

NEW MEDIA IMPACT ON CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF ASPIRATIONAL BEAUTY ADVERTISEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The high rate of development of new media platforms has changed the situation in the world of aspirational beauty advertising, and it greatly affects the perceptions of consumers regarding the beauty ideal. This paper discusses the development of digital spaces (specifically social media apps like Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube) and how they redefine the processes through which people perceive, internalize, or react to depictions of aspiration beauty. The new media, in contrast to the old, encourages participation in the form of user-created content, influencer marketing, and algorithms and recommendations that push certain trends of beauty to the forefront. The study explores how these dynamics can cause changes in the consumer perceptions of authenticity, realism, and attainability in beauty ideals. The study is based on the main theoretical themes, such as the social comparison theory, cultivation theory, and self-discrepancy theory, which examine the psychological consequences of being inundated with digitally mediated ideals of beauty. A mixed-method survey, interviews, and content analysis methodology are used to ensure that both quantitative trends as well as qualitative information are obtained. The results show that new media enhances the self-comparison behavior, dissolves the line between the aspirational and attainable beauty, and creates a new definition of authenticity with a curated brand identity.

Keywords: Aspirational Beauty, New Media, Social Media Influence, Consumer Perception, Self-Comparison, Digital Advertising

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF ASPIRATIONAL BEAUTY ADVERTISING

The aspirational beauty advertising has been a pillar in the worldwide beauty and fashion market that delivers fantasy images that promise change, desirability, and social acceptance. Historically, these commercials have created an image of perfection, a perfect skin, symmetrical shape of features, and thin bodies, and promoting the consumers to

perceive such characteristics as something they can achieve by buying particular products. This kind of advertisement is based on emotion, accessing the self-image of the consumer, his or her wish to become a better person, gain social acceptance. Previously, the main channel through which these messages were spread was through television, magazines, and billboards, which defined cultures of beauty and success [Ao et al. \(2023\)](#). Throughout the decades, the cyclical depiction of idealized aesthetics has led to a few standards of beauty that tend to marginalize diversity in race, body type and identity. The psychological process of aspirational advertising is based on the desire the consumers are not only promoted to follow these ideals, but also to identify them with happiness and confidence. Aspirational beauty advertisements have therefore been accused of creating unrealistic images and dissatisfaction with bodies [Lu \(2024\)](#).

1.2. RISE OF NEW MEDIA PLATFORMS

The emergence of the new media platforms has transformed the process of production, distribution, and consumption of the beauty messages. Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube and Snapchat are some of the content-producing platforms that democratize the production of content, allowing individuals, and not brands, to at least be involved in defining beauty discourses. An example of how new media influences the perception of aspirational beauty advertisement by the consumer is presented in [Figure 1](#). This digital transformation is the end of one way communication in the traditional advertising to interactivity and participation ecosystem.

Figure 1

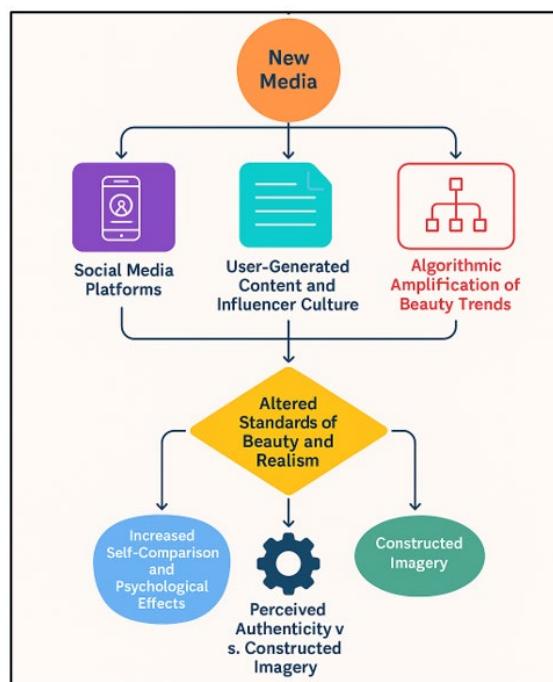


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Impact of New Media on Consumer Perception of Aspirational Beauty Advertising

Consumers are now interacting with brands, influencers and peers directly, making the distinction between advertising and ordinary social interaction less clear. Availability of smartphones, editing tools and algorithmic visibility have made trends go viral fast and enabled beauty ideals to progress at a fast viral rate. Besides, social media influencers have become one of the most important opinion leaders, as they are typically considered to be more relatable and true-to-life than conventional celebrities [Paintsil and Kim \(2021\)](#). They produce and maintain personal brands that are a blend between lifestyle, personality and product endorsements creating a sense of intimacy which creates trust and aspirational identification.

1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

Although the process of delivering beauty into the new media seems to have democratized beauty, emerging studies indicate that digital media can amplify instead of reducing the demands of aspirational beauty. The deep-seated research

issue is the comprehension of how the new media with its participatory and algorithmic qualities changes consumer attitude to ideal beauty and self-image [Bowden and Mirzaei \(2021\)](#). Whereas, traditional advertising has enforced beauty standards on the basis of well-considered visuals, the new media enhances these norms by means of peer comparison, influencer marketing, and algorithmic personalization that constantly subject users to the visuals of ideals of bodies and lives. This exposure has a psychological effect, one that is seen in the self-comparisons, body dissatisfaction and the desire to strive towards digitally created perfection, a phenomenon that requires critical investigation. The study has a strong value as it fills the gap existing between the traditional media theories and the modern digital realities exploring how the perception of beauty changes in the environment where the authenticity and aspiration are heavily interconnected [Oc et al. \(2023\)](#). Moreover, it provides meaningful information about how various groups of people perceive and internalize digital signs of beauty, which shows generational variations in media literacy and resistance to unrealistic ideals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. TRADITIONAL VS. NEW MEDIA ADVERTISING

Traditional advertising was based on traditional top-down models of controlled communication where the brand created the consumer perception and used channels of mass media including television, print magazines, and billboards. Such platforms were focused on smooth images, celebrity promotion, and convincing copy writing to create desire and aspiration. Consumers were passive receivers of messages that aimed to create idealized norms of beauty and usually focused on exclusiveness, luxury, and perfection [Dunayev et al. \(2022\)](#). This has however changed with the emergence of new media whereby there is more participatory and interactive communication. Instagram, Tik Tok and YouTube provide real-time interaction, two way communication and co-creation of content among brands and consumers. In contrast to old-fashioned advertisements, the new media is strongly dependent on the concept of personalization, algorithm-driven targeting, and peer-to-peer pressure. The influencers and micro-creators have become intermediaries who have distorted the line that exists between advertising and authenticity [Tafesse and Wood \(2021\)](#). Although such a development makes it more relatable and trustful, it also generates a cycle of feedback in which beauty ideals are reinforced through community validation, likes, and shares at any choice. Besides, the new media advertisements are dynamic and change according to the trends, hashtags, and viral aesthetics. Although content creation has become more democratic, due to the hyper-visual and competitive character of online spaces, alternative and heterogeneous ideas of beauty tend to spread [Khurana \(2023\)](#).

2.2. THE CONCEPT OF ASPIRATIONAL BEAUTY

Aspirational beauty is a concept which is based on the depiction of idealized beauty which suggests an emotional, social, or material benefit. Aspirational beauty advertising, which is a part of consumer psychology, is built on the fact that humans connect physical attractiveness with success, confidence, and desirability. It is founded on the assumption that beauty is both accessible and aspirational, something to struggle towards using products, routines, or lifestyles [von and Kaulartz \(2021\)](#). In the past, such an ideal was created with few representations of race, gender and body type, which supported exclusivity and conformity. The scholars have observed that aspirational beauty discourses depend on the mechanics of admiration and inadequacy: the consumer admires the introduced standards and at the same time believes that he or she lacks them, which stimulates buying conduct. Nowadays, this idea is related not only to physical qualities but to lifestyle, personality, and social presence [Boegershausen \(2022\)](#). Within social media, the concept of beauty is connected to performativity: users are selective of the images they post, which consists not just of their physical appearance, but also their perceived authenticity and social worth. Influencers are the new aspirational character who can bring a personal and approachable luxury.

2.3. THEORIES OF MEDIA INFLUENCE (SOCIAL COMPARISON, CULTIVATION, SELF-DISCREPANCY)

Consumer perception as a result of the beauty advertising practice can be well explained based on the three interdependent theoretical perspectives: social comparison theory, cultivation theory and self-discrepancy theory. The social comparison theory is the proposed theory by Leon Festinger, according to which people analyze themselves by

comparing their features, skills, and looks with others. Within the framework of social media, such comparisons are perpetually carried out, where idealized images of beauty are revealed to the users, which makes them judge themselves and perceive themselves as incompetent [Almonajed and Kečo \(2021\)](#). It is proposed by culturization theory developed by George Gerbner which states that the perceptions of social reality are formed due to the long-term exposure to the content which is mediated. Extended to beauty media, it means that being subjected to perfect and filtered images over the long term builds up a false perception of normalcy or desirability and solidifies unrealistic beauty ideals. Self-discrepancy theory is a theory that was put forward by E. Tory Higgins which examines the discrepancy between actual, ideal and ought self [Rane et al. \(2024\)](#). Table 1 presents the previous research findings associating the new media with aspirational beauty advertising.

Table 1

Table 1 Summary of Related Work on New Media and Aspirational Beauty Advertising			
Research Focus	Methodology	Data Source	Theoretical Framework
Social media influence on body image	Quantitative survey	1,087 adolescent girls	Social Comparison Theory
Media and self-perception	Literature review	Prior empirical studies	Self-Discrepancy Theory
Gendered digital labor and self-presentation Saroha et al. (2024)	Qualitative interviews	20 female influencers	Feminist Media Theory
Beauty comparison and self-esteem	Experimental design	160 participants	Social Comparison Theory
Instagram aesthetics and self-promotion Pandya and Padma (2024)	Ethnographic study	Influencer profiles	Cultivation Theory
Emotional response to influencers	Quantitative survey	250 female users	Self-Discrepancy Theory
Filtered vs. unfiltered image impact Szymańska et al. (2023)	Experimental	150 adolescents	Media Realism Theory
Advertising persuasion on Instagram	Mixed methods	300 users + interviews	Persuasion Theory
Digital beauty and body modification	Qualitative interviews	25 young adults	Self-Discrepancy Theory
Media education and self-image Horovitz and Argyrides (2023)	Educational intervention	120 students	Cultivation and Education Theory
Influence of parasocial interaction	Longitudinal survey	400 adolescents	Social Learning Theory
Impact of hashtags on beauty trend spread	Content analysis	10,000 posts	Algorithmic Bias Framework
Fitness ideals and digital self-comparison	Experimental	200 female participants	Cultivation Theory
Authenticity and commercial feminism	Theoretical analysis	Scholarly sources	Postfeminist Media Theory

3. THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA IN SHAPING BEAUTY IDEALS

3.1. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS (INSTAGRAM, TIKTOK, YOUTUBE)

The social media platforms, including Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube have become the dominant influences on the formation of the modern beauty concept. The fusion of visual narration, entertainment, and social interaction creates a strong ecosystem in which the standards of beauty are constantly being built, recreated, and spread through these platforms. Tik Tok, in its turn, is built upon the principle of short-form, algorithm-driven content, which promotes viral beauty challenges, makeup transformations, and filter-enhanced trends, thus making the experimentation with beauty more accessible but momentary. YouTube is an educational and promotional space, whose beauty tutorials, product reviews, and vlogs combine a commercial and perceived authenticity. Altogether, these platforms allow making participation democratic and enable individuals to take a part in the beauty discourse; they also contribute to the enhancement of the competitive self-presentation and the seeking of validation in the form of likes, comments, and followers.

3.2. USER-GENERATED CONTENT AND INFLUENCER CULTURE

The digital age has changed how beauty ideals are produced and circulated through user-generated content (UGC) and the culture of influencers. In contrast to conventional advertising, where the creative problem is moved to the center

of corporate organization, the new media allows people to create, distribute and even market their own beauty-related work.

Figure 2

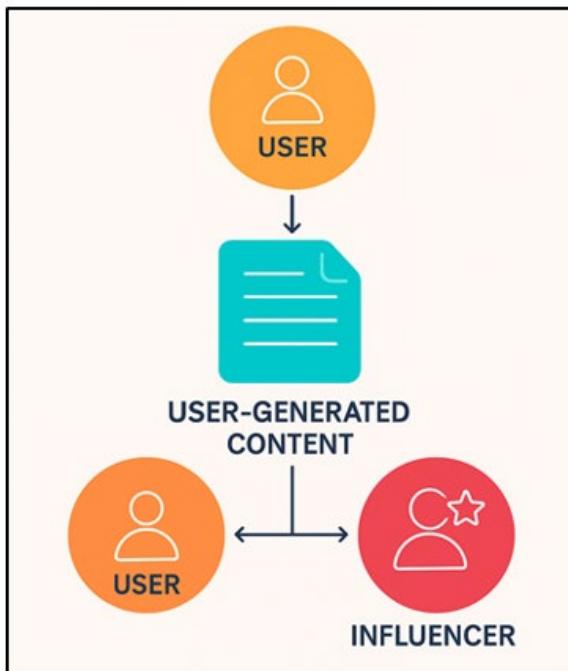


Figure 2 Framework of User-Generated Content and Influencer Culture in New Media Advertising

The role of influencers, including world-renowned icons, and micro-creators in influencing consumer attitudes is critical because of their authentic, relatable, and aspirational imagery. Figure 2 presents interdependencies between UGC and influencer culture and new media advertisement. They form personal brands that combine lifestyle, expertise, and self-presentation, allowing the establishment of emotional contact that is not easily obtained by traditional advertisements. This perceived closeness triggers an increased level of involvement and reliance leading to the followers copying beauty routines, products and style of aesthetics. The feeling of the community involvement in the beauty conversation is supported by user-created content, such as reviews, tutorials, and videos of transformations. Nevertheless, even though it is a democratic potential, influencer culture tends to promote the same attractiveness and consumerism hierarchies as the traditional media. The sponsorships and botulized rewards encourage the adherence to the conventional beauty standards, making the world less diverse and facilitating the homogenization of aesthetics.

3.3. ALGORITHMIC AMPLIFICATION OF BEAUTY TRENDS

Algorithms are the architects of beauty culture in the new media that remain invisible, and define what content becomes visible, viral, and influential. The recommendation systems of platforms like Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube prioritize content that creates engagement reaction in the form of posts, videos, or pictures that generate likes, shares, and comments. This design naturally gravitates toward the aesthetically appealing and idealistic issues of beauty, thus accentuating certain aesthetics and silencing alternative or non-conventional issues. As an example, the current trends of beauty with symmetrical faces, slim body or Eurocentric appearance are typically featured in disproportionate representations and they influence the general ideas of beauty. The reinforcement of the popular aesthetics through the algorithm creates a feedback cycle in which those who follow it imitate the trending looks to receive visibility, thus further reinforcing the dominance of ideals. Also, with filters and AR technology built into these applications, they eliminate the line between natural and digitally enhanced looks, which normalize unrealistic ideals. Algorithms are also supposed to be neutral, but since they rely on engagement rates, they incorporate social biases, which perpetuate exclusionary beauty hierarchies.

4. IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON CONSUMER PERCEPTION

4.1. ALTERED STANDARDS OF BEAUTY AND REALISM

The advent of new media has completely transformed the view of beauty and realism to the extent that it has changed the manner in which people perceive and seek attractiveness. In comparison to the traditional media which showed only fixed, professionally edited ideals, the new media platforms advertise dynamic and participatory form of beauty expression. But this development has not always increased inclusiveness; instead, it has made the process of attempting to match the algorithmically exaggerated standards more pressurized. The common access to digital editing software, filters, and augmentation filters is erasing the boundary between natural looks and the ones that are technologically created, creating a culture of the idea that perfection is something that is not hard and can be achieved. Thus, the definition of the real beauty is more and more obscure. These hyper-realistic images are absorbed by the users creating distorted body image perceptions and unrealistic expectations. The constant access to idealized content on social networks supports the idea that beauty is something that has to be maintained at all times, not something that is shown periodically. Moreover, the connectivity of the world implies that popularised aesthetics, whether the Instagram face or the TikTok beauty, can spread rapidly, with no concerns over cultural differences, and thus fostering homogeneity instead of diversity. Since users measure themselves against these digital ideals, authenticity turns to secondary aesthetic optimization.

4.2. INCREASED SELF-COMPARISON AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

The new media amplifies self-comparison as it exposes people in a permanent condition of exposure to idealized images and social validation measurements. Social media, such as Instagram and Tik Tok, are used as virtual reflections through which users compare themselves to others and influencers with regard to appearance, level of popularity, and lifestyle. This atmosphere encourages upward social comparison, the comparison of oneself to those who are perceived to be more attractive or successful which can bring about feelings of inadequacy, envy and low self esteem. Research has shown that the occurrence and intensity of such comparisons is associated with anxiety, body dissatisfaction, or depressive symptoms, especially in the case of adolescents and young adults.

Figure 3

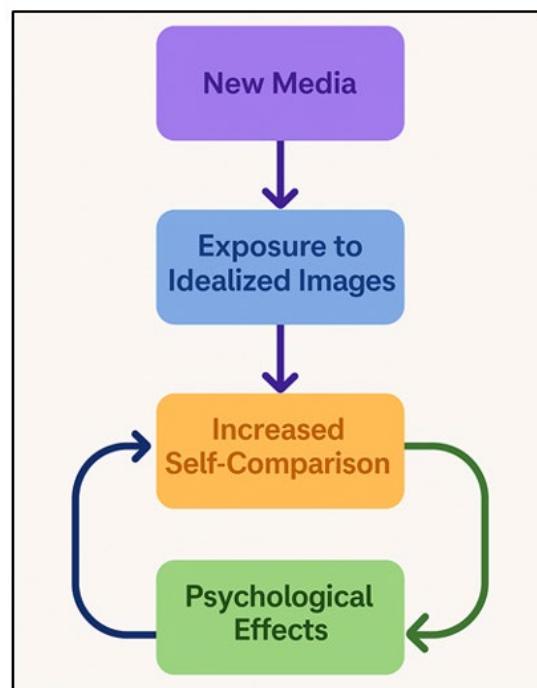


Figure 3 Flowchart Depicting Increased Self-Comparison and Psychological Effects in New Media Environments

The mental strain is further compounded by the nature of algorithmic feedback loops that keep on showing the user content that is similar to the history of their engagement, thus, reinforcing their exposure to unattainable ideals of beauty. [Figure 3](#) demonstrates the fact that new media causes self-comparison that brings about psychological consequences. Moreover, online popularity in the form of likes, comments, and the number of followers makes beauty a measurable self-esteem. The users start to identify validation with visibility and they equate online recognition with personal value.

4.3. PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY VS. CONSTRUCTED IMAGERY

The conflict between imagined authenticity and created images are the key to the interpretation of how the new media influences the perception of beauty by consumers. The concept of authenticity has turned into a strong cultural currency of the online environment, where users and influencers are trying to sound and seem as real, relatable, and authentic. This authenticity, however, is usually developed in a tactical way and the lines between earnestness and acting are frequently indistinct. Others, such as influencers, post behind-the-scenes content or no-filter posts, which convey a sense of vulnerability, although they still preserve the aesthetic integrity that will be consistent with brand collaboration and the expectations of the audience. Such performative authenticity creates emotional attachment and trust yet it is constructed as such. In the meantime consumers waver between a sense of admiration and scepticism as they know that even the images of nature can be subject to editing or artificially spontaneous pictures. It is a paradox that affects the way in which people compare themselves and others, another dimension of aspiration, authenticity turns into an aesthetic. In addition, the necessity to keep up with the authenticity on the internet leads to self-consciousness and sense of fragmentation. The users construct digital selves, which are an idealized but plausible imaginations of their real selves.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. RESEARCH DESIGN (QUALITATIVE, QUANTITATIVE, OR MIXED METHODS)

The research design adopted in this study is a mixed-methods research design, which will be used to investigate the effects of the new media on consumer perception of aspirational beauty adverts in a comprehensive manner. Combining quantitative and qualitative methodology permits the greater comprehension of the phenomena in the perspectives of statistics, behavior, and interpretation. The quantitative part entails the structured questionnaires that reflect objective data concerning the media consumption patterns of the participants, the frequency of exposure to the beauty content, and the attitudes towards self-image and beauty ideals. The data can be statistically analyzed to demonstrate correlation between exposure levels and changes in the perceptions. In addition to this, the qualitative element will be based on semi-structured interviews and thematic content analysis to investigate personal experiences and feelings of the participants regarding digital representations of beauty. These approaches taken together guarantee the methodological triangulation, which improves the reliability and validity of insights gained in one way or another.

5.2. SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANT CRITERIA

In the study, purposive sampling is used to capture a wide range of demographics, which are active users of beauty-related content on the large new media platforms of Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube. The participants will be selected according to their age, gender, the frequency of digital engagement to capture the differences in perception related to the generation and behavior. The sample population is aged between 18 and 40-year-olds which is both a digital native and an older millennial generation with a different experience of new media. Gender diversity comes first to address the issue of how beauty standards overlap with identity and self-representation among different groups of people. Moreover, the respondents must be subjected to frequent exposure to beauty content, as a passive viewer, an active producer, or a consumer of influencer marketing is necessary to make the respondent relevant and respond with certain knowledge. The quantitative survey uses a sample size of about 200 respondents which is enough to be statistically valid whereas the qualitative phase involves 20 to 25 people to be interviewed in depth so as to have a thematic saturation. Web-based forums, university discussion groups, and social media networks are used to recruit participants in order to provide optimal access and diversity. The ethical aspects such as informed consent and confidentiality are strictly adhered to. Anonymity is maintained to persuade the honest thought over sensitive matters like self comparison, body image and perception toward authenticity.

5.3. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS (SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, CONTENT ANALYSIS)

The three supplementary instruments (surveys, interviews, and content analysis) have been used in data collection to realize a multidimensional perspective of the research problem. The survey tool will be structured and will contain closed-ended questions that will assess the frequency of exposure of the participants, the attitude they have towards beauty content and their psychological reactions like self esteem and the tendencies to compare. To measure the perceptions of authenticity, idealization, and self-image correspondence with digital content, Likert-scale items are used. The interview aspect involves the use of semi-structured questions that aim at bringing out more emotional and cognitive reactions of the participants when engaging with posts and content by influencers that affect beauty. The interviews are carried out online and transcribed in verbatim to be analyzed. The content analysis uses a selected set of advertisements, posts of influencers, and user-generated content on platforms like Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube. Through triangulation of these data sources, the study is able to capture subjective and objective aspects of media impact - the connection between the perceptions of the users and the real content trends.

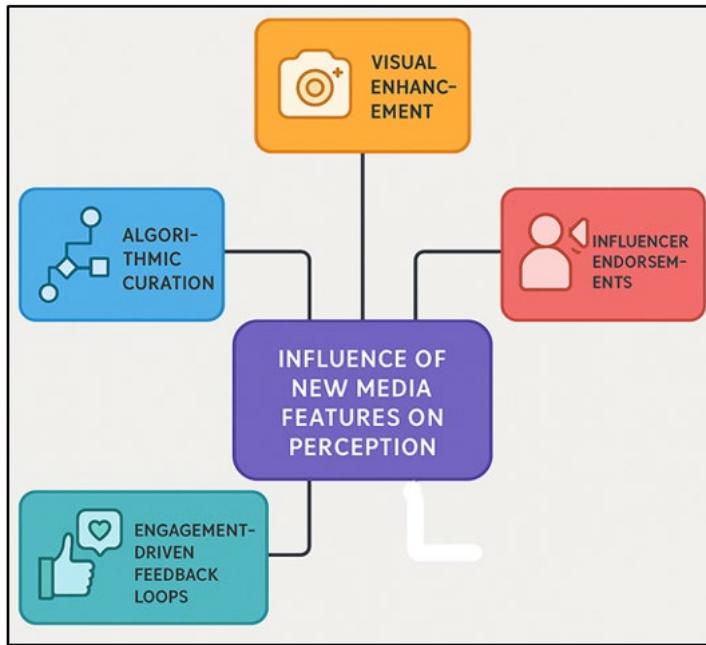
6. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.1. THEMES EMERGING FROM PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

A thematic analysis of the responses of the participants demonstrated that a number of themes are repeated, and these repeated themes depict the way in which new media influences the perception of aspirational beauty. The initial theme was an idealization and comparison whereby the participants were conscious of digitally enhanced imagery but acknowledged that they were internalizing such images as desirable ideals. This is an indication of a long standing conflict between media literacy and emotional vulnerability. The second overarching theme, that of authenticity paradox, sums up the indecision of the participants in relation to the influence-generated content, though a significant part of the content was appreciated due to perceived relatability and authenticity, the participants were also aware of the strategic nature of it and its commercial nature. The third theme is the one named algorithmic visibility and validation, as it covers the impact that metrics like likes and shares have on self-perception and social value. The respondents indicated to have changed their behaviors in relation to online practices, such as image selection, filters, or imitating influencers, to match current trends that generate visibility. Also, the cross-cutting theme was the presence of such phenomenon as emotional ambivalence, when admiration was accompanied by criticism of self, especially in the area of body image and satisfaction with appearance.

6.2. INFLUENCE OF NEW MEDIA FEATURES ON PERCEPTION

Based on the case study, the participants stated that the key components of the perception of beauty are new media features, namely filters, algorithms, influencer marketing, and engagement metrics. The visual enhancement filters or augmented reality filters, in particular, were often mentioned as the source of distorted self-image because users tended to contrast their natural look with the digitally altered one. These media make perfection a commonplace, and the line between reality and fake is unclear. The ways in which new media functionality affects the way consumers perceive beauty are illustrated in [Figure 4](#). The other element that affected the content was the algorithmic curation of the content; the participants noted that the feeds tended to feature conventionally attractive people, furthering the repetitive exposure to the same narrow beauty standards.

Figure 4**Figure 4** Illustrating the Influence of New Media Features on Consumer Perception of Beauty

The endorsements by influencers proved to be the most convincing, and those who were found to be relatable were found to have a more significant influence than conventional celebrity ads because of the perceived relatability and accessibility. Moreover, the involvement-based feedback mechanisms (likes, comments, and followers) worsened self-comparison and validation-seeking behaviors and connected beauty perception to social acceptance. The participants also addressed the contribution of short-form content, especially on Tik Tok, to the dissemination of rapid trends in beauty that establish brief but strong criteria of beauty. Together, all these media characteristics make an ecosystem of unceasing comparison and self-optimization, and digital participation is associated with aesthetic conformity.

6.3. DIFFERENCES ACROSS AGE GROUPS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The discussion indicated that there is a significant age and demographic variation in the perceived and reaction of the participants to the aspirational beauty contents on the new media. It was observed that younger participants and those 18 to 25 years of age were more engaged with application like Tik Tok and Instagram and were more prone to self-comparison and dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Influencer culture and trends on the algorithms largely shaped their views on beauty, and most of them admitted that they felt under the emotional stress of having to live up to online beauty ideals. Conversely, media literacy and awareness of digital manipulation was observed to be greater in participants that were aged between 26 and 40 years old but they were not fully immune to the effects of digital manipulation. This cohort complained about the pervasiveness of screened images and the challenge of being authentic and having to cope with work and social norms on the Internet. There was also gender variance in that the female gender showed more emotional reactions towards beauty information, whereas males focused on fitness and lifestyles ideals associated with beauty.

7. CONCLUSION

According to the research on the New Media Impact on Consumer Perception of Aspirational Beauty Advertisement, it can be observed that digital technologies and participatory platforms have completely changed the way beauty ideals are built and perceived. As opposed to old fashioned advertising, which presented one-dimensional and inactive conceptualisation of perfection, the new media serves as a dynamic, interactive, and algorithmic ecosystem, whereby beauty is constantly conceptualised through viewing, participation, and social legitimisation. The results show that, on the one hand, social media platforms make content creation more democratic, and diverse representation possible; on

the other hand, they teach homogenized aesthetics and aspirational norms by promoting the content of influencers and using algorithmic amplification. Responses of the participants highlighted the contradictory character of the new media: on the one hand, new media enable people to demonstrate a specific identity, and, at the same time, new media exert certain pressures on individuals to follow the dominant digital aesthetics. Reaction to perceived authenticity and constructed imagery, in turn, speaks of the emancipatory and performative nature of self-presentation on the Internet. Moreover, generational differences and demographics also mean that younger users are more susceptible to self-comparison and psychological pressure and older participants are more critical but also subjected to the overwhelming presence of idealized imagery.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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