



The Influence of Social Media on Beauty Ideals Among Millennials and Gen Z in Punjab Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary digital culture, social media platforms have emerged as dominant architects of physical beauty standards, profoundly impacting younger generations. For Millennials and Generation Z, continuous exposure to digitally enhanced imagery, augmented reality filters, and sponsored content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok regularly recalibrates personal notions of attractiveness. This pervasive exposure carries significant psychological and behavioral implications, altering self-presentation, body satisfaction, and consumer choices. While global scholarship extensively documents this phenomenon, the specific contextual dynamics of Punjab, Pakistan remain underrepresented, highlighting an imperative need to investigate how regional socio-cultural factors intersect with digital beauty ideals. To address this gap, this study examines how digital platform engagement moulds aesthetic expectations across Millennials and Generation Z. Employing a cross-sectional research design, data were gathered from a sample of 600 participants selected through a multistage sampling strategy. Statistical analyses confirm that social media exposure exerts a profound influence on shaping contemporary beauty norms. Robust positive correlations emerged across all key exposure metrics: usage frequency, total daily duration, and active interactive engagement were each significantly linked with beauty ideal internalization, with interactive engagement with content creators standing out as the strongest determinant. Given these insights, this research underscores the urgency of implementing digital media literacy initiatives, enforcing ethical standards in creator marketing, expanding mental health support systems, and developing regulatory guidelines to cultivate realistic visual standards. Ultimately, these results enrich sociological scholarship surrounding digital identity, youth socialization, and modern media culture.

1. Introduction

In the modern world, communication, self-perception, and identity formation have all been transformed by digital technology. Various social media platforms such as Tiktok, Instagram, and Youtube, have now become a crucial part of everyday life, serving as important agents of cultural influence and identity (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Siagian et al., 2023). This influence is especially strong for Millennials and Gen Z because they typically spend a lot of time consuming digital content and interacting with influencers through social media (Mintel, 2017; Denton, 2019). Millennials saw the shift from conventional media to digital

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communication technologies, whereas “Generation Z” was born into a world dominated by social networking platforms and digital connection (Barska, 2015; Williams, 2011). As a result, both generations spend a considerable amount of time engaging with online content, following influencers, participating in digital trends, and constructing their identities through virtual interactions (Naumovska, 2017). Traditionally, beauty ideals were shaped through family, culture, religion, television, magazines, and cinema. However, social media has transformed this process by creating an interactive digital environment where beauty trends are continuously produced, circulated, and reinforced (Perloff, 2014).

Social media facilitates self-expression and interpersonal connections, but it also fosters idealised standards of beauty that cause social comparison, and contribute to body dissatisfaction, and thereby enhance appearance-related anxiety (Fardouly et al., 2015; Tiggemann and Slater, 2014). Celebrities and the beauty influencers often use filters when presenting images of themselves that affect how others see them as attractive (Hwang, 2018; Barker, 2017). This dynamic places pressure on both women and men to conform to unrealistic beauty standards (Verrastro, et al., 2020). Social Networking Sites allow users to create, share, and consume visual content while simultaneously interacting with peers, influencers, and celebrities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Unlike traditional media, social networking platforms are highly interactive and largely based on user-generated content, making them more personally engaging and socially influential (Tiggemann & Velissaris, 2020).

The visual aspect of social networking sites encourages users to display idealised images of themselves via selfies, manipulated pictures, filters, and carefully chosen material. Millennials and Generation Z now see and perform beauty differently because of social media. Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube constantly expose viewers to manipulated photographs, beauty filters, influencer material, and celebrity-endorsed lifestyles that create modern beauty standards. Users are encouraged to compare themselves to idealised looks, which are generally faultless, youthful, and socially acceptable (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). According to studies, body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and the internalisation of idealistic beauty ideals have been associated with regular exposure to appearance-focused content on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook (Cohen et al., 2017). Individuals may learn to judge themselves in terms of socially promoted appearance norms, resulting in greater body monitoring and social comparison (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Thompson et al., 1999).

Young people increasingly connect their physical appearance, lifestyle, and social position to the content they see on the social media (Fioravanti et al., 2022). The ability to filter, edit, and enhance images has further normalized unrealistic expectations regarding beauty and physical appearance, especially among young women (Hafeez & Zulfiqar, 2023). In particular, the young females frequently experience pressure related to skin tone, body shape, weight, and facial appearance, although men are increasingly affected by appearance-related expectations as well (Sandhu et al., 2021; Verrastro et al., 2020). Simultaneously social media has also contributed positively by promoting body positivity, self-expression, inclusivity, and awareness regarding mental health and diversity in beauty standards (Yoo & Kim, 2018; Pila et al., 2019).

Digital platforms frequently present idealized images of flawless skin, slim bodies, and youthful appearances, which shape societal expectations of attractiveness and elevate pressure to conform to these ideals (Grogan, 2021; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). As a result, many individuals increasingly turn toward cosmetic and dermatological procedures to achieve socially accepted beauty standards. Cosmetic treatments are no longer viewed only as medical or corrective procedures but are also considered tools for social acceptance and self-enhancement within digitally influenced cultures (Balsamo, 1992). Simultaneously, the emergence of body positivity movement has been fuelled by social media, through which the restrictive beauty standards are challenged and body acceptance, diversity, and self-esteem are usually encouraged (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

The world of social media has also uniquely changed the advertising for aesthetic and dermatological services in giving the chance to professionals and beauty companies to reach their clients directly through visual content and collaborations with influencers. Digital platforms enable dermatologists and cosmetic clinics to showcase before-and-after transformations, skincare routines, and beauty treatments that normalize cosmetic enhancement and strengthen consumers' trust in aesthetic services (Ewen, 2008). The growing dependence on social media among Millennials and Generation Z raises important sociological questions regarding identity construction, self-presentation, consumer culture, and social comparison (Jong & Drummond, 2013). Young people are increasingly influenced by online trends, influencer recommendations, beauty advertisements, and virtual validation through likes, comments, and followers (Kinski, 2017; Kumar, 2023).

1.1 Problem Statement

The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed how beauty standards are created, communicated, and internalized across societies. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Snapchat continuously expose users to idealized and digitally enhanced images that promote specific standards of physical attractiveness. These platforms not only influence perceptions regarding beauty, body image, skin tone, fashion, and lifestyle but also shape individuals' self-esteem, social acceptance, and identity formation (Perloff, 2014; Fardouly et al., 2015;). Millennials and Generation Z are particularly

vulnerable to these influences because they spend substantial amounts of time engaging with social media content and interacting with influencers, celebrities, and online communities (Mintel, 2017; Denton, 2019). Despite the growing body of international literature on the connection between social media and body image, sociological issues related to the formation of beauty ideals through the use of digital media in non-Western countries need further investigation. The study aims to explore how exposure to social media, influencer engagement, and beauty-related content shape perceptions of beauty, body image, and self-presentation among young individuals in contemporary society. By examining these issues from a sociological perspective, the study aims to contribute to academic knowledge on digital culture, identity formation, media influence, consumer behavior, and shifting beauty standards in Pakistan.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate how the use of social media affects people's ideas about what is considered to be beautiful among Millennials and Gen Z.
2. Identify motivations for seeking aesthetic procedures influenced by social media.
3. To explore how being exposed to beauty-related content impacts body image and self-esteem among Millennials and Gen Z.

1.3 Hypotheses

H₁: Frequency of social media use significantly influences beauty ideals among Millennials and Gen Z.

H₂: Frequent interaction with beauty-related content significantly affects perceptions of beauty standards.

H₃: Preference for certain social media platforms for beauty content significantly influences beauty perceptions among Millennials and Gen Z.

H₄: Exposure to idealized beauty images on social media significantly shapes beauty ideals.

H₅: Exposure to beauty-related content significantly affects body image perception.

1.3 Theoretical Integration

Collectively, Feminist Media Theory (Van Zoonen, 1994), Objectification Theory (Fredrickson, 1997), and Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the role of social media in shaping beauty ideals among Millennials and Generation Z. Feminist Media Theory explains how media systems promote gendered beauty expectations; Objectification Theory explains how individuals internalize and monitor these standards; and Social Comparison Theory explains how continuous comparison with idealized online representations influences self-perception and body image. The empirical findings of the study support the central assumptions of these theories by demonstrating that social media exposure, influencer engagement, beauty-related content, and online validation mechanisms significantly shape perceptions of beauty and self-worth among young individuals. The integration of these theories, therefore, strengthens the sociological interpretation of the study and provides a deeper understanding of how digital culture influences identity formation, body image, and beauty standards in contemporary Pakistani society.

2. Review of Literature

Perloff (2014) notion that social media has transformed contemporary beauty culture by creating continuous exposure to appearance-related content and idealized beauty standards. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube allow users to interact with highly curated images, influencer content, and beauty-focused advertisements that shape perceptions of attractiveness and self-worth.

Williams (2011) stated that generation Z spends a significant amount of time online and is continuously exposed to visual content through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. Gen Z places a strong emphasis on authenticity, peer interaction, and digital connectivity. Their social relationships and self-perceptions are heavily influenced by social media engagement, online feedback, and virtual communities. Verrastro et al., (2020) found that due to their high dependence on image-based platforms, Gen Z is more vulnerable to appearance-focused comparisons and beauty-related pressures than previous generations. Exposure to edited photographs, beauty filters, influencer lifestyles, and viral trends often shapes their understanding of attractiveness and ideal appearance.

According to Siagian et al., (2023), social media has become central to Gen Z's communication styles, identity formation, and social interactions. Social media functions not only as a communication tool but also as a space where young people construct and display their identities. Perloff (2014) argued that social media intensifies self-objectification because users constantly

evaluate their appearance through external validation, likes, comments, and comparisons with others. Mintel (2017) further reported that Gen Z consumers spend nearly eight hours daily engaging with digital media across smartphones, tablets, televisions, and computers. This extensive exposure increases their vulnerability to beauty messaging, influencer marketing, and appearance-related social comparison.

Jong and Drummond (2013) explained that adolescent girls use social media to understand social norms, identity expectations, and beauty ideals. Their qualitative research showed that social networking sites strongly influence girls' perceptions of attractiveness, femininity, and body image through peer feedback, visual comparison, and beauty-centred advertising. According to Kinski (2017), social media enables users to collect opinions and recommendations from members of their social networks, influencers, and consumers who have already experienced certain products or procedures. This interactive communication system has transformed social media into a powerful beauty-information ecosystem where trends spread rapidly and influence consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviours.

Studies indicate that Gen Z consumers are highly influenced by influencer marketing and social media advertising because they perceive influencers as more authentic and relatable than traditional celebrities (Peedikayil et al., 2025). (Fardouly et al., 2018) explored that Influencers play a major role in promoting beauty products, skincare routines, cosmetic procedures, and lifestyle trends, which significantly affect Gen Z's purchasing behaviours and beauty preferences. Continuous exposure to idealized beauty images on social media has also been linked to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and body dysmorphic concerns among Gen Z users.

Sandhu et al., (2021) argued that media representations reinforce unrealistic beauty expectations, particularly for adolescent girls, by encouraging self-objectification and appearance monitoring. Constant exposure to idealized female bodies may lead individuals to internalize societal standards of beauty and evaluate themselves primarily through physical appearance. Similarly, Verrastro et al., (2020) found that intensive Instagram use is associated with body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty ideals among both males and females. The widespread use of beauty filters and photo-editing applications further intensifies these pressures by normalizing digitally enhanced appearances. Adolescents and young adults may therefore experience greater vulnerability to eating disorders, low self-esteem, and body dysmorphic concerns as a result of repeated exposure to unattainable standards of beauty.

According to Peedikayil et al., (2025), influencer marketing strongly affects Generation Z because influencers are perceived as authentic, relatable, and trustworthy. However, idealized body images promoted by influencers can contribute to body dissatisfaction and negative self-evaluation. Studies show that social media influencers significantly shape beauty ideals by encouraging appearance-based comparisons and promoting cosmetic products, fitness trends, and aesthetic procedures (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Young users who frequently engage with influencer content are more likely to internalize unrealistic beauty standards and experience dissatisfaction with their own appearance (Fardouly et al., 2015). Research suggests that social media users often value influencer-generated beauty content more than traditional media representations because influencers appear relatable and authentic (Ward & Paskhover, 2019).

According to Dinkler (2023), TikTok promotes upward social comparisons because users are constantly exposed to fitness, fashion, makeup, and appearance-related content. Young women, particularly Gen Z users, often compare themselves to idealized creators and influencers, resulting in dissatisfaction with their own appearance and increased pressure to conform to online beauty expectations. TikTok's algorithm further intensifies this process by continuously recommending appearance-focused content based on user engagement patterns. Research consistently highlights a strong relationship between social media use, self-esteem, and body image concerns. Perloff et al., (2016) reported that increased social media use is associated with lower self-esteem and greater body dissatisfaction.

Similarly, Fardouly et al., (2018) emphasized that repeated exposure to appearance-focused content intensifies concerns regarding physical attractiveness and self-worth. Research demonstrates that frequent social media exposure contributes to body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and appearance anxiety among young people, particularly Millennials and Gen Z (Fardouly et al., 2018). Social comparison theory suggests that users often compare themselves with influencers, celebrities, and peers who present idealized and filtered versions of themselves online (Festinger, 1954). These upward comparisons can negatively affect self-esteem and body image, especially when users perceive themselves as failing to meet socially constructed beauty standards (Vogel et al., 2014). Fioravanti et al., (2022) argued that exposure to idealized beauty images on social networking sites significantly increases body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety, especially among young women. Experimental studies reviewed by the researchers demonstrated that even short exposure to highly attractive or "fitspiration" content negatively affects body satisfaction and self-esteem. Appearance comparison was identified as one of the strongest psychological mechanisms explaining these negative effects.

Similarly, Fardouly et al. (2018) discovered that excessive exposure to appearance-related information is substantially linked to body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety, and low self-esteem. Verrastro et al., (2020) observed that Instagram usage is

associated with anxiety, social pressure, and dissatisfaction with body image among adolescents. The study revealed that both girls and boys experience pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards presented online. Many users edit or filter their photographs to gain social approval and validation, further perpetuating unrealistic appearance norms. Cohen et al., (2019) found that exposure to body-positive social media content may enhance body appreciation and reduce dissatisfaction by promoting diversity and authenticity rather than unrealistic perfection. Research conducted in South Asian contexts also supports these findings. Sandhu et al., (2021) found that media exposure intensifies body surveillance, shame, and self-objectification among adolescent girls in India. Similarly, Pakistani youth increasingly experience pressure to conform to Westernized beauty ideals promoted through social media platforms, particularly ideals emphasizing slimness, flawless skin, and facial perfection (Saleem & Khalid, 2021).

Hassan and Hussein (2021) similarly found that credibility and emotional connection strongly affect young consumers' purchasing intentions regarding cosmetics and skincare products. Influencers who openly share personal experiences, beauty struggles, and product reviews are often perceived as more reliable than traditional advertisements. The influence of influencers extends beyond purchasing behaviour. Influencers shape attitudes toward body image, beauty routines, cosmetic enhancements, and lifestyle expectations. Continuous exposure to idealized influencer content can increase appearance-based social comparison and body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Kumar (2023) argued that many influencers contribute to the spread of unattainable body ideals by promoting edited images, cosmetic procedures, and unrealistic lifestyles. Such content may negatively affect mental health by increasing body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and low self-esteem among young women.

Such content encourages individuals to value their bodies beyond physical appearance and resist unrealistic beauty expectations promoted online. Body dissatisfaction, the appearance anxiety and social comparison can be the results of exposure to idealised influencer imagery, particularly among young females (Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010; O'Reilly, 2020). At the same time, celebrity endorsements raise the perceived social worth of beauty goods and cosmetic treatments, leading consumers to equate physical attractiveness with confidence, popularity, and social acceptability (Hwang, 2018).

2.1 Significance of the Study

This study offers critical insights into the multifaceted impact of social media on beauty perceptions, psychological well-being, and consumer behaviour among Millennials and Generation Z. Academically, it advances sociological discourse through frameworks like social comparison theory, examining how algorithmically curated content, digital filters, and socioeconomic variables reshape self-concept and cultural norms. Beyond theoretical contributions, the research highlights key sociological consequences by detailing how online validation and exposure to idealized imagery influence identity formation, body image, and gender expectations. Practically, it provides actionable guidance for policymakers advocating for regulatory measures such as mandatory disclaimers on altered commercial photos, transparent influencer marketing, and school-based media literacy initiatives. Furthermore, the findings serve commercial and broader societal interests by encouraging beauty industries to embrace authentic, inclusive representation while laying a foundational framework for future inquiries into emerging technologies like augmented reality and virtual environments.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the association between social media exposure and beauty ideals among Millennials and Generation Z in Punjab, Pakistan. The sampling frame included Millennials (1981–1996) and Generation Z (1997–2010) who actively used at least one major social media platform (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube) and were enrolled in higher education institutions or accessible through online social media communities. A multistage sampling approach was used. In the first stage, three universities (Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi; Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan; and The University of Faisalabad) were randomly selected as study clusters. In the second stage, 200 eligible respondents were purposively selected from each university, including Millennials and Generation Z, students and faculty members, and males and females. The final sample comprised 600 respondents from urban and rural areas. The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations. Initially, 600 questionnaires were distributed, of which 66 were excluded due to incomplete or inconsistent responses and replaced with additional questionnaires, yielding 600 complete and valid responses. Data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire comprising demographic characteristics and measures of social media use, exposure to idealized beauty images, following beauty influencers, and beauty ideals/body image perception. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Content validity was established through expert review, and a pilot study assessed the instrument's clarity and comprehensibility. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) summarized respondent characteristics, while Chi-square tests were used to examine associations between the independent and dependent variables.

4.Results & Discussion

Univariate Analysis

Table. 1 Socio-Economic Characteristics of the respondent.

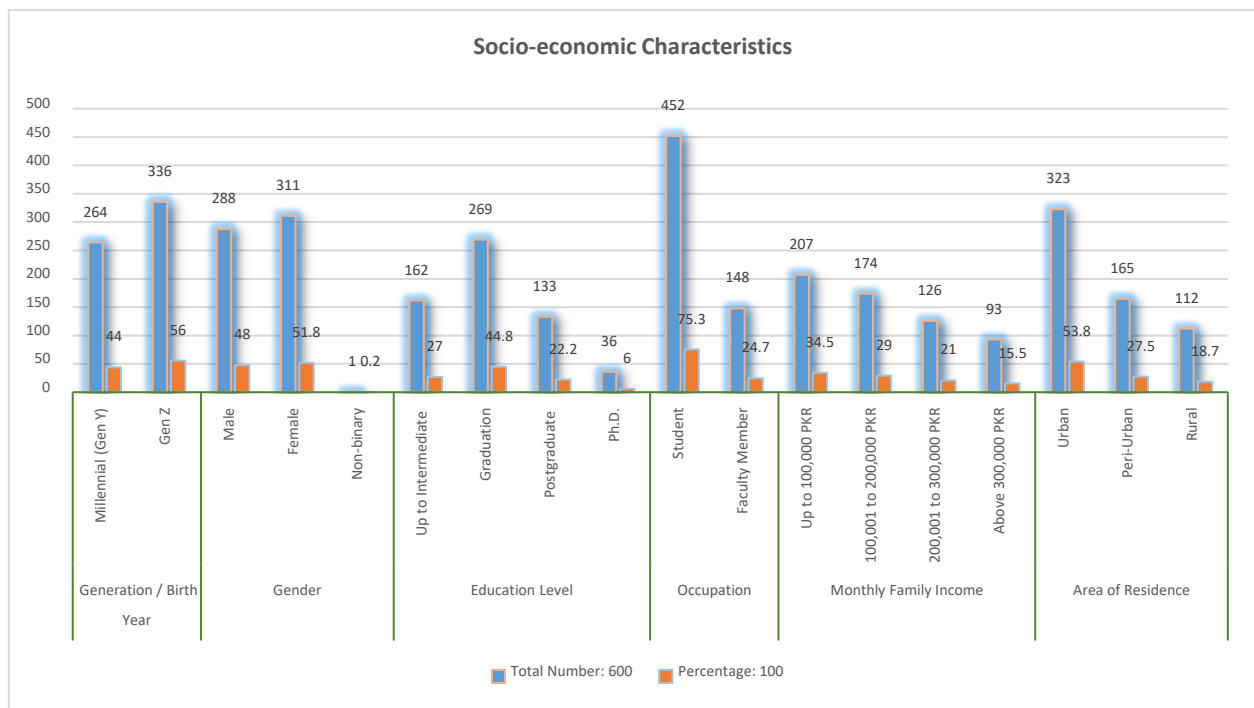


Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Generation Z constituted the majority of the sample (56.0%), while Millennials accounted for 44.0%, providing relatively balanced representation for generational comparison. Gender distribution was also relatively balanced, with females comprising 51.8%, males 48.0%, and non-binary respondents 0.2%. Regarding education, 44.8% of respondents had 16 years of education or a bachelor's degree or higher, followed by 27.0% with intermediate education, 22.2% with postgraduate qualifications, and 6.0% with doctoral degrees. In terms of occupational status, students represented 75.3% of the sample, while faculty members accounted for 24.7%. Monthly family income varied across respondents: 34.5% reported incomes up to PKR 100,000, 29.0% reported PKR 100,001–200,000, 21.0% reported PKR 200,001–300,000, and 15.5% reported more than PKR 300,000. Regarding residence, 53.8% lived in urban areas, 27.5% in peri-urban areas, and 18.7% in rural areas. Overall, the sample reflects relatively diverse socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, with greater representation of Generation Z, students, and urban residents.

4.1 Bivariate Analysis

Table.2 Association between frequency of social media usage by the respondents and their beauty ideals

<i>H'</i> : Frequency of social media use * Beauty ideals cross-tabulation.					
Frequency of social media		Beauty Ideals Among Millennial and Gen Z % (Number)			
		To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Total
1	Not at all	37.0 (37)	10.4 (37)	9.7 (14)	14.7 (88)
2	To some extent	37.0 (37)	74.4 (264)	27.6 (40)	56.8 (341)
3	To a greater extent	26.0 (26)	15.2 (54)	62.8 (91)	28.5 (171)
Total		100.0 (100)	100.0 (355)	100.0 (145)	100.0 (600)
Chi-Square: 170.725		Sig. Level: 0.000,	Gamma: 0.483,	Sig. Level: 0.000	

This analysis examined how often different types of social media platforms are used versus how likely a person is to conform to traditional or modern beauty standards. The results of the cross-tabulation show that there is a clear trend. The group of people who reported higher use of social media also fell into the category of greater influence of beauty ideals, with 62.8% of respondents indicating this as the case. This suggests that heavy users are more likely to internalize socially defined images of beauty. On the flip side, those who reported using little or no social media exhibited a lower degree of influence by beauty ideals and were distributed more evenly across the two categories of "to some extent" or "not at all". Those who indicated that they use social media "to some extent" tended to cluster more heavily within the category of moderate influence of beauty ideals, especially "to some extent (74.4%)". This indicates that moderate exposure to beauty imagery will influence the development of beliefs about beauty, but not to the extent of significant amounts of usage. The distribution of results across the three categories further confirms that as the amount of exposure to beauty images through social media increases, the amount of influence from beauty images through social media increases. The relationship between social media use and beauty standards is supported by the Chi-Square test result, with a Chi-Square value of 170.725 and a p-value of 0.000, meaning it is statistically significant. Therefore, there is strong evidence of a relationship between social media use and beauty standards for the population studied. Further, a Gamma value of 0.483 ($p = 0.000$) represents a moderate positive directional relationship between social media use and beauty standards, they both positively influence one another and are predictable. The findings are consistent with the previous researchers' findings that there is a direct correlation between how often something is seen or exposed on social media platforms and the manner in which that object (in this case, a person's body) is perceived (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Perloff, 2012; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Ultimately, these results indicate that in today's society, beauty standards will increasingly be created and reinforced through the way users interact with social media; repeated exposure to beauty standards through social media will increase user adoption of normative standards of beauty.

Table.3 Association between frequent interaction with beauty-related content and respondents' perception of beauty ideals

<i>H²: Frequent interaction with beauty-related content * Beauty ideals cross tabulation.</i>					
Frequent interaction with beauty-related content		Beauty Ideals Among Millennial and Gen Z % (Number)			
		To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Total
1	Not at all	33.0 (33)	10.1 (36)	8.3 (12)	13.5 (81)
2	To some extent	38.0 (38)	70.7 (251)	29.7 (43)	55.3 (332)
3	To a greater extent	29.0 (29)	19.2 (68)	62.1 (90)	31.2 (187)
Total		100.0 (100)	100.0 (355)	100.0 (145)	100.0 (600)
Chi-Square: 132.945		Sig. Level: 0.000,	Gamma: 0.446	Sig. Level: 0.000	

The chart above demonstrates how frequently users who interact with beauty content and beauty ideals find the beauty standards of the two generations (Millennials & Gen Z) to be similar. The results of the cross-tabulation, the chi-square test, and the Gamma value create a statistical correlation between the two variables. Table 3 illustrates a distinct structure of association between beauty-related content exposure and the extent to which beauty ideals are influenced. Respondents who often have interactions with beauty-related content appear in the group with the greatest extent of beauty ideal influence (62.1%), indicating that increasing levels of interaction with beauty-focused content result in stronger beauty standards internalisation. Respondents who engage at moderate levels of interaction are mostly represented within the "to some extent" influence group (70.7%), suggesting that those who occasionally/regularly engage but do not extensively engage in beauty-related content maintain a moderate level of influence on beauty ideals. Respondents with little/no interaction show relatively low levels of strong influence on beauty ideals; however, an overwhelming number within this group (33.0%) respond that they are influenced by beauty-related content "to a great extent", showing that even very limited levels of interaction can help to construct beauty standards. Overall, the data show a consistent pattern in which there appears to be a linear relationship between the level of interaction individuals have with beauty-related content and the extent to which beauty ideals are influenced. With a Chi-Square Value of 132.945 with a significance level of 0.000. This indicates that the relationship between frequent interaction with beauty-related content and beauty ideals is statistically significant, or that the observed association is not random, but it represents a pattern in the data. The Gamma Value of 0.446 is also statistically significant at $p = 0.000$, indicating a moderate positive relationship between frequent interactions with beauty-related content and the effect of beauty ideals. According to previous studies, social media platforms such as Instagram greatly impact the concept of beauty and the development of beauty trends in young users (Stein & Krause, 2017; Lu & Chia, 2023). Research has shown that influencer-generated content and interactive engagement significantly shape young people's perceptions of beauty and attractiveness (Qamar et al., 2023). In addition, idealized image exposure can help young adults internalize socially acceptable definitions of

beauty (Yens et al., 2023). Additionally, the data indicate that interactive engagement, as opposed to only passive experience, affects how individuals view beauty. Ongoing interactions with beauty-related content enhance the visibility, familiarity, and normalization of certain beauty standards and increase the likelihood of these standards being internalized by younger users in digital environments.

Table.4 Association between preferences for certain social media platforms for beauty content and respondents' perception of beauty ideals

H³: Preference for certain social media platforms for beauty content * Beauty ideals cross tabulation.

Preference for certain social media platforms for beauty content		Beauty Ideals Among Millennial and Gen Z % (Number)			
		To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Total
1	Not at all	58.0 (58)	17.2 (61)	17.9 (26)	24.2 (145)
2	To some extent	32.0 (32)	73.2 (260)	41.4 (60)	58.7 (352)
3	To a greater extent	10.0 (10)	9.6 (34)	40.7 (59)	17.2 (103)
Total		100.0 (100)	100.0 (355)	100.0 (145)	100.0 (600)

Chi-Square: 150.862 Sig. Level: 0.000, Gamma: 0.499 Sig. Level: 0.000

As demonstrated in the table above, there is a correlation between how you engage with different types of social media (i.e., Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) and your preferences about beauty and the way that you internalize those ideals (the way you see yourself compared to someone else's view of you). Table 4 summarizes the clear structure of associations among participants according to their responses. The majority of participants who reported a greater preference for specific types of social media platforms for finding beauty-related content fit into the category of "to a great extent," as it relates to their exposure to social media and how it affects their perceptions of what beauty is (40.7%). In contrast, participants with a moderate preference are primarily grouped in the "to some extent" category (73.2%), indicating that these participants are moderately influenced when they selectively consume beauty content from specific platforms. Lastly, even for those participants who do not report any preference for one specific social media platform, there are still a large percentage (58.0%) of them that report being influenced "to a great extent" by their exposure to social media, but this influence is diverged across all categories; therefore, the data illustrates that as preferences for specific social media platforms increase, there is a clear structure and increased influence regarding how social media influences perceptions of beauty. With a Chi-Square value of 150.862 at a significance level of 0.000, the association between preference for specific social media platforms and beauty ideals is statistically significant and providing evidence that the association is real and not by chance, therefore suggesting that there is statistically significant relationship between the two variables (Gamma = 0.499; $p=0.000$), indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between preference for specific social media platforms and beauty ideals among Millennials and Gen Z and their stronger influence upon millennials and Gen Z in a consistent and meaningful way. The findings of the present study are in line with the results from prior studies. All research indicates that there are differences in how beauty ideals are formed or influenced on different types of social media. Research shows that image-based social media such as Instagram and TikTok create stronger ideals of appearance-based comparison through visual exposure and influencer-driven content (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Chae, 2020). In addition, meta-analytic studies show a significant correlation between social media use and body image disturbance, indicating that using different types of social media platforms strongly correlates with how individuals perceive beauty (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). In particular, studies measuring Instagram exposure have reported that Instagram plays a significant role in establishing beauty standards through its visual exposure and influencer content (Stein & Krause, 2019). Therefore, findings from these prior studies, along with the current study, demonstrate that there is a statistically significant correlation between platform type and beauty ideals from Millennials and Gen Z.

Table.5 Association between exposure to idealized beauty images on social media by the respondents and their beauty ideals.

H⁴: Exposure to idealized beauty images on social media * Beauty ideals cross-tabulation.

Exposure to idealized beauty images		Beauty Ideals Among Millennial and Gen Z % (Number)			
		To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Total

1	Not at all	55.0 (55)	12.4 (44)	11.7 (17)	19.3 (116)
2	To some extent	29.0 (29)	69.9 (248)	30.3 (44)	53.5 (321)
3	To a greater extent	16.0 (16)	17.7 (63)	57.9 (84)	27.2 (163)
Total		100.0 (100)	100.0 (355)	100.0 (145)	100.0 (600)
Chi-Square: 189.194 Sig. Level: 0.000, Gamma: 0.560 Sig. Level: 0.000					

The chart provided indicates a relationship between seeing images of 'ideal beauty' via social media & the understanding of what 'ideal beauty' is among Millennials & Generation Z. Women with exposure to images of idealized beauty (greatest) had a significantly higher percentage (57.9%) than those without/limited exposure (55%) in the "great extent" category for how beauty ideals have been influenced based on high internalization of idealized beauty. Conversely, respondents with no/little exposure to images of idealized beauty are over-represented in the "great extent" category compared to their overall representation, reflecting the distribution effect that all the categories have limited exposure, resulting in low structured internalization across the categories. Respondents with moderate exposure were primarily concentrated in the "some extent" category for how beauty ideals are influenced (69.9%); therefore, respondents with some exposure to beauty will exhibit a moderate degree of influence on beauty perceptions. The overall distribution illustrates a clear gradient established by the incremental increases in exposure to idealized beauty, demonstrating that as you experience more idealized beauty content, you experience a greater degree of influence from it, which is reflected in your beauty perception. A Chi-Square value of 189,194 with a significance level of 0.000 indicates a significant relationship between idealised beauty image exposure and beauty ideals. The relationship shown in the table resulted from a non-chance array of instances in the overall population. Additionally, the Gamma value of 0,560 statistically significant ($p=0.000$), indicating a moderately high positive relationship between exposure to idealised beauty images and beauty ideals in the Millennial and Gen Z generations. Several previous studies have also found that social media platforms with curated or filtered beauty images contribute to young people's use of social comparison, dissatisfaction with their bodies, and the reinforcement of dominant ideals of beauty (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Perloff, 2014). Therefore, social media platforms will have a major impact as a visual channel and instrument to influence what standard of beauty or attractiveness means to an individual and how they view their own beauty.

Table.6 Association between exposure to beauty-related content by the respondents and their beauty ideals

H₅: Exposure to beauty-related content on social media * Beauty ideals cross-tabulation.

Exposure to beauty-related content		Beauty Ideals Among Millennial and Gen Z % (Number)			
		To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Total
1	Not at all	54.0 (54)	9.9 (35)	12.4 (18)	17.8 (107)
2	To some extent	35.0 (35)	71.3 (253)	35.2 (51)	56.5 (339)
3	To a greater extent	11.0 (11)	18.9 (67)	52.4 (76)	25.7 (154)
Total		100.0 (100)	100.0 (355)	100.0 (145)	100.0 (600)
Chi-Square: 177.131 Sig. Level: 0.000, Gamma: 0.559 Sig. Level: 0.000					

The results presented in Table 6 illustrate that respondents who reported greater levels of exposure to beauty-related content tended to fall into the higher end of the categories of beauty ideals that were influenced to a larger degree. In the "very much" category of beauty ideals, the majority of respondents with high levels of exposure to beauty-related digital content were classified here, which indicates that a significantly strong relationship exists between high exposure to beauty-related digital content and internalizing beauty standards. For respondents who report moderate levels of exposure to beauty-related content, the majority are classified into the "to some degree" category of beauty ideals (71.3%), indicating a moderate amount of influence on respondents who regularly consume beauty-related content through digital media. Respondents with little or no exposure to beauty-related content, while showing the least amount of influence by comparison, report that 54% of them still report having a large amount of influence to some degree, indicating that respondents who do not have any or only a small amount of exposure to beauty-related content will also have some degree of influence at least. About the overall pattern of results, it is apparent that there is a positive relationship between increased exposure to beauty-related content and the greater amount of influence that the respondents have on beauty ideals. The Chi-Square value (177.131), significant at 0.000, indicates a statistically significant relationship between exposure to beauty-related content and beauty ideals. Thus, the observed relationship is likely not the result of chance and does demonstrate that a valid relationship exists within the population sampled. The Gamma value of 0.559, also statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), indicates that a moderate to strong positive

relationship exists between these two variables. Therefore, a significant increase in exposure to beauty-related content will also create a corresponding increase in the impact of beauty ideals on Millennials' and Gen Z's perceptions of beauty (and thus begin to create consistency in how these groups define beauty). Furthermore, the results corroborate earlier work, which has found that continual viewing of aesthetically pleasing images on social platforms leads to modifications in self-perception regarding body size and shape and to adopting societal expectations around concepts of attractiveness and "ideal" physical appearance (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). As a result, certain standards of beauty become normalized through repetitive exposure and are used for appearance-based comparisons. Thus, social media content has a strong effect on shaping contemporary understanding of beauty.

5. Conclusion

The results of the analysis for hypotheses 1 indicated that frequency of use is significantly associated ($\chi^2 = 170.725$, $p = 0.000$, Gamma = 0.483) with the internalization of beauty ideals. The findings support Hypothesis H^1 , indicating that social media use is a major factor in the formation and maintenance of beauty standards for the Millennial and Gen Z population. The results of this study show that social media functions as a socializing agent by providing users with images of idealized beauty, and through repeated exposure, users change their perceptions of beauty and self-esteem accordingly. The analyses of H^2 (frequently interacting with beauty content on social media, $p=0.000$, Gamma=0.446) and H^3 (preferentially using social media platform for beauty content, $\chi^2=150.862$, $p=0.000$, Gamma=0.499) were found supportive of each respective hypothesis. Therefore, the more frequently someone interacts with beauty-related content, the more influence that content will have on their beauty ideals, following a consistent and significant pattern among Millennials and Gen Z. Ultimately, the data support the hypothesis that frequent interaction with beauty-related content has a significant impact on beauty ideals for Millennials and Gen Z. Results from the current study further validate hypothesis H^3 , that preference for specific social media platforms for beauty-related content exerts significant influence on individuals' (Millennials and Gen Z) perceptions of beauty standards. This also illustrates that the diverse types of beauty content associated with different social media platforms, as well as the varying visual cultures associated with those different platforms, combine to affect how users of these platforms interpret and internalize beauty standards. Thus, the options provided by various platforms greatly influence the nature and intensity of individuals' exposure to beauty ideals and, therefore, significantly influence the development of contemporary beauty standards in digital environments. Exposure to idealized images of beauty (hypothesis 4) and beauty content that affects body image (hypothesis 5) were all significantly associated with the internalization of beauty ideals (hypothesis 4: $\chi^2 = 189.194$, $p = 0.000$, Gamma = 0.560; hypothesis 5: $\chi^2 = 177.131$, $p = 0.000$, Gamma = 0.559). Therefore, as exposure to idealised beauty images increases, so too will the positive impact of these exposures on the development of beauty ideals among Millennial and Gen Z consumers; this trend is both strong and consistent across the sample group. The data support Hypothesis H^4 and demonstrate how seeing idealized, beautiful images on social media affects how people in Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z view beauty as an ideal. In addition to supporting Hypothesis H^4 , the results also illustrate how visual cultures have played an important part in forming our opinions regarding beauty, with a direct correlation between the repeated viewing of images of perfect and/or non-representational beauty and how we view beauty as a cultural norm or expected standard of how we perceive beauty. Overall, the data support the hypothesis and suggest that beauty-related content on social media has an important effect on shaping how both Millennials and Gen Z perceive beauty. The data also indicate that beauty-related digital content serves as an extremely influential factor in shaping individuals' beliefs about what constitutes beauty by exposing users to carefully curated examples of idealized (i.e., commercialized) representations of beauty over time.

The in hand research provides considerable empirical evidence against the hypothesis that the social media plays an important role in the process of establishing beauty ideals among the millennials and the gen Z in Punjab Pakistan. The study findings confirm that frequency of social media use, engagement with the beauty related content, exposure to culturally acceptable forms of media, such as filtered images of a perfect type, and the influence of online downloadable tools can all have an impact on how individuals socially construct beauty as well as their own self-perceptions of beauty thru the use of social media, including influencer identification. While self-esteem levels were at a moderately high level for many participants, a substantial percentage reported experiencing social comparison and body dissatisfaction, with indications that there is pressure to seek out beauty-enhancing procedures. The findings also show that the type of material and how users engage with it have a greater impact on their views of attractiveness than merely putting user-generated content on their preferred platform. Furthermore, the channels utilised to obtain social media information from their target audience influence their perceptions of attractiveness. As a consequence, survey participants' recommendations for more regulatory and instructional activities including beauty-related information on social media platforms demonstrate how topical and relevant this policy action is. As digital penetration continues to increase, tackling the negative consequences of warped or false representations of beauty will require both individual and coordinated efforts from regulators, schools, technology companies, health care providers, and the beauty industry. With the implementation of the following evidence-based recommendations, Pakistan can create a digital environment in which youth can find authentic, diverse, and psychologically positive representations of beauty.

6.Recommendations

On the bases of the findings of in hand study, numerous legislative reforms are proposed to address social media's rising effect in establishing unrealistic beauty norms among Millennials and Generation Z. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) should develop and implement policies aimed at promoting responsible digital content and protecting young social media users from harmful beauty-related trends and misleading advertisements. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) should monitor beauty-related advertisements, cosmetic promotions, and media campaigns that reinforce unrealistic beauty standards or promote harmful body image perceptions. In addition, PEMRA should discourage discriminatory and colourist beauty narratives frequently associated with fairness products and appearance-based stereotypes. Media organizations should be encouraged to broadcast educational content related to body positivity, mental health awareness, and self-acceptance among youth. Schools, colleges, and universities should implement media literacy and digital awareness programs to teach students that how the social media affects beauty views, mental health of people, and their self-esteem. Educational institutions should hold lectures, workshops, and counselling sessions on subjects such as body image, social comparison, cyberbullying, influencer culture, and appropriate social media use. Psychologists, counsellors, and mental health practitioners should develop intervention programs focused on body image issues, social comparison behaviours, and social media-related anxiety among Millennials and Generation Z. Social media companies should adopt stronger ethical policies regarding digitally altered beauty content, harmful beauty trends, and misleading influencer marketing. The Social media platforms should increase transparency by labelling edited images, AI-generated beauty filters, and sponsored beauty promotions. Beauty brands and cosmetic companies should adopt socially responsible marketing strategies that promote realistic and inclusive beauty standards rather than unattainable ideals. Brands should avoid excessive use of digital editing, unrealistic beauty filters, and misleading cosmetic claims in advertisements targeting Millennials and Generation Z. Ethical marketing practices should prioritize authenticity, self-confidence, and consumer well-being instead of exploiting insecurities related to physical appearance.

7.References

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