

Perfecting the Digital Self: Body Surveillance and Appearance Management among Social Media Users

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Digitalization is reshaping patterns of human life. It has significant effects on how people communicate, share, and learn. This study examines the effects of social media on body image and self-presentation. It considers phenomena such as digital distortions, body surveillance, appearance criticism, social comparison, and photo-editing behavior. This study explored how self-objectification, comparative appearance evaluation, and digitally altered beauty ideals shape self-image and mental health. This research utilized a qualitative interpretivist approach.

Methodology: Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with (n=25) young adult social-media users, identified as active participants in digitally mediated beauty culture. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed online experiences such as checking appearance, peer comments, comparative processes, and photo editing before posting.

Findings: Findings indicate that body image is heavily mediated by social media. Almost 73% of participants reported examining themselves numerous times before publishing images, while 24% were hurt after receiving negative remarks about their looks. Very few participants compared themselves with influencers and celebrities, and equally with friends. Moreover, 78% of respondents used photo-editing tools to enhance their photos.

Conclusion: These behaviors led to greater body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, creating a schism between the real self and the online self. Social media has become more than a way to communicate in an online space where people embody identity and beauty norms. Key recommendations of this research highlight that incorporating media literacy, body positivity education, and mental health literacy can mitigate the detrimental impact of idealized representation in digital self-presentation.

Keywords: Photo-Editing Practices, Body Image, Objectification, Body Surveillance, Appearance Management, Social Media Comments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The internet is influencing how people access knowledge by promoting certain lifestyles. Moreover, mobile phones have transformed how communication is conducted (Javed et al., 2026; Safdar & Fatima, 2024; Bessarab et al., 2022). However, social media sites are at the heart of current digital culture. This has made it almost an intrusive ability for people to connect and share things they might never have managed to do otherwise. The emergence of social platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok has created a new type of social environment (Digennaro, 2024; Torous et al., 2021).

Individuals now have the ability to carefully craft and manage their online presence. From the images uploaded on the social sites to the statuses and profile pictures displayed, social media allows us to share a sanitized version of ourselves (Conboy & Mingoia, 2024; Syed et al., 2023). This self-presentation is not only an expression of individuality (Al-Kandari et al., 2017) but has also been turned into a performance for global audiences, governed according to expectations and societal.

This pressure to match such digitally enhanced standards is particularly high among the younger generations who have lived their childhood in a world that was saturated in social media. According to McCrory et al. (2020), exposure to those images may result in the development of negative body images, particularly in teenagers and young adults. So there is a need to imitate these ideal forms of beauty and success, which are usually filtered and distorted, may negatively affect the self-esteem of a person.

The increasing supremacy of digital technologies and their influence on self-presentation, however, does not pass without challenges. These technologies pose new dangers to all the advantages they bring, such as global connectivity, access to information, and social interactions (Eldaly & Mashaly, 2022). Even though social media sites are allowed to provide individuals with freedom to express themselves, they expose them to the gazing eyes of an audience. Self-performance on these sites is not merely an individual phenomenon, but it occurs within a more general social framework, as dictated by trends, influencers, and the constant desire to receive social approval (Brownstone & Bardone-Cone, 2021).

This endless loop of performance, validation, and comparison may be very dangerous. Social media platforms have been associated with mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and self-esteem problems due to the addictive nature of the social media, which is designed to keep users sufficiently active by providing likes, shares and comments (Chen et al., 2023). The more individuals are interested in acquiring validation by the means of their online identities, the more likely they are to forget about their real selves and experience a sense of emptiness or incompetence.

Intricate interplay between the social phenomena of body surveillance, critique, comparison, dissatisfaction, and digitally-augmented social media photo manipulation must be analyzed as the world becomes more integrated through social media (Bourke et al., 2025). Digital distortions, which are mostly driven by the application of photo-editing tools, have had a substantial effect on body image, especially when it comes to social media, leading to the formation of false ideals of beauty. The result is body dissatisfaction as people compare their real selves to these idealized, digitally modified versions, which have an adverse impact on self-esteem (Boursier et al., 2020), particularly the younger demographic who are more susceptible to social media influences.

1.1 Problem Statement

The proposed research attempts to fill the gap in available literature by analysing the association between digital distortions, body surveillance, and dissatisfaction with body image. The issue is that the usage of photo-editing technologies and social networks are popularized, and people are motivated to show perfect and digitally edited images of themselves. Being preoccupied with keeping an eye on their bodies and showing their identity on the internet, people are also more depersonalized with their real bodies, which leads to poor body image and self-esteem. One should learn the way these processes could be integrated to estimate the overall impact of the digital technologies on self-perception and mental health.

Moreover, the role of digital technologies in promoting body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, and mental health problems can be tracked down by focusing on the way people follow body surveillance and self-presentation and the role of flawless, edited images and promoting more realistic standards of beauty. This information is crucial in addressing the mental health problems that are on the rise as a result of using social media particularly among the younger generations who are the most vulnerable to the digital distortions.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the perception and experience of body surveillance by people regarding social media and photo-editing practices?
2. How does social media comparison with others relate to body dissatisfaction and photo editing in order to match idealized beauty standards?
3. What is the impact of discussions about body image on social media on how individuals perceive themselves, and how this phenomenon makes photo-editing a self-presentation practice?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Photo-based social media sites are image-oriented, and they have transformed the way individuals form their online identities (Wanniarachchi et al., 2022; Roberts et al., 2022). Exposure to idealized photographs on social media may have a strong influence on individuals' perception of their body (Frederick et al., 2022), that may result in such negative body image, particularly among young women who tend to internalize the ideals of beauty. Social media has also enhanced self-objectification where individuals and particularly women are appreciating themselves (McCrackin et al., 2025), exacerbated by the ever-running stream of photo-content that forces individuals to adhere to the standards of beauty (Wang et al., 2020). The influence of photo-based media is not only passive, but defines the way individuals portray themselves on the web. Individuals who share photos tend to be more dissatisfied with their own bodies, particularly when they receive negative comments or when they do not match the beauty standards depicted by influencers or celebrities (Abbasi et al., 2025).

Body surveillance is the constant checking and assessing of how one looks physically. The process has become more widespread due to the emergence of social media (Pérez-Torres, 2024), where influencers, celebrities, and peers are introduced on such platforms. The reason behind this self-monitoring is that social approval is usually needed (Yao et al., 2020). In many situations, people become very conscious of their own bodies when contrasting their real-life image with idealized images on the Internet. Constant checking for physical imperfections may result in dissatisfaction and self-blame (Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2021), primarily based on their appearance rather than their talents or character.

Moreover, criticism of appearance has become quite widespread in the age of the Internet and social media (Seeme et al., 2025; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Möri et al., 2022), where individuals tend to be judged based on their appearance by other people and themselves. Appearance criticism has a powerful impact on mental health, as the digital world is composed of images, which are edited and properly chosen.

Ajewumi et al. (2024) indicate that adverse statements and online criticism are damaging to the body image of individuals. The commentary on weight, faces, or skin texture may leave people unhappy with their natural appearance. These unrealistic beauty standards are even more difficult to avoid due to social media, on which the most improved and edited photos are shared.

2.1 Appearance Comparison on Social Media

Appearance comparison has received a lot of research, particularly regarding the ways individuals compare their looks to idealized images they encounter online. Individuals assess their self-esteem by comparing their positions to other people (Paramita et al., 2022). Users are surrounded by filtered and

filtered images of the lives, bodies, and appearance of other people that may translate into a sense of ineptitude and body dissatisfaction (Caldwell, 2021; McGovern et al., 2022).

Tiggemann and Anderberg (2020) revealed that the more exposure to idealistic photographs on Instagram, the more dissatisfaction with body image, and this was particularly true in young women. Equally, several other studies demonstrated that social comparison on social media raises concerns about appearance, especially when comparing the self with others who are perceived to be more attractive or successful (Walker, 2021; Shu, 2024).

According to You & Liu (2022) individuals exposed to edited photos frequently, particularly in social media, feel more unsatisfied with their bodies. Such shared perfect images (Miller & Hogg, 2023) tend to depict characteristics such as slim bodies, flawless skin, symmetrical faces, and flawless hair, to believe that their own bodies are not good becoming bad to self-perception and self-esteem (Paul et al., 2024).

Those women who frequently viewed these idealized images on social media were more dissatisfied with their body weight and shape, not because of the content that concerns; instead, men are also subjected to unrealistic expectations of masculinity, which revolve around muscular bodies, low body fat, and symmetry (Purnomo, 2025). Although these edits result in a more refined image, there are issues of authenticity, body image, and self-esteem associated with this.

Consequently, digital space is packed with highly selective images and usually unrealistic photographs. With the growth of edited images as a phenomenon, authenticity becomes less appreciated, and the primary goal of self-presentation becomes appearance, internalizing unrealistic beauty standards, causing the distortion of self (Boursier et al., 2020). Teenagers and young adults might become even more dissatisfied with their bodies because they compare their own untouched bodies to the perfect bodies they observe online.

The emergence of digital distortions where individuals manipulate their photos to fit the standards of ideal beauty has led to a digital delusion whereby online identities are becoming less connected to the real world (Digennaro, 2024). With social media, individuals have the ability to filter their personalities by presenting the most favorable sides of themselves (Möri et al., 2022). Mental health may be damaged in the case of constant exposure to such curated pictures. This comparison may cause body dissatisfaction, particularly when their own self does not correspond to the standards that they are shown online (Bell et al., 2022).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) to comprehend how social media use and self-presentation of idealized bodies occurs through photo-editing tools causing body dissatisfaction and self-objectification, among other mental health issues. Objectification Theory (OT) is the key to the discussion of how people, and, specifically, women, are trained to see their bodies as objects to be assessed in terms of appearance.

Vendemia & Fox (2024) and Chen et al. (2023) have discussed the ways in which social media platforms where people post and get comments on their selected images promote the self-objectification behavior. Being constantly ready to change their appearance to align them with the idealistic standards of beauty, the individuals turn hyper-concerned with the appearance of their bodies, which results in the emergence of body dissatisfaction and self-esteem problems.

The social comparison theory (SCT) focuses on the way in which people compare themselves with others. Festinger assumed that individuals are biologically moved to compare themselves to other people as a way of ascertaining their own capabilities and self-esteem.

This theory serves this study to explore how persistent viewing digitally enhanced, filtered, and curated images on the applications such as Instagram, Tik Tok, and Snapchat leading to an appearance

comparison and influences body satisfaction (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020; Wheeler, 1991), especially in people who feel they are not as attractive as they could be.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research allows exploring the meanings, patterns, and themes that arise within the personal experience of the participants, as well as relying on numerical data (Wanniarachchi et al., 2022). This is the perfect design to explore the why and how behind the use of social media and photo-editing tools, and how the practice influences how people present themselves on the internet and how they view themselves (Louis & Chithra, 2025).

This research is an interpretivist approach that attempts to comprehend the meaning of social phenomena as the participants view it (McCrackin et al., 2025). The interpretivist method presupposes that reality is constructed socially and it is concerned with the subjective definitions people place on their experiences. Under the condition of this research, the study investigates how the users of the social media area perceive and manage their body image in the online realm and how the perception they hold about their bodies affects their behaviors and own identities.

3.1 Population and Sampling

The intended audience of the proposed study includes (n=25) young adults between the ages of 18-30 that actively utilize a social media platform, including Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. The chosen age bracket was due to the fact that young adults are the main age group that are exposed to social media and because within this group there is the major influence of the pressure of digital self-presentation and body image issues (Hussain et al., 2021). Studies have indicated that this is the age bracket that is in the critical identity formation stage and their body image is mostly influenced by the virtual space they are exposed to.

3.2 Sampling Method

In this study, non-probability purposive sampling is applied in order to select those that meet certain criteria when it comes to the research goals. Following purposive sampling principles (Alaba et al, 2026; Cohen & Arieli, 2011) twenty-five participants were selected based on their active first-hand experience with digitally mediated beauty content ensuring depth and relevance of the data. Moreover, the sample size was determined in accordance with the level of theoretical data saturation (Nascimento et al., 2018).

3.3 Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews are taken as a qualitative data collection method since they provide an opportunity to explore the experiences of the participants in detail, but is still rather structured (McAdams & Jennings, 2024).

3.4 Interview Guide

The interview guide is based on open-ended questions which involve major themes of body surveillance, appearance criticism, appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction and photo-editing practices (Zein et al., 2022). These questions are used to find out the experiences that the participants have and how they cope with the strains of self-presentation on social media. The semi-structured interview guide includes the following themes represented in the Fig. 1.

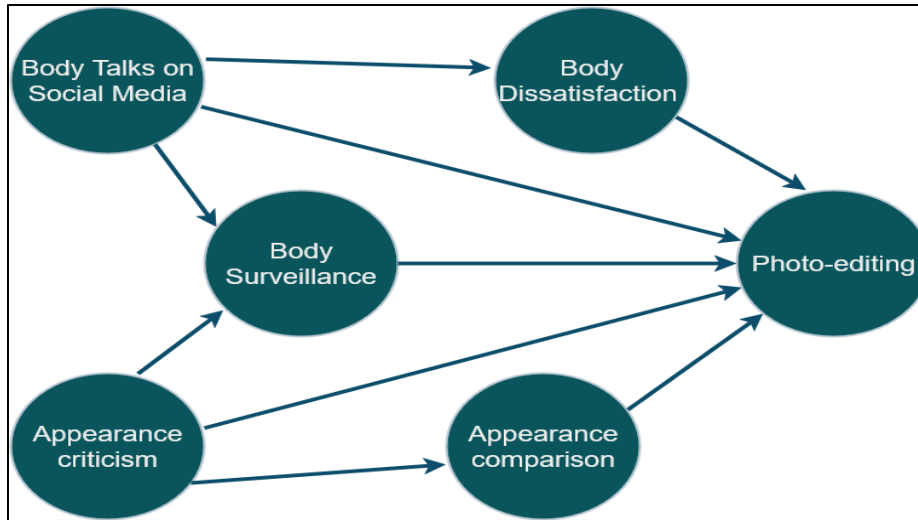


Figure 1: Relation between different variables

Body surveillance: Participants are asked how often they check or monitor their appearance before posting photos on social media and what aspects of their body they focus on most.

Appearance criticism: The interview explores participants' experiences with receiving criticism about their appearance, whether online or offline, and how such feedback influences their perception of themselves.

Appearance comparison: Participants are asked how often they compare their own bodies to those of others on social media, especially influencers, celebrities, or peers.

Body dissatisfaction: Questions focus on the relationship between photo-editing practices and feelings of dissatisfaction with the body, particularly regarding specific body parts.

Photo-editing practices: Participants are asked about the frequency of their photo-editing practices, the types of edits they typically make, and the reasons behind these behaviors.

Another aspect that is explored within the interview is how social media discourses about the body image (trends, memes, campaigns by influencers, etc.) affect participants and their self-perception, as well as their involvement in photo-edit activities.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are followed to the letter in the course of the research. All the participants are informed of consent prior to the interviews. The purpose of the study is explained to the participants, and they are advised that they willingly participate in the research, and they have the right to withdraw without any repercussions at any point. The study keeps confidentiality, and all the information obtained in the study is anonymized to safeguard the identity of the participants.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The thematic analysis is used in analyzing the data gathered through semi-structured interviews, as it is a popular aspect of qualitative research (Garcia-Iglesias et al., 2023). Thematic analysis offers an opportunity to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) in qualitative data that can reveal the key ideas and concepts that can be determined based on the responses of the participants.

Thematic analysis is a systematic process which enables the researcher to determine and explain patterns in the qualitative data. Thematic analysis involves the initial stage of data familiarization (Wanniarachchi

et al., 2022). This includes verbatim transcription of the interviews and reading the transcripts a number of times, to achieve a holistic perception of the information and immerse in the responses of the participants. The preliminary reading allows the researcher to start observing some shared ideas, phrases, and emotional tones which constitutes the basis of the analysis later.

Then it is important to generate initial codes. In this stage, meaningful statements or words that are connected to the areas of interest in the study, i.e., body surveillance, appearance judgment, and photo-editing behaviors are determined (Jarman et al., 2021). The codes are the fundamental units of meaning of the data and assist in sorting out the information into manageable fragments. The codes are not conclusive themes but just are particularities of the data that are pertinent to the research questions. After creating the initial codes, the researcher moves to the second step that is searching themes.

4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The data from the interviews were recorded by transcribing the answers given by each of the twenty-five interviewees and categorizing similar themes based on their relevance to the research questions. Their goal was to investigate how social media, body image ideals, and other pressures shape people's perceptions of their bodies. This included grouping data into relevant themes with regard to the body image and self-identity of participants, as well as social media. The following image depicts the gender ratios of participants. Participants responded about the time duration spent by them on social media as shown in fig. 2.

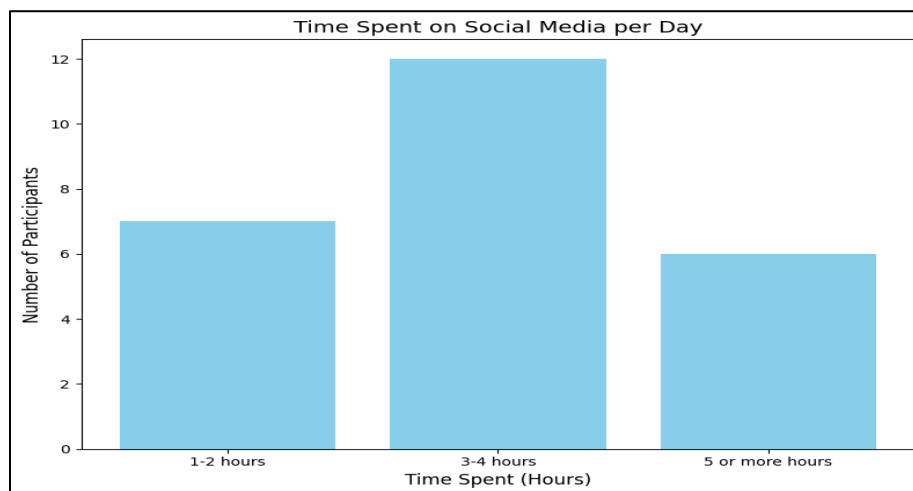


Figure 2: *Time spent on social media per day. Prepared by the researcher*

The data in Fig. 2 shows that the time spent by participants on social media is shown in this graph. The biggest group, with 12 from the whole 25 participants, spends daily between 3 and 4 hours on social media. The second group consists of 7 members who spend between 1 and 2 hours per day on social media. Finally, the group with the fewest number of participants has 6 members who use social media for more than 5 hours. This indicates that the majority of our participants fall into using social media for a moderate amount of time, and only a limited few use it for an excessive amount.

Most are in the 3-to-4-hour range, which shows that an increasingly larger portion of people's day is spent interacting with social media platforms. The information that 7 respondents spend only 1 to a maximum of two hours shows that at least some individuals interact with social media in a more limited manner, likely sticking to one or two platforms and mainly keeping up with updates.

The few who are on 5 hours or more of social media could mean they are even more addicted. It also makes sense in the number of benefits that excessive use of social media can have an adverse effect on

one's occupational and mental well-being, as social media becomes an increasingly central part of modern life.

4.1 Body Surveillance

The most common theme that emerged from interviews is body surveillance. Participants were all a little worried about how they look, especially before we posted a photograph of ourselves on social media. The majority of the survey respondents admitted to rechecking their pictures to ensure they are putting on their best side.

Participant 1 mentioned:

I always check myself before hitting the post into the mirror. I want to look my best.

Participant 7 also highlighted:

I take heaps of photos and then keep checking them to see if everything is correct. I feel as though I am being judged by the photos I post.

This shows the psychological toll participants feel when posting photos to an online platform. This also shows that their self-worth is subject to how they are perceived by an audience. The practice of shooting 10-15 photos and then uploading them to give it another go (re-checking) shows how work towards perfection is considered utmost by the participants.

Participant 13 stated:

I'm always re-aligning myself in pictures, I try to look slim, poised. I assume – and my own experience has shown me – that people notice how I present, so it better be good.”

Moreover, the fig.3 illustrates how frequently participants examine themselves before posting on social media. The biggest group of 16 would always check themselves before posting a photo. Six participants in the small group look at their appearance from time to time. 2 check once in a while, and 1 not at all before posting. As the majority of people make an effort to appear presentable or, better yet, even perfect when sharing photos online and so on.

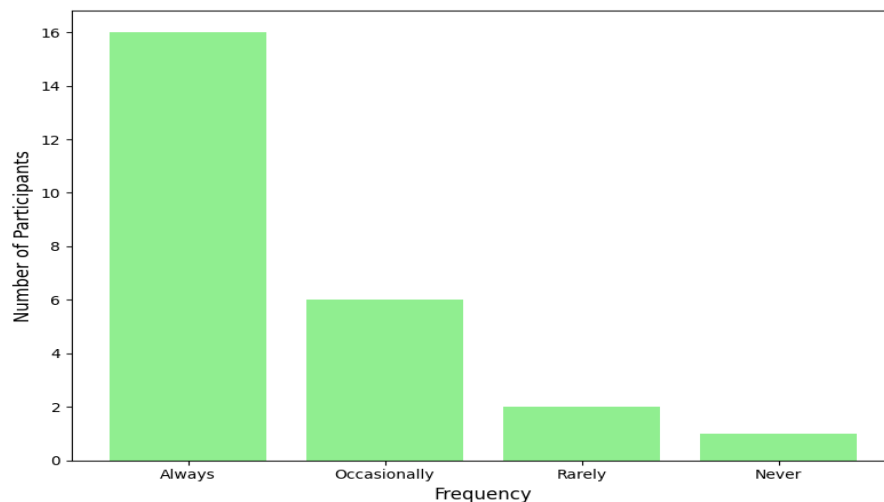


Figure 2: *Frequency of checking appearance*

The data illustrates the extent to which social media changed how we view our outward appearance. Social media is designed to encourage users to show their best self and therefore makes us more acutely aware of our visual image. It is a sign of the broader dominance of platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, which are all about highly curated, heavily edited images.

Results also indicate a need for acceptance and likes, which is somewhat dangerous. And the difference between how you underline it based on distinct social media systems built around visual content that influence users to be extra cautious about what they look like before sharing. Body surveillance as a theme summarizes the pressure participants experience to conform to beauty ideals portrayed in social media platforms. The consequences of the extensive self-regulatory strategies leading up to this determined moment define the desire to appear as favorable.

4.2 Criticism by external factors and body-image

This is another theme that appeared successfully and many of the contributors recalled when they were given some criticism on their appearance. For example, they became ashamed of their hair. They were also impacted negatively by these types of criticisms.

Participant 3 shared:

*It was during a time when people used to comment about my skin/weight on Instagram?
It triggered my insecurity for weeks.*

Similarly, Participant 7 stated:

I mean, I've had people say to me that they think I should lose weight. I felt bad about my body, and I started self-doubting.

The criticisms resulted in lower self-esteem and heightened fear over their looks for many of the participants. They felt exposed, and the responses they received made them feel more conscious of their apparent imperfections.

Participant 4 also noted:

I was so upset after someone commented on my acne scars, I could not get over them for days. This type of things sometime produces problems for my self-esteem.

Where this is serious issue is that it leads to the problematic conclusion. That even an important remark can have a very much effect on bodily image, encouraging participants to fixate upon incredibly mild imperfections.

Participant 8 shared:

I remember the comments when I looked rather too thin and told I should be eating more. That really got to me. I kept wondering if I was going to thin, and it is making me more self-conscious about my body.

And this sort of critique compels participants to doubt their perception of their own bodies, taking into consideration the levels of comfort they had previously embodied. In other instances, external judgement makes them adapt their actions or even change their bodies to fit into societal definitions of who they quote unquote should be.

Finally, Participant 18 said:

Most of the time, I mean what I have observed, everyone has always shamed me about my height and shape. It made me feel like my body was not good enough, that everything I had been told about appearance and standards of what a body should look like was wrong.

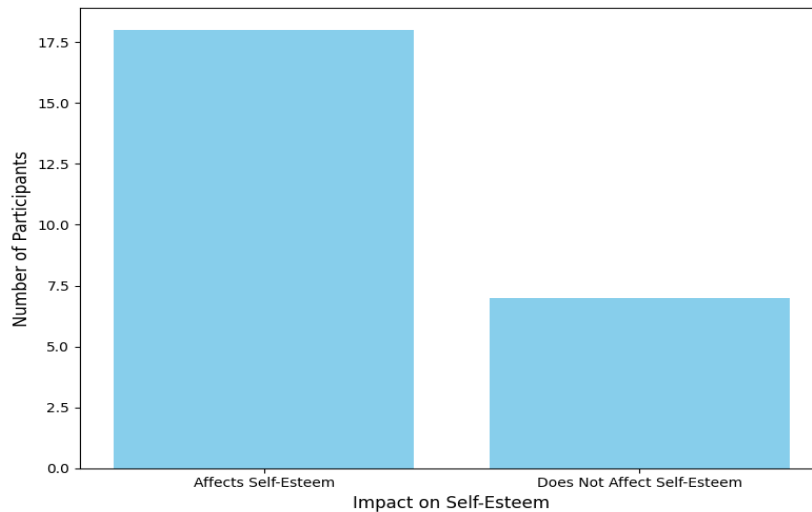


Figure 3: *Impact of external criticism on self-esteem*

Fig. 4 graph shows how external criticism affects self-esteem. In a small sample of 25 participants, it was found that 18 indicated external criticism impacts their self-esteem, while the other 7 stated that it does not have much effect. It implies that maybe most humans are swayed by the way others comment on or think we look, but a smaller handful are less so than those who are not impacted by outside voices.

The 81.8% participants have a high risk, because their self-esteem gets strongly affected by criticism is an apparent proof of how sensitive and vulnerable people could be to any sort of judgments from others. This is especially applicable on social media, where comments come from outside of the company and are publicly viewable and permanent. Negative comments regarding looks can sink even the best confidence for so many. This is especially true for visually-driven platforms such as Instagram or Facebook, where everyone seems to be scrutinized based on how they look in photos.

Conversely, seven respondents who indicated that external criticism does not affect their self-esteem may either have a more resilient sense of themselves or simply be less concerned about anyone else's thoughts about them. This points out the emotional cost that external attacks might have on individuals, especially in a social media-driven society with excessive concerns about appearance. It also addresses the larger topic of body image and how it is influenced by what people think and outside praise.

Therefore, external critique is the main factor of a participant negative body image and self-esteem. Feeling insecure about who they are and forcing them to conform in what society sees beauty as has an important effect on body image and self-esteem (Bessarab et al., 2022). This extends the levels of esteem and fear of more judgment in appearance enhancing, upgrading you to convince a foreign perspective as better fitting of this expectation.

4.3 Body Comparison on Social Media

According to this theme participants compared their own bodies to those of celebrities, and influencers. Those comparisons stoked insecurities, disappointment in bodies like theirs.

Participant 2 shared:

If I see my favorite influencer I try to look like that person. It gives me the feeling that I am not enough.

Participant 6 added:

Ever since I can remember, I have always compared my body to celebrities. They have such good bodies, and I feel like mine doesn't compare.

The responses show that social media compounds body dissatisfaction through a stream of aspirational and unrealistic images of beauty. There was an element of their body not being good enough against these filtered images as many participants reflected on how their bodies were in some way failing as a result of unrealistic presentations set by influencers and celebrities. So when their scrolls are filled with images on social media of perfectly toned bodies, it's seen as a daily shows that what you're seeing in the mirror isn't right.

Body comparison on social media was one of the most frequently mentioned themes. This theme is indicating that repeated exposure to idealized images through posts by others on social media put participants at risk of feeling insecure and dissatisfied with their body (Festinger, 1954). Within this context, participants reported an adverse effect on their self-esteem and body image attributed to the idealized representations seen online that were perceived as unrealistic or impossible to attain. This theme emphasizes the detrimental impact that comparisons with others on social media can have on mental and emotional health.

4.4 Photo-editing Practices

Respondents said they would use editing software to edit a photo before posting it on social media, making themselves look different by smoothing skin, adjusting body type or lighting skin tones. It illustrates the necessity for photo-editing to be viewed as an obligatory step toward conforming to beauty standards prevalent on social media.

Participant 4 described:

I am always smoothing my skin and making my body thinner before I post. This is something that you just feel compelled to do.

Participant 8 stated:

The filters I use to make my cheeks thinner and skin clean.

Participant 3 also mentioned:

It is better to share good pictures. This is very good thing. Show your good to the people.

Participant 25 added while talking about managing emotion before posting any picture on the social media.

Makes me conscious for a while, but I manage my emotions and regain confidence by controlling myself.

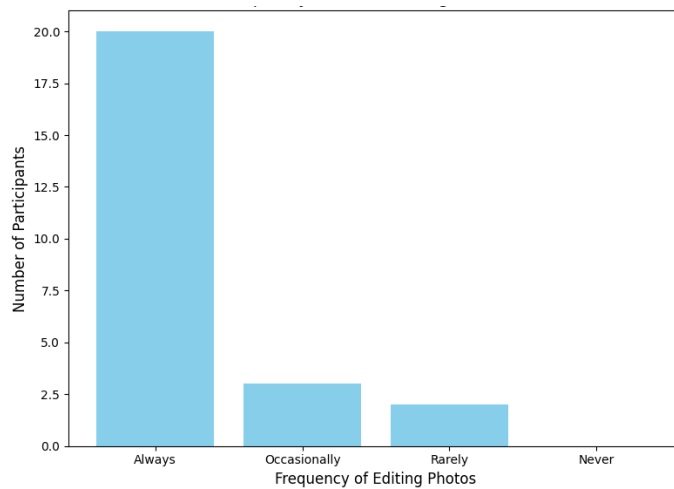


Figure 4: Frequency of photo editing practices

Furthermore, fig. 5 depicts how often the folks edit their photos before sharing them on social media. Only a little more than three-quarters of the participants (20 out of 25) always change their photos before sharing them on the Internet. 3 participants edit occasionally, and 2 participants rarely edit their photos. More on the same subject, no member from the group alleges not to edit their photos. The fact is that photo editing has become a common practice for the majority of social media users, even though not a few are indifferent to this process.

5. DISCUSSION

According to the findings on body image and social media usage among participants, body surveillance is the most prevalent behavior (Wang et al., 2020) detected here. The majority of respondents mentioned that they cross-examined themselves against beauty standards before putting out pictures, because none was to be offensive against the ideals of aesthetics. This behavior was seen across all users, indicating a heightened awareness (Roberts et al., 2022) that they were being followed via at least one digital platform.

Moreover, external criticism also significantly affected the body image of participants (Seeme et al., 2025), as several participants reported being critiqued negatively, whether in a virtual setting or an in-person one, and it frequently left them with lower self-esteem. And this is what affected their body image: comments from strangers and close friends. According to participants, they would try things like correcting their posture, losing weight, or trying to make their photos look better (Ajewumi et al., 2024) in response to how external audiences viewed them.

Furthermore, results have shown that social media comparisons add to body dissatisfaction. The excess body scrutiny included constant comparisons to others, whether an influencer or a celebrity, to a friend. Participants reported feeling insecure when comparing their bodies to images (Möri et al., 2022) commonly posted on social media.

Finally, the photo-editing practices are a common method (McGovern et al., 2022) participants use for creating the idealized self-consistent with portrayals of femininity in social media. Nearly all participants reported that they edited their photos before posting them, typically softening skin, changing body shape, and brightening the eye area. Photo-editing was not only done to make the photo look better but also to showcase it online with matching community expectations.

6. CONCLUSION

The study highlights body surveillance to be common among social media users. Touching up their face, body, and even clothes, their posture was studied for the impending pics. Because they wanted to be labelled good and were feel inferior. It shows how social media forces people to act seemingly perfect. This practice ultimately led the person who practiced it to become more aware and less confident with their overall look.

Social media effects on body image and self-presentation (Çimke & Gürkan, 2023) in young adults, which is a 21st-century issue, analysis of socially evoked changes. More emphasis has been put on watching over appearances, body shaming, comparing yourself with others, or altering photos. Not only is social media a means of communication, but the study also found that Pakistan's digital landscape has grown rapidly (Ameen et al., 2026), where people focus on their appearances. It is for this reason that how people think about themselves is heavily influenced by their life online.

Moreover, findings have shown that the main reason behind this is the unfiltered images which polished on social media. Many social media influencers, celebrities, and even friends post unbelievably perfect photos of themselves. This can lead to others feeling like they have to do the same in order to gain approval or likes. The hunger to get validated forces the modification of photos and a fear of folks absorbing yourself as it is, wanting to be treated like you're perfect. But this idealization is usually

contrived and does not accurately present reality, which leads some to feel inadequate when comparing themselves.

Furthermore, this compare-and-despair culture leads to unrealistic standards of beauty and success. Negative emotions like sadness, frustration, and a feeling of failure appear when an individual fails to meet any of these standards, which can impact mental well-being due to anxiety, depression, and body discontent.

6.1 Recommendations

Longitudinal designs would be optimal for future research to understand the direction of the relationship between social media use and body image. Another crucial area for future research is the design and evaluation of intervention programs that buffer against the harmful effects of social media on body image.

6.2 Research Implications

Given the significant influence of social media on body image, it is vitally important that practitioners offer guidance and support so individuals are more likely to foster a positive self-concept and engage critically with online content. Education, counseling, and mental health professionals can play a significant role in helping navigate some of the negative impacts of social media by fostering a healthier body image among young adults. Moreover, media literacy programs within schools, universities, and counselling centers would not merely implement schemes to inform young adults how to critically analyze the media they view, but to understand the illiterate persons' scenario around them to make them aware.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

The study is based on interviews of digital media users with a majority of female respondents. Future research should include diversity of gender and examine bias, as due to social desirability, participants may not characterize their true feelings or behaviors.

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Conflict of Interest

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