

BEAUTY NORM: THE UNDEFINED DEFINED

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ABSTRACT

Various social media have become important tools of shaping views and perceptions of people. The study analyses the effect of social media on body image.

Physical appearance has played an important role since historical times. Today, for a fact, social media has a crucial role in setting a standard for beauty for men as well as women. This study examines this influence of social media in particular, on body image in the Indian context.

The method of survey has been used to get first-hand information on the impact of social media on the perceptions of physical appearance for males and females in the age group of 15-30 years, living in metropolitan cities in India.

Further, the study explores, using second hand data sources, the consonance between social media users and changes in factors related to body image such as plastic/cosmetic surgery and gyms or fitness centres, and eating habits and whether these changes communicate a pattern for millennials in India.

“It is a staggering statistic that there are six billion human faces on the earth at any one time, with every one of them unique as the result of a complex interaction of genes, developmental stage, life experiences and environment. Consequently, faces are used as the unique identifier on passports, identity cards and driving licences. With all this complexity, how do we make judgments of what is beautiful or ugly; attractive or unpleasant? On what basis do we decide who we wish to interact with, and what interaction style would be most appropriate?”

-Nicola Rumsey, Diana Harcourt

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The on-line literature examined in this section suggests that body image has emerged as a core aspect of mental and physical well-being. Significant progress has been made toward identifying diverse factors that make individuals more or less vulnerable to body perfect ideals in the media. (Dittmar, 2009).

An overview of the researches on social media and body image (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2016) showed that social media is related to body dissatisfaction and the effects were found to be similar to that of traditional media (television, magazines). Just like traditional media, social networking sites are a platform for objectified images of women (Holland and Tiggeman, 2016).

Also, social comparison was found to be an important determinant of body image for adolescent girls and boys. Although peers were more frequently the targets of attractiveness comparisons, models in the media were certainly identified as targets as well. The students who reported more frequent social comparison with peers as well as models experienced greater body dissatisfaction. Weight comparisons were certainly found to be important among males as well as females (Jones, 2001). Social networking sites provide greater opportunity for frequent social comparison (Tiggeman and Miller, 2010) to peers as well as celebrities. It was shown that even a 5 minute exposure to thin-and-beautiful media images resulted in a more negative body image state than did exposure to images of neutral objects, particularly among young women with high media-ideal internalization levels and social comparison tendencies (Yamamiya et al., 2005).

Media influence predicted stronger body image dissatisfaction in adult women as compared to men which was similar to have been found in younger women. Factors like age, family pressure and self-esteem predicted body dissatisfaction in both men and women. (Green, 2003)

Various other studies showed that exposure to media images of the ideal male body, defined as lean and muscular, can have deleterious effects on mood and body satisfaction in men. Viewing ideal male images also was associated with a significant increase in depression (Agliata and Dunn, 2004). The implications for men after years of exposure to muscular body ideals could be comparable to the effects of exposure to the thin body ideal for women: lowered self-esteem, depression, guilt, stress, insecurity, shame, and body dissatisfaction (Lorenzen et al., 2004).

A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Korea and the United States examined the relationships among social media use for information, self-status seeking and socializing, body image, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, and some cultural effects moderating these relationships. It was shown that there is negative relationship between social media use for information and body image in both the United States and Korea (Lee, 2014).

However, the past research has not been inclusive of culture, gender, and age. Women seem to have larger online social networks, spend more time communicating with network members and are less worried about adding new people to their online social network, whom they do not know much about (Acar, 2008) most of the studies conducted have been in the western context where the participants largely have been adolescent and college females (Holland and Tiggeman, 2016) with only a few exceptions (Lee, 2014; Lorenzen et al., 2004; Agliata and Dunn, 2004)

OBJECTIVE

Body image has emerged as a core aspect of mental, physical and social well-being. Although there is a good deal of research on the effects of social media on body image in the western context, there is a scant of data in the Indian context regarding this influence. This study addresses the question of how social media affects body image of millennials in the Indian context and how it is different for males and females.

The study also examines the various trends related to social media and body image in India and related factors such as cosmetic surgeries, fitness, and eating disorders.

METHODOLOGY

The method of survey using questionnaire was used to gather information regarding the effect of social media on body image of males and females. The sample (N=230) consisted of 130 females and 100 males in the age group of 15-35 years living in metropolitan cities as the effect of social media has been more pervasive in this age group as well as these regions. The questionnaire was closed-ended with nominal and ordinal responses which were quantified for data analysis. The questionnaires were circulated online using Google forms.

Further, various studies in the Indian context and facts from second hand data sources have been reviewed in order to categorise the broad trends of the influence of social media on body dissatisfaction in men and women leading to change in related variables such as cosmetic procedures, fitness and eating habits, with a particular focus on eating disorders, in India.

SURVEY RESULTS

The data for the survey which was collected through online circulated Google forms was quantified and then analysed.

The null hypothesis was $H_0: \mu=0$ (Social media has no effect on body image). The alternate hypothesis was $H_a: \mu \neq 0$ (Social media has an effect on body image) and $\mu > 0$ implied negative impact on body image in a way that μ closer to 1 implied higher degree of negative impact; according to method of quantification.

After testing the hypothesis, the null hypothesis was rejected (for $\alpha=0.95$). The p-value was found to be less than $2.2e-16$ which is very small and therefore, the result is statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

According to the results of the survey:

Social media shapes the views of both men and women on various issues but the influence was found to be higher in females ($\mu=0.82$) than in males ($\mu=0.75$).

Though, the respondents sometimes felt insecure about their physical appearance and the influence was slightly higher for females ($\mu=0.44$) than males ($\mu=0.42$); the frequency of social comparison on social media although moderate for male as well as female respondents was higher for males ($\mu=0.45$) as compared to females ($\mu=0.41$).

The respondents did not feel bad if their physical appearance did not match the beauty standards of social media however, women felt that social media sets a standard for beauty whereas the male respondents were indecisive. Also, Portrayal of men and women body ideals in a stereotyped way was found to have no impact on men but a negative impact, although low, on women's body perception.

The survey found a low degree of correlation between the growth of social media and rise the cosmetic surgeries for both males and females but a high moderate degree of correlation between growth of social media and increase in the occurrence of eating disorders for both males and females, slightly higher for females. Also, a high degree of correlation was found between social media and self-objectification.

Media, in the recent years, has not become inclusive of the differences in physical appearance.

VARIOUS TRENDS IN INDIA

India was ranked second in the world in terms of highest number of Internet users as of December 2017. A global culture has emerged in India as a result of the technological changes which have not only changed the quality of life but also the social architect of society in India (Mahajan 2009).

Issues of body image are not limited to European and U.S. areas. As the world becomes more globalized the influence of Westernization has become apparent. Recent prevalence studies have found that women and girls in the developing world experience levels of body image disturbance and eating disorders that are similar to levels found in Western samples (Button, Reveley, & Palmer, 1998; Sharps et 2001; Wardle et al., 2006).

“Western” influence are critical factors contributing to the rise of eating disorders in Asia (Pike and Dunne 2015). Acculturation has been posited as a key mediating factor in light of one study's findings, which revealed a significant association between binge-eating and acculturated body attitudes.

The study showed that increasing industrialisation and globalisation was associated with proliferation of eating disorders in Asian countries, (Soh NL, Touyz S, Dobbins T, Surgenor L, Clarke S, Kohn M, et al. 2008) which is a significant association between greater acculturation to Western culture and increased body image disturbance.

Acculturation is influenced by the nature, type and frequency of media consumption patterns (Young Kim, 1988, 2001). Cultural differences found in the physical world are also in play in virtual communities (Shuter, 2012). As developing countries integrate with the Western world, there has been a parallel evolution in their media. An ideal example of this evolution has been observed with the Indian media. India is a rapidly developing country that has become more globalized in the last decade. With globalization has come a greater emphasis on meeting international standards in all facets of life. It is likely that the Indian movie industry, or Bollywood, is the single greatest external influence on the attitudes and mores of

Southeast Asians (Dudrah, 2006). With women and girls in India experiencing increasing exposure to Western media images, researchers have noted a growing awareness and concern with physical appearance among Indian women. India was ranked 5th in 2010, 8th in 2011 and was and 4th in the world in 2015 among the countries with the highest number of cosmetic procedures (ISAPS, 2010, 2011, 2015).

Countries by Total Number of Procedures (Top 25)								Rank in 2010
Rank		Total Surgical Procedures	% of total surgical procedures	Total Nonsurgical Procedures	% of total nonsurgical procedures	Total Procedures	% of total procedures	
1	U.S.	1,094,146	17.2%	2,011,100	24.1%	3,105,246	21.1%	1
2	Brazil	905,124	14.2%	542,090	6.5%	1,447,213	9.8%	2
3	China	415,140	6.5%	635,720	7.6%	1,050,860	7.1%	3
4	Japan	372,773	5.9%	579,878	7.0%	952,651	6.5%	4
5	Mexico	299,835	4.7%	494,731	5.9%	794,567	5.4%	6
6	Italy	316,470	5.0%	388,440	4.7%	704,910	4.8%	7
7	South Korea	258,350	4.1%	391,588	4.7%	649,938	4.4%	8
8	India*	191,439	3.0%	274,792	3.3%	466,231	3.2%	5
9	France	207,049	3.2%	248,247	3.0%	455,296	3.1%	9
10	Germany	187,193	2.9%	228,255	2.7%	415,448	2.8%	11

Total Procedures			
Rank *	Country:		% of World-Wide Total
1	USA	4,042,610	18.6%
2	Brazil	2,324,245	10.7%
3	South Korea	1,156,234	5.3%
4	India	935,487	4.3%
5	Mexico	907,913	4.2%
6	Germany	617,408	2.8%
7	Colombia	548,635	2.5%
8	France	488,718	2.3%
9	Italy	418,760	1.9%

* Rankings are based solely on those countries from which a sufficient survey response was received and data were considered to be representative.

Several factors, including the participation of Indian women in international beauty pageants, the increase in weight loss centres in metropolitan areas, and the establishment of gyms in the country, have resulted in a modern beauty ideal in urban India (Menon & Pant, 2007). Gympik is a Bengaluru-based India's largest online fitness discovery platform. A study conducted by Gympik found that women are more focused on losing weight and the primary focus of men behind joining a gym remains building muscle mass. Specifically, the media has been blamed for presenting a standard of attractiveness in women that is comprised of exaggerated features, including the use of very thin models who have been digitally enhanced with modern photography (Posavac & Posavac, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Social media has emerged as a powerful socialization agent in India with number of internet and social media users increasing exponentially.

Social media has a crucial role in shaping the views and perceptions of people on various issues. Social media affects body image among men and women in the age group of 15-30 years in India, but has a greater degree of negative impact on women as compared to men. Acculturation and globalisation are two essential factors that impact body image and prevalence of eating disorders and the growth in the internet and social media facilitates that. Social media also facilitates social comparison to peers as well as celebrities which affects Indian men more as compared to women.

Even though cosmetic surgeries have been on a rise in the recent years, no direct correlation has been found between the growth of social media and cosmetic surgeries.

A growing awareness and concern with physical appearance has led to rise in weight loss centres and gyms. While women have become focused on losing weight, primary reason of men is to be more muscular.

Media, in general, and social media, in particular, continue to promote unrealistically high ideals of beauty for males and females and has not become inclusive of the differences in physical appearance.

There is a need for media literacy programmes in order to promote physical and mental well-being of individuals and try to minimise the seemingly inevitable consequences of the omnipresent social media.

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although there have been some studies showing the relationship between social media/print media and body image, but questions are yet to be answered, there is much more to explore in this field in Indian context specially, as not much studies have been done in this domain that are India specific.

For example: As millennials are the most affected people by social media the following question arises: Which social networking sites are most influential and colours the opinions of millennials?

There have been a lot less studies on Indian men as on Indian women, which brings us to our next set of questions: How do Indian men feel about their body size and shape? What are the factors affecting the views of Indian men on their bodies?

People are getting more health conscious nowadays so, does increase in number of people doing Zumba or bhangra workouts and other re-energizing sports activities are somehow a product of social media? Has social media somehow affected the eating habits of Indians? Has social media affected mental well-being of people? If yes, are people taking correct measures to overcome the mental illness?

As the research in this domain is at infant level, the researchers will have to start from the ground level by collecting first hand data, they might not find everything that they are seeking on online portals or any record sites and will have to collect first hand data.

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Books

- The Psychology of Appearance: Nicola Rumsey and Diana Harcourt
- BODY IMAGE OF INDIAN WOMEN AS INFLUENCED BY INDIAN MEDIA:
Manisha Kalidas Kapadia