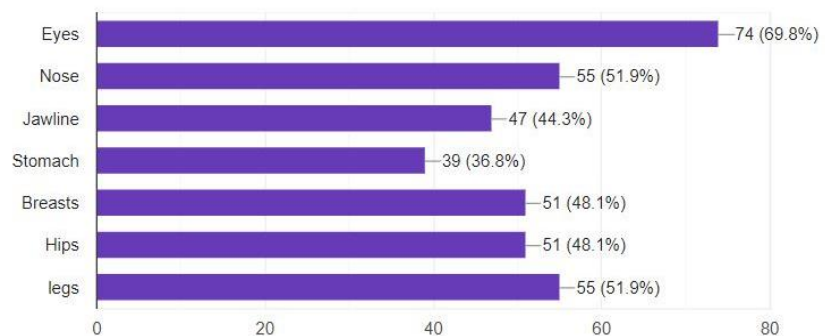


Majority of respondent’s i.e.39.3% strongly disagreed beside 23.2%, who disagreed as well with the idea that they would go for cosmetic procedures if given an option. Around 15.2 % of the respondents remained neutral, whereas14.3% agreed and 8 % strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 24: Being Content with One’s Body

Tick the options below if you feel content with the particular body part

106 responses



It is further discovered that majority of the respondents are least content with the body parts that are usually targeted in social media campaigns and ads including breasts, hips, stomach and jawline.

5.1. Interview Analysis

Theme 1: The popularity of Social media apps has created an environment (basically a scale of beauty measurement, different beauty ideals have been cherry-picked in it like curvy body, fox eyes, sharp jawline, straight long hair, thin waist, big lips, and poreless skin) where there is pressure on women to fit into certain beauty ideals. Beauty ideals are now more specific. All the interviewers agreed with this notion that ever since social media became mainstream it celebrated certain beauty ideals, and hence, the overall concept of beauty became more specific. This phenomenon has led women to feel extremely conscious of their bodies, and seven out of eight interviewees believed that this type of consciousness was not at all healthy for women.

An 18-year-old student of Roots International from Lahore said,

"Whenever I use social media, I always open filters first and then post my pictures, cannot think of posting pictures without filters. I feel social media has created a want where everyone wants to fit into these beauty ideals. Honestly, my self-confidence has been destroyed and I'm sure it's not just me, it's everyone. My friends are also going through this and they think way too".

A 21-year-old NCA student from Lahore endorsed,

"Unconsciously, there is now a desire and a want. Beauty standards have evolved. They were different in the '90s and now on social media you see curvy bodies, women with big lips, and clearly defined jawlines, the jawlines were never there before. I feel there isn't a need but a very strong want in women to look a certain way, you see pictures on social media all the time and you see the validation on those pictures".

The feminist writer believed that when you are bombarded with pictures of people looking good on social media, then you automatically feel bad. She admitted that in the past she has felt bad when she went on social media and saw the profiles of other women. A model from the industry added,

"I feel with the advent of globalization and all of these apps that we have now, the standard of beauty has become very specific. Before this, every culture was admired and had its own set of beauty standards, I mean look at Kim Kardashian, we all think that she's the embodiment of femininity now"

While interviewing the psychologist, she was of the view that social media has created intense pressure. A similar pressure is created by print and electronic media where every woman is slim and fair. Celebrities are idealized by people, who will do anything to create a mirror image in them. While everyone agreed that social media beauty standards created pressure and that pressure was not good, the fitness trainer differed with this opinion. According to the fitness trainer,

"I agree to a certain extent that there is now pressure, but I don't think it is completely bad. I feel now due to social media there is a lot of awareness. In the era of our mothers, there wasn't awareness or information. I now see a lot of "body shaming" uproar on social media, but if you look at it logically obesity and being overweight bring lots of diseases and it should not always be about loving your body. People should be aware and fit, and social media makes people conscious and that's why they put in effort".

Theme 2: Social media celebrities across the globe have played a key role in ingraining unrealistic beauty standards in women.

The majority of the interviewees believed that social media celebrities strengthened a culture that already prioritized beauty standards. The feminist writer was of the view that top Pakistani influencers mostly belonged to the elite class. These privileged influencers had gone to top elite schools in the country. Elite schools are heavily influenced by the Western school of thought and so because of these influencers a certain school of thought is transferred to their followers. The writer also observed that all the top makeup influencers in the country promoted makeup that was too expensive and could not be purchased at the local store. These influencers made it look cheap and gave the illusion that everyone could avail it and this kind of narrative makes people insecure. She also believed that not all Pakistani influencers behaved alike and some put a conscious effort to put disclaimers on their videos. The nutritionist believed that influencers had ingrained this concept and that it wasn't just in Pakistan but across the globe. According to her;

"Of course, I've seen it countless times, girls come to me and say I want to look exactly like this blogger, if she can be slim then I can do it too".

The nutritionist also held the same view as the feminist writer that some influencers were very careful with their imaging and did not have a negative influence. In her career, as a

nutritionist she had seen women being more influenced by social media influencers (primarily Pakistani lifestyle bloggers) than by actresses that appeared on TV. A leading model from the local fashion Industry added;

"When we go on social media and look at these people with such big following we automatically want to be like them and we see people around us looking up to them as well"

A 24-year-old M.Phil. student further commented,

"In Pakistan when we see our social media celebrities who, are super skinny and going on keto, the thing is our public does not have the awareness that body ideals can be achieved through healthy ways. They then either start starving themselves or opt for unhealthy lifestyles and in most cases, you get into a weird state where you undermine yourself and disrespect your body"

Theme 3: Phases of falling out of love with your body

All the interviewers had gone through a phase where they felt uncomfortable with their bodies and wanted to change something about it. Both the 19 and 21-year-old students were not satisfied with their bodies. The 19-year-old believed that if she had money she would get a nose job and the 21-year-old wanted liposuction. The psychologist recalled that in her teen years, she had felt insecure after comparing her body to super-thin models in magazines. She believes that the lack of inclusivity in TV dramas and in print magazines made her and other girls of her age feel alien in their own bodies. The model felt that, as a child, she had dark skin and was conscious about it, but the moment she joined an art school all those unconventional traits made her seem desirable. The feminist writer also had a very interesting take on this She added,

"Umm...so you should add this to your research that, since the last year I've been completely in love with my body. I love my hair and my skin and I've also stopped following a majority of social media celebrities and that has made a big difference."

Theme 4: The illusion of beauty filters

All the interviewers strongly believed that beauty filters distorted the reality of one's face. According to the 24-year-old M.Phil. student

"If you've used Snapchat filters, then you would know how it enlarges your eyes and makes your face look smaller. It makes you delusional about how you look basically and when you interact in real-time with people and they comment on your looks, then you're bound to go into a spiral of self-doubt".

The Psychologist interviewed further endorsed,

"We cannot stop using beauty filters on our pictures because when we stop it, we don't look the way we actually look ".

Theme 5: Witnessing drastic measures common among women to achieve beauty standards

The interviewee's responses to this theme varied slightly. Some had witnessed their friends doing drastic unhealthy measures, some had known acquaintances and clients who had confessed to previous behaviors, and some had never witnessed this. The feminist writer had known a class fellow who had saved 1 lac rupees to get a nose job and one other procedure.

A 24-year-old M.Phil. student said,

"I had a friend who would only eat half a kebab in a day and then go on to exercise for 6 hours, she attained her beauty ideal but I don't think she was ever really happy ".

The psychologist had seen countless examples of women taking drastic measures. One of her clients was flat-chested and after marriage was body-shamed day and night by her husband who compared her to International stars on social media. She got so uncomfortable with her body that she went to a local Hakeem and began applying some herbal medicine. After a certain time, her figure got curvy but due to those herbal medicines, she became infertile for life. Another example that she gave was of her other client who had gotten different cosmetic procedures on her face and those procedures had gone wrong. She felt pain in her face and couldn't laugh at all. She had done this to attract clients to her makeup salon.

The model observed that people would smoke weed in order to lose weight in her industry. She observed that those models whose kitchen money was generated through modeling had undertaken drastic measures to look a certain way whereas those that were freelancers did not fall prey to such measures.

The fitness trainer is of the opinion that Trainers can tell when someone has attained a body through fitness or by surgeries. *"A lot of people do get them. It looks very different than a normal body, since it is achieved in such a short time."*

However, the 18-year-old student and the nutritionist never encountered women who had gone through drastic measures to attain certain beauty standards inspired by social media. On the other hand, 21-year-old student NCA student said;

"I've seen people starve themselves and it's so normalized but it is a drastic measure. I haven't seen people go for medical procedures at least not in my circle but yes some have used pills"

Theme 6: Pakistani culture takes on beauty standards and the fixation on fair skin and petite figures.

All the students and the feminist writer believed that the people in Pakistan still had a colonial mindset. Fair skin and petite frame were always believed to be traits of successful women. In a Pakistani construct, having a petite frame meant that you are a good candidate for motherhood and you can please your husband. The fitness trainer believed that parents in every generation have held regressive views and have passed that on to their children and especially to daughters.

"I had a girl who came to the gym; her mother sent her and complained that she had big hips and breasts, and that she looked married. She wanted me to make her lose weight in those areas. I did not think that her hips were big, she was normal but her mother did not like it there is no concept of fitness in Pakistani women. They only come near shaadi season and say that we only have four months to lose weight, do something," she added.

The fitness trainer observed that women are shamed for their bodies if they are too big or too thin than the standard Pakistani criteria. She felt that parents made their girls anxious about their bodies. The psychologist thought that parents, who compared their children or made fun of them, drove their children into self-doubt and led them to develop an unhealthy relationship with their bodies as adults later in life. She also heavily criticized the *rishta* culture and believed that women who were scrutinized based on their appearance developed low self-esteem, which also made them uninterested in marriage. The psychologist also believed that those beauty ideals are in trend which is seen as desirable by the opposite gender. Men in Pakistan want their women to be fair and have slim figures but with good proportions. These men then make their parents look for women with these ideals; hence men should be educated on this topic. They are the ones who put pressure on their parents leading to a cycle that never ends. Colonial mindset, male-dominated society, and parents who upheld regressive attitudes developed a toxic culture in which the female body is constantly scrutinized and objectified against unrealistic beauty standards.

Theme 7: Having a movement that counters body dysmorphia in Pakistan.

All the interviewers believed that there should be a movement in Pakistan that promotes body positivity and self-love. The majority believed that an ideological movement modeled

around the likes of the American body positivity movement could produce great results and tackle growing body dysmorphia. Both the trainer and psychologist agreed that there should be sessions on parent's counseling so that they don't make their children hate their bodies. The psychologist also suggested that the media in its all forms should be inclusive to all body kinds so that one particular kind is not considered a standard. However, the 24-year-old student was of the opinion that a body positivity movement could not work in Pakistan as the people here lacked awareness and held to their decade-long beliefs very religiously. Likewise, the fitness trainer thought that a movement molded around the American one would not be good for Pakistan as it could not draw a line between body positivity and obesity. She said that Pakistan needs a movement that promotes all body types within the range of fitness.

6. Discussion

In this section of the study, we will analyze the hypotheses and discuss if they were proved or rejected.

H1: Social media beauty standards are a catalyst for triggering body image issues such as body dysmorphia disorder in young women.

When we analyze the data, we come to the observation that social media beauty standards could trigger body image disturbances only if certain criteria are met. Those women are more likely to be triggered by social media who have grown up in homes where they have been made fun of, bullied in schools, and possess a comparison trait in their personality. If this certain criterion is met, then social media beauty standards will trigger body dysmorphia. This hypothesis is thus true or partly true under certain circumstances.

H2: Unrealistic beauty ideals have been ingrained in the minds of young women by social media influencers.

In the light of the interviews and data obtained through the survey, this statement is true. Majority of the social media influencers have promoted unhealthy and unattainable body goals.

H3: Excessive use of social media has led to poor self-esteem in women.

Contradictory data has been obtained while studying this assumption. Individual interviews indicated that when women cut back on their social media consumption, their insecurities about their bodies declined, whereas the survey data showed that longer time on social media did not equate to insecurity. If we go by the qualitative data, then this hypothesis is proved, however, if we go by the survey data, then it is not.

H4: Constant use of photo enhancing tools led to body anxiety among women.

This statement is true and is heavily backed by interviews and data surveys. Photo enhancing tools often distort reality. It leads to body anxiety among women.

7. Conclusion

The reason more women are suffering from body dysmorphia is that in a patriarchal society like Pakistan, certain structures like those of *rishta* culture objectify and scrutinize women. Women since birth are conditioned to be perfect wives and good mothers. In order to be able to play these roles, they have to go through a certain selection process. In the preparation of this process and during it, women are left with self-doubt and a poor body image of themselves. Further, with the emergence of new social media apps and due to its easy accessibility, their insecurities are triggered and, in most cases, capitalized. Overall body dysmorphia affects the mental health of women and should be countered through an inclusive movement that promotes a healthy body image.

During this research, certain limitations were faced. Firstly, a number of women did not want to give interviews even after knowing that their anonymity would be respected. Secondly, despite clear instructions about the age groups, when the survey was uploaded on social media, women older than 27 also participated which slightly tilted the results. It is assumed that women

above 27 are relatively mature and less affected by social media beauty trends as compared to younger ones. Thirdly, it is suggested that the sample size should have been extended to 300 in order to get more representative results. For future researchers, it is recommended to have a survey size larger than 300. In-depth interviews of women belonging to the professions of education, medicine and acting should also be included. It is of prime importance that future researchers get the opinion of social media influencers and bloggers on the topic so that a balanced analysis with realistic and unbiased findings can be attained.

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