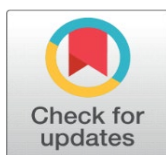# INFLUENCERS, HASHTAGS AND CAMPAIGNS: THE ROLE OF INSTAGRAM IN ADVANCING MALE BODY POSITIVITY

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the role of social media in shaping and advancing the male body positivity movement. The male body positivity movement has recently gained significant traction, challenging traditional masculinity norms and promoting body acceptance among men. Research indicates that men, like women, experience body dissatisfaction, although they often remain silent about it due to societal expectations that frame body image concerns as predominantly a female issue. Social media platforms, especially Instagram, offer men a space to discuss these concerns, share their experiences and build supportive communities. Given that India has the highest number of Instagram users globally, it is important to examine how male body positivity is represented and perceived on Instagram. With a focus on the intersection of digital culture and body image activism, this study examines how online platforms such as Instagram contribute to the dissemination of body-positive messages and the promotion of diverse representations of masculinity in the international and Indian spheres. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the paper analyses user-generated content created by Instagram influencers, body positive movements and hashtags as well as focus group discussions of users from India. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary discourses surrounding masculinity, body image and digital activism. The study concludes that while social media can reinforce harmful body image ideals, it also has the potential to promote body positivity and self-acceptance.

Keywords: Body Positivity, Instagram, Body Image, Social Media

1. INTRODUCTION

The male body positivity movement has emerged as a significant cultural phenomenon in recent years, challenging conventional standards of masculinity and promoting body acceptance among men. Recent studies have shown that males, like their female counterparts experience body dissatisfaction (Daniel & Bridges 2013, Castonguay et al., 2014; Mental Health Org, 2019) but males tend to hesitate to raise their voice regarding the issue as body image concerns have been primarily considered to be a female related issue (Burlew and Shurts, 2013).

Online media provides users a platform to air their views and personal experiences related to male body image, providing spaces for advocacy, representation and community-building. India ranks first in Instagram users with approximately 362 million people on the photo sharing platform as of January 2024

while the U.S had 169 million users (Dixon, 2024). Over the past few decades, academicians have explored the impact of social media on the mental and physical well-being of users. Research based on Indian users is however, very limited. When studying the impact of social media content on body image, research has been focussed mainly on female body ideals and the impact of related online content on female users. Also, there is limited qualitative research available on the subject. The present study therefore analyses user-generated content, online discourse and a focus group discussion of users to explore the dynamics of the movement in the digital realm. It aims to explore the dynamics of the online body positivity movement on Instagram, especially with regard to the Indian content and audience on Instagram. It utilises a systematic approach to collect influencer content that predominantly targets male audiences and covers topics related to self-esteem, body image, fitness and lifestyle, and further aims to understand the broad themes related to the nature and impact of content consumption.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Body image and well-being: An individual' body image is one's perception of their body as well as how other individuals see it (Fobair et al., 2006; Cafri et al., 2006). Body image affects both physical and mental well-being of individuals (Clay et al., 2005).

Strelan and Hargreaves (2005) state that gender differences transfer to how different genders construct body ideals. Males have often placed importance on building muscles and having a larger chest and shoulders (Furnham et al., 2002). Also, previous studies have shown that Western men place an increasing value on unrealistic body ideals as compared to their non-Western counterparts (Phillips et al., 1993; Phillips, 1996; Snaith, 1992). Research on variables that constitute body image as well as on body image perception is predominantly focussed on females.

Impact of social media, especially Instagram: Socio cultural influences such as parents, peers and mass media directly impact body image which further influences individual behaviour (Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Smolak, Murnen, & Thompson, 2005).

It is well established that females are judged based on certain standards of beauty that affected by the content that one sees in both traditional and new media. What is also being recognised is the impact of this content on males and their self-perception. A study on Instagram users showed that individuals are driven by their need to express their personalities and physical attributes online (Lee et al., 2015).

With the younger, impressionable audiences spending an increasing amount of time on social media, its content impacts self-perception as well as self-acceptance. Young males substantially use platforms such as Instagram for information gathering with regard to fitness (Benson, 2018). In addition, media exposure to body ideals and comparing oneself to what one sees in the media leads to an increasing drive in men for muscularity (Leit, Gray and Pope, 2002; Morrison, Morrison and Hopkins, 2003). A quantitative content analysis of 1,000 relevant Instagram posts posted by males was conducted to understand male body depiction as well as user response to the same. The results showed that posts depicting muscularity and leanness received a greater number of likes and comments. Posts focused on building health and undertaking physical activity (Gültzow et al. 2020).

A study by Fox and Rooney (2015) showed a positive correlation between social media usage and self-objectification. The study further stated that men that self-objectify also spend more time on social networking sites. LaForme-Csordas

(2021) confirmed through a study that body commodification on Instagram negatively impacts the wellbeing of individuals by promoting unrealistic body image ideals and pushing products that help to achieve them. This study elaborated that advertising on media like Instagram promotes unrealistic body image and products that help to achieve them. Commodification of health and wellness coupled with influencer marketing of related products only adds to the problem (Influencer Marketing, 2019). Gelsinger (2020) reported that hegemonic beauty ideals were depicted in Instagram posts and females accounted for 90 percent of the observed posts. Also, only 10 percent of the posts were faces, foods, objects or quotes. The rest were body-centred. Posts that were tagged #bodypositive or #bodypositivity did not uphold the initial goals of the body positive movement.

A cross sectional study that explored that consequences of body-objectification on male body esteem focused on three aspects: Instagram intensity use, photo manipulation and selfie feedback investment. It found that appearance control-related dimensions positively influenced body esteem (Boursier and Gioia, 2022). Tiggemann, Anderberg, & Brown (2020) also cautioned against the commodification of body positivity, noting the influence of advertising and commercial interests on representations of bodies online.

A study on self-objectification by males and females showed that low esteem in both genders increased the drive to exercise and change one's appearance (Strelan and Hargreaves, 2005). A content analysis of the Instagram #fitspiration online trend which was designed to motivate individuals to lead a healthier lifestyle showed that the imagery used was restricted to mainly the thin and toned body type which was likely to have negative effects on the viewer's body image (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2018). A study on the same trend deemed it to be inappropriate as results indicated that daily exposure to #fitspiration images was associated with the highest rates of growth of negative mood and appearance comparison (Fioravanti et al., 2021). Another study determined that pressure from the mass media was significantly related to men feeling worse about their own bodies. The results from two metanalyses of 25 studies concluded that pressure from the mass media was related to body satisfaction, body esteem, self-esteem, psychological disorders (e.g., depression), and behavioural outcomes (e.g., excessive exercising) (Barlett, Vowels and Saucier, 2008). Bagautdinova's (2018) study on Instagram selfies also showed that individuals exposed to selfies of known figures often

Smolak et al. (2005) and Cafri et al. (2005) explain that males who are dissatisfied with their bodies often compare themselves to bodies depicted in the mass media. They may then resort to excessive exercising, steroid use and dieting in order to achieve those ideals. Psychological factors such as low self-esteem and depression also play an important role in the process. compare themselves to them often leading to body dissatisfaction.

Pepin and Endresz (2015) confirmed that social media pressurises individuals to lose weight and look more muscular. Kim and Chock (2015) explain that online social grooming behaviours that include profile viewing and commenting on peer's profiles affected one's drive for thinness for both female and male participants. Meier and Gray (2014) suggested that the extent to which users engage in photo activities (i.e., posting and sharing photos of oneself and friends) on Facebook, rather than the total time spent on this site, was significantly linked to body image disturbance. A study by Rounsefell et al. (2020) also established the negative impact of exposure to image related content via social media engagement on food choices. When individuals seek validation on social media, they may also, resort to using filters and change their appearance in photos (Dumas et al., 2017). As compared to

users on Facebook, Instagram users spend considerable time to select best photos on which they receive likes and appreciation leading to satisfaction (Huang & Su, 2018).

While the impact on one's self esteem and body image is very evident from the above mentioned research, it also confirms that social media also drives behavioural change among users. An interesting trend in the recent times is that with subtle changes in the definition of hegemonic masculinity, male online users are now more comfortable expressing personal concerns and feelings online (Marshall et al., 2020). Online promotion of brands and services targeting the male audience are also not propounding traditional masculine traits such as muscularity, leading men to find new perspectives related to self-esteem and body image (Scheibling and Lafrance, 2013.

Positives and negatives of the movement: The body positivity movement has been both appreciated and criticized by scholars. Cohen et al. (2019) laud the body positive imagery that included broad range of body sizes and appearances. Chua and Chang (2016) state that social media can serve as a source of support and validation for individuals struggling with body image issues. Social media content can help users challenge the accepted norms of idealistic beauty and body size (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

The movement however, has been criticised on the grounds that social media users and companies have commoditised it for self-serving and economic gains. Concerns have also been raised about performative allyship and tokenistic gestures of support within online advocacy efforts, emphasizing the need for substantive engagement with systemic issues (Brathwaite and DeAndrea, 2022).

The majority of body positivity literature predominantly addresses female social media users. Even in research that encompasses both genders, the representation of males is typically less than that of females (Kim and dahl, 2015). Numerous researchers have called for increased investigation into user engagement levels and the varying ways in which both genders perceive social media content. Additionally, the credibility of social media platforms is another critical factor that might influence user perception (Dahl et al., 2018).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hegemonic Masculinity Theory: Fundamental to grasping the male body positivity movement is the hegemonic masculinity theory. This framework, expounded by Connell (2005), emphasises the prevailing cultural ideals of masculinity and their sway over gender norms and conduct. In the realm of social media, these norms frequently endorse an idealised and unattainable male physique, reinforcing notions of muscularity and physical dominance (Slater & Tiggemann, 2014).

Social Comparison: Individuals tend to compare themselves to those they think are better than them. Festinger (1954) calls this upward social comparison. People tend to compare themselves with others who share similar characteristics, such as age, race or profession. Social media has emerged as a prominent platform for upward and downward social comparison, with user profiles, influencers, comments, likes and statuses serving as triggers (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015). On social media, individuals compare themselves to both known personalities as well as to family, friends and acquaintances.

Body Objectification Theory: Drawing on feminist scholarship, body objectification theory posits that individuals, irrespective of gender, internalise

societal beauty standards and engage in self-objectification, resulting in adverse body image consequences (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Within the context of the male body positivity movement, social media platforms can both perpetuate and contest body objectification. While idealised portrayals of male bodies on social media might contribute to body dissatisfaction among men, content promoting body positivity can offer a contrasting narrative, encouraging self-acceptance and resilience (Perloff, 2014).

Affordances of Social Media: An analysis of the affordances of social media platforms is crucial for comprehending their impact on the male body positivity movement. Affordances denote the inherent capabilities and limitations of technology that shape user behaviour (Gibson, 1979). Social media platforms provide distinct affordances such as user-generated content, interactivity, and virality, which facilitate the dissemination of body-positive messages and the cultivation of supportive communities (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Nonetheless, these same affordances can also amplify detrimental beauty standards and foster social comparison (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015).

Cultural Studies Perspectives: Cultural studies scholars stress the significance of contextualizing media texts within their socio-cultural milieu, taking into account power dynamics, representation, and resistance (Hall, 1980). In the male body positivity movement, social media serves as a platform for negotiation, where individuals challenge dominant discourses of masculinity and advocate for more inclusive representations of male bodies (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Cultivation theory: The cultivation theory posits that prolonged exposure to media influences one's perception of real life and society. It suggests that media can shape beliefs and values about the real world.

The aforementioned theoretical frameworks help to critically assess the impact of social media on the male body positivity movement, exploring how hegemonic masculinity norms, body objectification, social media affordances, and broader cultural discourses intersect to shape depictions of male bodies and influence body image outcomes. This theoretical framework offers a comprehensive perspective for examining the intricacies of the male body positivity movement in the digital era.

4. INFLUENCER CONTENT AND CAMPAIGNS

Various influencers have been contributing to the body positivity movement internationally. In India, the movement has been steadily gaining ground. Followers consider influencers to be as credible as their own friends. Users of social media increasingly seek them out for advice and solutions (Swant, 2016) and one of the main reasons why influencer marketing or advocacy works is because of direct communication (Talavera, 2015). The influencer community can actually drive engagement with followers as low as 500 (Social media, 2020). The mega influencers however, have millions of followers thus, having a greater reach which can be exploited to either promote brands or to support causes.

However, another perspective realises that influencer marketing of fitness related products is only a fictionalised reality that mainly focuses on how they physically present themselves online (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). Featuring personal content helps influencers achieve credibility. However, it is better for them to upfront about sponsored brand promotions rather than manipulation (Silva et al., 2020; Naderer et al., 2021)

The community boasts of several influencers that are promoting the concept of body positivity among male users. Zach Miko's (@zachmiko) work has been

recognised by publications such as the New York Times and Vogue. Miko has recognised that body image issues can affect mental health (Green, 2016). The plus-sized model, writer and entrepreneur has made a sizeable contribution to the male body positivity movement. Ryan Sheldon is a blogger who has openly talked about his binge eating disorder. He states that, "…body image is three things—the way we feel physically in our bodies, the way we view our bodies when looking in the mirror, and the way we think others perceive our bodies." Individuals like Marquis Neal (@marquimode) also emphasise the importance of inclusivity as well as body acceptance. Steve Blain (@bopo.boy)who earlier used Instagram as an inspiration for weight loss, is now using the same platform to promote the concept of body acceptance (Morris, 2019). Dr. Joshua Wolrich (@joshuawolrich), a medical professional posts content to fight weight related stigma and to debunk misconceptions related to health. A man who uses humour and sensitivity to drive across ideas related to physical and mental health, James Cappola (@james_cappola) calls out other content creators who indulge in body shaming.

In India, Kais Sundrani (@kaissundrani) has openly talked about low self-esteem in the initial stages of his life. He creates content centered around fitness, wellness, and body positivity. He shares tips on maintaining a healthy lifestyle while advocating for self-love and acceptance. Sundrani's posts often highlight the importance of a positive mindset and the impact of mental health on physical well-being. Pushpak Sen (@thebongmunda), whose saree clad photographs in Milan has voiced concerns about toxic masculinity (News 18, 2021). He shares personal stories and experiences to inspire others to accept and love their bodies. Sen often highlights the importance of mental health and self-care, encouraging his followers to prioritize their happiness and well-being.

Body positivity includes freedom to express oneself through their bodies. There are several Indian male influencers who are redefining beauty ideals and norms related to makeup and skincare, a domain that has been dominated by females. Babil Khan (@babil.i.ik, son of late actor Irrfan Khan, on Instagram has advocated for detaching the feminine tag from make-up and skin care. In his Instagram posts, he talks about why who use makeup are shamed and termed 'girls' when they use makeup to look better. He emphasizes the importance of embracing one's true self and finding strength in vulnerability. Ankush Bahugana (@ankushbahugana) who has more than a million followers on Instagram as of May 2024, has expressed a keen interest in makeup. His other account @wingitwithankush shows him experimenting with makeup on himself as well as others. Fashion influencer Siddharth Batra (@siddharth93batra) has been noticed for his clothing and makeup related choices which are not gender specific. In his Instagram content, he promotes self-expression and self-acceptance, often using humor and creativity to address body positivity.

Ranveer Allahbadia (@beerbiceps) who was an overweight child states that social media helps to normalise body related insecurities. He also states that conventional norms related to beauty and fitness are changing due to the creation of body positive content (Chaturvedi, 2022). Additionally, he has encouraged normalizing conversations about relevant but often overlooked topics related to men's physical health, aiming to foster a more inclusive and understanding social media environment.   Sangram Chougule (@sangram_chougule_official), a professional bodybuilder and fitness icon shares motivational content related to diet and exercise on his social media platforms. He encourages his followers to pursue fitness goals while maintaining a healthy and realistic perspective on body image. Jitendra Chouksey, founder of The Fittr Podcast covers topics related to male health, fitness and nutrition. He advocates for sustainable fitness practices,

encouraging his followers to prioritize overall well-being over mere aesthetics. His content frequently features motivational posts and showcases real-life transformations, advocating for a balanced approach to health and fitness. There are several prominent female body positive content creators from India, such as Sakshi Sindwani, Diksha Singhi, Neelakshi, Anjana Bapat and Aashna Bhagwani that have both male and female followers.

There are several organisations and initiatives in India that are actively raising awareness about male body image issues and promoting body positivity. The Red Door, The Better India, Pink Legal, MINDS Foundation are working towards creating safe spaces for all genders. Workshops, support groups and events are aimed at breaking down stereotypes and promoting a healthier understanding of masculinity and body image.

Several social media campaigns have recently focused on male body image in order to promote awareness, foster community and challenge societal norms. Instagram community @EffYourBeautyStandards allows for individuals of all genders to express confidence in their bodies.

Several hashtag campaigns aim to do away with social stigma and promote inclusivity. The #BodyPositiveMen hashtag campaign motivated men to share their experiences related to body image issues and overcoming them on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. The campaign encouraged users to accept and celebrate various body types. People of all genders were encouraged to share messages related to body positivity with the #LoveYourBody campaign. A more assertive campaign #MyBodyMyRules empowered individuals to ignore body related stereotypes and to express themselves through their positive body image related content. The #MenWhoYoga campaign promoted holistic development by using yoga to improving mental and physical well-being among men. Participants shared photos and videos of themselves practicing yoga, highlighting its benefits for body positivity, flexibility, and stress relief. Another campaign that aimed to challenge challenges societal expectations regarding male grooming was #NormalizeBodyHair. It encouraged men to embrace their natural body hair. Participants share photos and stories advocating for body positivity and self-acceptance, regardless of grooming preferences.

Instagram influencers have contributed substantially to begin as well as maintain the momentum of the body positivity movement by utilising their platforms to promote self-love, acceptance. They are able to drive engagement and bring together their community to initiate healthy dialogue on male body positivity. By challenging traditional body ideals, and posting content that users can related to, they promote inclusivity and positive comprehension of an issue that was perhaps less talked about in both physical and digital spheres.

5. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A qualitative study was conducted with five focus groups. Each group contained 20 male participants in the age group of 15-45.The discussions aimed to analyse various opinions and narratives on body image ideals among males, their effects and coping strategies, and the role of Instagram influencers in promoting body positivity. Discussions were facilitated using semi-structured interview guides that explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards Instagram influencer content and body positivity content. The discussions were recorded and transcribed for detailed qualitative analysis.

Participants were asked the following questions:

1. Are you satisfied with how you look?
2. How do you select and edit photographs for Instagram?
3. How do you think Instagram campaigns and influencer content impacts male body image?
4. What coping strategies do you adopt to maintain or improve your body image?

Thematic analysis techniques were employed to identify key themes, patterns and variations in participants' perspectives and experiences.

The perception of body image and the feeling of inadequacy: Most participants reported not feeling satisfied with their physical appearance. With those with self-reported negative body image issues, participants mentioned factors such as weight, height, complexion, facial features, muscle mass and body hair among others that contributed to their perception. A few of these participants were also willing to make changes to their bodies such as getting a hair transplant and cosmetic surgery. A 37-year-old lawyer stated, "I often compare my physical attributed to pictures I see on my feed, and it often leaves me feeling low." For those with a positive perception, they mentioned factors such as big muscles, good hair and tall height. Comparison with idealized images on Instagram seemed to be common.

Posting photographs, tagging and filters on Instagram: Several participants confessed to taking multiple photographs to capture their best angles and then chose from them before posting them online. Many were not comfortable being tagged in photos they had not approved of and admitted to untagging themselves. There was a consensus in all groups that it is very common to think about the how posted photos will be received by their followers. To ensure positive reception, many users stated that they crop and filter their photographs to enhance their physical appearance. A teenager stated, "I do not grow a wholesome beard on my face and hence, I don't feel confident posting close-ups on Instagram. I also use filters."

Role of Instagram influencers: Names of various influencers such as Zach Miko, Ranveer Allahbadia and Siddharth Batra came up during the discussions. It was noted that health and fitness influencers posted content that not only aimed at building confidence much before one builds the perfect body. Further, their content encouraged avoiding extreme and unhealthy measures related to health and body building.

Mixed responses were received from all groups regarding the effect of this content. While some participants felt encouraged to kick-start their health regimen, others felt pressured to fit in. An under-grad student revealed, "I have tried to lose weight several times in my life. Earlier, I used to feel pressured by family and friends, but now the pressure to imitate the influencers I follow can be really overwhelming." Several participants stated that different types of content resonate differently with users. While workout videos and diet tips can be motivating, they also set high expectations that can lead to feelings of inadequacy. Lifestyle posts, which often depict a curated and idealized version of life, can be particularly impactful, evoking both inspiration and insecurity.

Body positivity and diversity: There were positive perspectives too. Several participants indicated that following body-positive accounts enhances their self-esteem. They found that seeing a variety of body types and more realistic portrayals of beauty had a positive impact on their self-image. A 39-year-old Project Manager

said, "I was very awkward as a teenager as I was tall and lanky. Seeing perfect male figures on social media made me uncomfortable with myself. However, there is enough positive content on social media at present to help individuals feel good about themselves and to not calculate their worth based on how their body looks. I'm confident today. I'm grateful that my body helps me achieve so much and is disease free."

Awareness and coping strategies: The groups discussed the potential impact of various online media campaigns that help to generate awareness about male body image issues.

Participants talked about various coping strategies they adopt to develop, maintain or improve their body image. A number of participants discussed that they had felt pressured to make changes in their appearance after looking at images of prominent male personalities on social media. Appearance fixing, according to them isn't an easy route, however it helped them build a more acceptable body image. A minority agreed that online representation of male bodies had pushed them to make long term life style changes such as joining a gym and making dietary concessions.

Few participants admitted to avoiding social media content that perpetuated unrealistic body image standards.

Many participants laid stress on holistic well-being of men rather than the superficial focus on one's appearance. They also highlighted the importance of cultivating a positive mind set and focusing on their strengths so that they feel good about themselves. Discussions concluded that those with a positive perception were also individuals that had worked on their mental and spiritual growth. One participant said, "Building self-love has included acceptance of how my body looks apart from my mental faculties and financial status. I have a renewed sense of energy now that I am happy with everything about myself. It is reflecting in all areas of my life."

When asked about asking for help, participants stated that it is important to ask for help from friends, family or mental health professionals when facing body image concerns. Few participants talked about the need of critically evaluating media representations of male bodies as perpetuated by mainstream media. They emphasized the need to consume diverse and inclusive content that celebrates all body types.

Suggested solutions: Participants in all groups advocated the judicious use of social media platforms. While talking about the dangers of addictive scrolling one participant mentioned, "It is very easy to disappear in the online world created by smart influencers and marketers to promote their brands and agendas. It is important that we consciously look away from our screens enough to realise that our lives should not be wholly dictated by the content we consume online. We seem to be absorbing more content that lowers our self-esteem than the positive content helps us love our mind and bodies."

Participants expressed a desire for more realistic and diverse portrayals of male body image from influencers, as well as greater transparency about the use of editing tools. Awareness of the curated nature of influencers' posts provides some participants with a critical lens through which to view content. This understanding helps mitigate the negative impact on self-esteem by reminding users that what they see is not entirely real. However, the knowledge that images are often edited does not completely eliminate feelings of inadequacy.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study concludes that social media platforms such as Instagram do set up unattainable body image ideals for men. These ideals impact the self-esteem of males. Social media influencers are responsible for maintaining old body image ideals or creating new ones. The focus group discussions highlighted the intricate connection between Instagram influencers and male body image. Influencers can inspire and motivate, yet they often establish high standards that lead to feelings of inadequacy. Although body-positive content and an understanding of curated images provide some comfort, participants still struggle to maintain a healthy self-image. There is a strong call for more varied and genuine representations of male bodies on Instagram, which could enhance self-acceptance and lessen the adverse effects of social media.

Addressing male body image issues requires a multifaceted approach involving education, media literacy and promoting body positivity. Encouraging realistic representations of men in media and challenging traditional stereotypes of masculinity can help reduce the pressure to conform to unrealistic ideals. Additionally, promoting healthy lifestyles based on balanced nutrition and regular exercise, rather than solely focusing on appearance, can foster positive body image among men.

Social media exerts considerable influence on shaping the male body positivity movement, offering avenues for representation, advocacy and fostering communities. Nevertheless, there are hurdles to address, including issues like commodification, performative allyship, and concerns regarding mental well-being, which demand deeper scrutiny. Looking ahead, it becomes imperative for researchers and practitioners alike to critically analyse and address these challenges, striving to cultivate a social media landscape that is more inclusive and empowering for male body positivity.

In a society that depends on heavy use of social media to gain knowledge, perspective and opportunity, depiction of visual imagery related to the human body often becomes aspiration. Awareness is a powerful tool that helps users gain control over the strength of the influence social media extends over their lives.

Further quantitative research can be conducted on Indian users of Instagram and other social media to examine exposure to influencer content over time influences changes in male body image perceptions and self-esteem. Researchers can also compare similarities and differences in the types of content, audience engagement, and effects on male self-esteem across different cultural settings. It would also be interesting to approach the research from the perspective of males of different socio economic status and sexual orientation. The research can be supplemented by exploration of perspectives and experiences of male influencers themselves regarding the portrayal of body image on social media with respect to the Indian cultural framework.

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