Appearance Ideal Internalization and Body Image Dissatisfaction: A Quantitative Analysis on the Influence of Instagram Among Young Adults

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Abstract: Dysfunctional appearance beliefs are important risk factors in the development of body dissatisfaction. Social media is the most powerful tool in propagating appearance-ideals. This paper analyses the relationship between use of Instagram, appearance ideal internalization, body image dissatisfaction and the social pressure to adhere to the constructed appearance standards in a sample of college-going young adults (N=103, aged 19-21, 64% females) in Kochi. Furthermore, this study uses The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3) (Thompson, Berg, Roehrig, Guarda, & Heinberg, 2004)and The Figure Rating Scale (Stunkard, Sørensen, & Schulsinger, 1983) to examine and compare the difference in Instagram mediated attitude towards appearance-related variables between female and male samples. The paper is an attempt to assess and quantify the societal pressure to adhere to the stereotypes and idealized body images proposed by Instagram. Cultivation theory in regard to body image effects is also being elucidated in this paper.

Keywords:

Appearance ideal-internalization, Instagram, Body Image, Body image dissatisfaction, SATAQ, Figure Rating Scale, Cultivation theory, Social pressure

Introduction

Instagram serves as a social media platform enabling users to share a diverse array of photos, garner likes and followers, and engage with other accounts, spanning individuals, brands, celebrities, and even animals. This platform offers the opportunity for users to showcase their content through photos and videos, customizable via filters, and organized using hashtags and geo-tagging. The sharing of posts can be configured to either the general public or a select group of pre-approved followers. Exploring trending content and perusing other users' posts can be facilitated through tags and locations. Users can curate a personalized feed by engaging with content through likes and following other accounts. The quantification of one's prominence is often dictated by the accumulation of likes and followers. This popularity-centric dynamic, particularly impactful on teenagers and young adults, holds substantial implications for individuals' overall well-being.

Appearance Internalization and Body Dissatisfaction: The Influence of Instagram

Appearance ideals, defined by our society, dictate the desired ways to look and are constantly fuelling social comparisons. The pursuit of these ideals has become a race, leading individuals to compare themselves based on their appearance. One prominent issue arising from this is the internalization of appearance ideals, particularly on Instagram. The platform, along with other photo-sharing platforms, serves as a powerful tool for disseminating ideas of what is considered ideal. With filters, beauty enhancement tools, and retouched photos, Instagram presents an altered reality that can lead to dissatisfaction with one's own appearance.

Moreover, the emergence of Instagram influencers further intensifies the propagation of idealized appearance standards, influencing users' perception of how they should look.

The impact of Instagram on appearance ideals and internalization is profound. Users are constantly exposed to a curated feed of images that embody the societal beauty standards. These images, often retouched and filtered, create an unattainable and unrealistic standard of beauty. The presence of influencers on the platform adds another layer of influence, as they actively shape the ideals and disseminate messages on what individuals should aspire to look like. This continuous exposure and influence cultivate a sense of dissatisfaction with one's own appearance and further perpetuate the internalization of societal beauty standards. This emotional barrier can be studied effectively with the help of Cultivation theory.

Cultivation Theory for New Media: Shaping Perceptions and Behaviours

Cultivation Theory posits that long-term exposure to media shapes individuals' perceptions and behaviours. It argues that frequent and extended engagement with media content influences how people view the social reality presented by the media they consume. While traditional cultivation analysis primarily focused on television viewing hours, the dynamic nature of media technology necessitates a shift toward a big data approach to understand its effect (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2015). Despite initial scepticism regarding the applicability of cultivation theory to new media, research suggests that narratives remain influential, making the theory relevant. For instance, studies have explored the impact of media on body image perception within the context of social media platforms. Stein, Krause, and Ohler (2021) found that specific types of information consumption on social media can lead to skewed perceptions of strangers' physical appearances. This highlights the cultivation effects that social media platforms, like Instagram, can have on individuals' perception of beauty and appearance ideals.

Overall, cultivation theory provides insights into how long-term exposure to new media shapes individuals' understanding of the social world and influences their attitudes and behaviours. By examining the cultivation effects of social media, researchers gain valuable insights into the impact on body image and perceptions of physical appearances (Stein, Krause, & Ohler, 2021).

The Indian context

In India, appearance ideals encompass a range of beauty standards influenced by the country's diverse culture. However, a persistent ideal revolves around fair skin, reflecting a long-standing obsession with "fair and lovely" complexion. Despite some evolving attitudes, the pressure to conform to Western beauty standards, particularly for women of colour, remains prevalent. This pursuit of Westernized attributes extends to various aspects of life, including fashion, makeup, and fitness, often overshadowing the celebration of India's unique skin tones, body types, and capabilities. Social comparisons with friends, family, and Bollywood actors contribute to individuals' dissatisfaction with their physical shape and size, often leading to a perceived need to conform to slimmer body standards (Kapadia, 2009). Additionally, Indian media predominantly portrays Western standards of beauty, further reinforcing these ideals. However, it is important to acknowledge that perceptions are evolving, and the younger generations are driving significant changes in these beauty standards and perceptions in today's society.

Aim of the study

This study focuses to understand and examine the relationship between the 'use of Instagram', 'appearance internalization' and 'body dissatisfaction' on Instagram users between the ages of 19 and 21 from Kochi. The study also throws light on the effects of the use of Instagram on promoting social pressures on young adult users to adhere to constructed appearance standards. Additionally, the difference in body image

dissatisfaction or ideal body images among male and female respondents are brought to attention in this study.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the relationship between 'use of Instagram', 'appearance internalization' and 'body dissatisfaction' on Instagram users between the ages of 19 and 21 from Kochi.

2. To inspect and quantify the social pressure to adhere to the constructed appearance standards which are propagated through Instagram on a sample of young adults.

3. To analyze the extent of appearance and body image idealization among female and male samples.

Scope of the study

There is a scarcity of studies examining the correlation between Instagram usage, internalization of appearance, and overall body dissatisfaction in both male and female populations. Furthermore, the majority of previous investigations have focused on adolescent samples. Additionally, there is a notable paucity of research specifically addressing this topic within the context of Kerala or India as a whole.

Literature Review

Extensive support exists for the notion that media plays a significant role in shaping women's perceptions of beauty and their concerns about appearance, as it encourages the internalization of an extremely slim body type as the epitome of beauty. Rather than passively receiving unrealistic beauty standards from the media, many individuals actively seek out idealized images. The media effectively communicates the preferred physical attributes for attractiveness and desirability, commonly known as the 'thin ideal,' encompassing various aspects such as hair, skin, and facial features (Mills, Shannon , & Hogue, 2017)

A meta-analysis of 25 experimental studies revealed that viewing thin media images led to more negative body image among women compared to control images or images of average-sized or plus-sized models (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). Furthermore, social media platforms have played a pivotal role in shaping body image perceptions, with a focus on lean body patterns and anti-obesity messaging (Cecon, Franceschini, Peluzio, Hermsdorf, & Priore, 2017). Online behaviours such as selectively posting flattering photos, using filters, and digitally altering appearance contribute to the internalization of beauty ideals (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). However, the constant exposure to retouched images and appearance-related commentary on social media can have long-term negative consequences on individuals' body image.

Instagram, a popular image-based social networking site, sees millions of photos uploaded daily, fostering comparisons between users' appearances. With its filters and editing options, Instagram promotes societal beauty ideals, leading users to judge themselves as less attractive compared to others. This contributes to increased body dissatisfaction and self-objectification (Fardouly, Willburger, & Vartanian, 2018). The impact of Instagram on the well-being of adolescents, particularly girls, is significant. This influence is evident in its association with body image, self-esteem, and overall body awareness. (Verrastro, Fontanesi, Liga, Cuzzocrea, & Gugliandolo, 2020).

Sheldon and Bryant (2016) discovered that in addition to monitoring other people (friends and strangers), university students use Instagram primarily for self-promotion purposes, such as documenting their lives for others, expressing and showcasing their creativity, and increasing their popularity among peers. Given that Instagram is a platform for self-expression, presentation, and image management, it's no surprise

that young 27 people use it to seek validation or attention in the form of "likes." (Dumas, Maxwell-Smith, Davis, & Giulietti, 2017).

Increased engagement in Instagram photo activity was associated with heightened levels of appearance-related comparisons, specifically those occurring on Instagram. These comparisons, in turn, correlated with elevated levels of body image concerns among the participants. (Hendrickse, Laura, & Clayton, 2017). In a study by Coy-Dibley (2016), the term "digitized dysmorphia" has been introduced to describe the disparity between beauty standards portrayed on social media and females' body image. This study suggests that platforms like Instagram may contribute to the rise of dysmorphic disorders among young women. Digital dysmorphia is characterized by the alteration of purportedly unwanted aspects of one's self through the use of numerous tools, such as Photoshop, to tweak and fix one's online appearance before putting it on social media.

Numerous studies have analysed similar themes within the Indian context. The skin bleaching industry in India generates an annual revenue exceeding 450 million, with Fair & Lovely, a skin whitening brand launched in the seventies, continuing to be one of the most lucrative brands. The colonial history, dating back to the British colonization of India in the nineteenth century, ingrained the association of power with lighter skin. The glorification of fair skin in Indian societies extends beyond mere aesthetic preferences and is intricately tied to notions of self-worth, intelligence, and privileges. This trend is further perpetuated by the endorsement of skin whitening products by some of the most prominent Bollywood actors and actresses. Notably, dark-skinned individuals are often portrayed as significantly lighter in glossy magazines, TV shows, and films. Western beauty pressures add to this. The run for thinner bodies and lighter skin in India is never-ending. (Seth, 2019)

Moreover, recent research indicates an increasing prevalence of body image issues among women in India. For instance, in a study by Goswami, Sachdeva, and Sachdeva (2012), a sample of college-aged young adult women exhibited a noteworthy level of dissatisfaction with their body image. Dixit, Agarwal, Singh, Kant, and Singh (2011) explored the impact of age and urban living as variables influencing body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls aged 10 to 19. Individuals from younger age groups and urban areas demonstrated considerably higher levels of dissatisfaction compared to their counterparts from older age groups and rural areas. (Nagar & Virk, 2017).

However, major social media platforms are increasingly recognizing the potential risks associated with exposure to specific types of content. Currently, Instagram has taken measures to prohibit hashtags like 'thinspiration' and 'proanorexia,' deeming them as actively endorsing self-harm. Other appearance-related hashtags, such as 'sopretty', 'attractive', 'bikinibody', and 'everybodyisbeautiful' are, at present, no longer searchable on the photo-sharing application. (Mills, Shannon , & Hogue, 2017)

Research Methodology

Research methodology deals with the procedures or strategies used to find, select, process, and analyse information about the relationship between use of Instagram, appearance ideal internalization, body image dissatisfaction and the social pressure to adhere to the constructed appearance standards in a sample of young adults. The study was conducted quantitatively.

1. Sample

The rationale behind selecting 103 Instagram users, specifically college students, between the ages of 19 and 21 from various colleges in Kochi, stems from the desire to investigate the relationship between Instagram use and body-related perceptions within a specific demographic. The choice of this age group is likely influenced by the unique challenges and trends faced by individuals in the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. Focusing on a localized sample from Kochi provides a more nuanced understanding of the impact of Instagram within the cultural and social context of the city in Kerala.

Using purposive sampling for this research allows for intentional selection based on specific criteria. The inclusion criteria, including age range, Instagram account ownership, and location in Kochi, are carefully chosen to ensure that participants meet certain characteristics relevant to the study's objectives. This targeted approach enhances the applicability of the findings to the chosen demographic and locale, contributing to a more focused and meaningful exploration of the research questions.

The questionnaire, administered through Google Forms, provides a structured means of collecting data on Instagram use and body-related perceptions. This method allows for consistency in data collection and facilitates the analysis of patterns and correlations. Overall, the study's design, sample selection, and data collection methods are tailored to address the research objectives effectively within the specified population and context.

2. Variables

The variables assessed in the questionnaire were the gender of the respondent, the average time he/she spend on Instagram per day, appearance internalization, discrepancy between respondent's choices for their current body size and ideal body size and the social pressure to diet, to be thin, to lose weight, to exercise and to change appearance.

3. Measures

3.1 Instagram-related measure

Ten Items (5 pressure items, 3 internalization items, 1 reverse-keyed item and 1 information item) from The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3) (Thompson, Berg, Roehrig, Guarda, & Heinberg, 2004) was used in the questionnaire to assess the societal pressure to adhere to the stereotypes proposed by Instagram. The questionnaire is a self-report scale rated on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).

3.2 Body dissatisfaction

The general body dissatisfaction of the students was also assessed in the questionnaire with the help of The Figure Rating Scale (Stunkard, Sørensen, & Schulsinger, 1983). The scale comprises nine male and female schematic silhouettes of varying shapes, ranging from extreme thinness to extreme obesity.
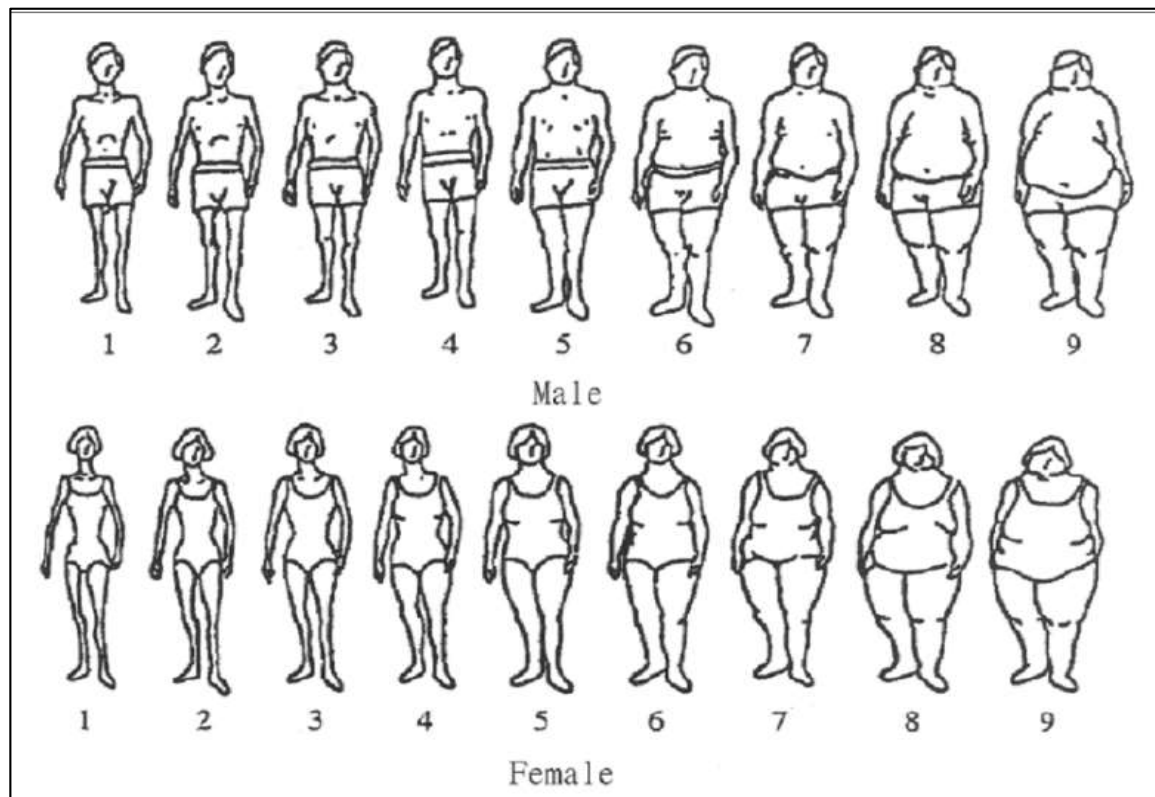
Figure.1 Figure Rating Scale (Stunkard, Sorensen, & Schlusinger, 1983)

The participant had to choose the silhouette that they believed reflected their current body size and the silhouette that represented their ideal body size. The respondent's choice of their perceived ideal body sizes is used in the study to gain insights into an individual's body image perceptions Given that the scale relies solely on figures and is nonverbal, it has proven effective in evaluating body dissatisfaction within non-Western samples. The scale is used in conjunction with other measure (here SATAQ) to obtain a comprehensive understanding of an individual's body image perception and concerns and their potential impact on mental health and well-being.

4. Research questions

The research questions for this study were:

a) What is the influence of use of Instagram on appearance internalization and body image dissatisfaction on Instagram users between the ages of 19 and 21 from Kochi?

b) What effect does the use of Instagram have on promoting social pressures on young adult users to adhere to constructed appearance standards?

c) What are the differences in body image dissatisfaction or ideal body images among male and female respondents?

Data Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of the collected data was performed using cross tabulation in SPSS v28.0 (IBM, 2021). The preliminary analysis of the data itself suggested that respondents with higher amount of exposure showed greater levels of dissatisfaction with their bodies, adhered to social comparisons and has felt pressure from Instagram to diet, to be thin, to exercise, to change appearance, to lose weight etc. Internalization of appearance was also measured in the questionnaire whereby respondents were asked if they compare their bodies with the bodies of people on Instagram, if they want their bodies to look like those of influencers/models/people on Instagram, if they've compared their bodies with those of people in 'good

shape'. The following cross-tabulated data tables are the ones that showed greater amount of pressure and internalization through Instagram on respondents.

I. Pressure to be thin * Time spent on Instagram

		Pressure to be thin * Time spent on Instagram Cross tabulation									
		Time spent on Instagram									
		Two hours or more		More than an hour		20-50 minutes		Less than 20 minutes		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Felt pressure to be thin	SA	6	60	4	17.4	14	40	12	34.3	36	35
	MA	2	20	7	30.4	6	17.1	9	25.7	24	23.3
	N	2	20	7	30.4	5	14.3	7	20	21	20.4
	MD	0	0	4	17.4	8	22.9	6	17.1	18	17.5
	SD	0	0	1	4.3	2	5.7	1	2.9	4	3.9
Total		10	100	23	100	35	100	35	100	103	100

Table 1

II. Pressure to diet * Time spent on Instagram

		Pressure to diet * Time spent on Instagram Cross tabulation									
		Time spent on Instagram									
		Two hours or more		More than an hour		20-50 minutes		Less than 20 minutes		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Felt pressure to be thin	SA	6	60	7	30.4	14	40	11	31.4	38	36
	MA	2	20	4	17.4	8	22.9	11	31.4	25	24.3
	N	1	10	6	26.1	6	17.1	8	22.9	21	20.4
	MD	1	10	5	21.7	5	14.3	4	11.4	15	14.6
	SD	0	0	1	4.3	2	5.7	1	2.9	4	3.9
Total		10	100	23	100	35	100	35	100	103	100

Table 2

*(SA-Strongly Agree, MA-Mostly Agree, N- Neither agree nor disagree, MD-Mostly Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree)

Table 1 and 2 are the results received for two pressure items when cross tabulated with average time spent on Instagram

1. Table 1 presents the cross-tabulation results between respondents' agreement on feeling pressure from Instagram to be thin and their average daily Instagram usage. The findings highlight that 60% of respondents who spend two or more hours on Instagram per day strongly agreed with feeling pressure to be thin. This suggests that individuals who spend more time on the platform are more likely to experience greater pressure regarding their body image, indicating a relationship between prolonged exposure to Instagram content and the pressure to be thin. Notably, none of the respondents spending two or more hours on Instagram per day disagreed with feeling pressure, although 20% indicated a neutral stance. This implies that all respondents in this category have experienced some level of pressure to be thin, reinforcing the perpetuation of the "thin-ideal" on Instagram. However, it is important to observe that 35% of all respondents strongly agreed, while only 3.9% strongly disagreed, indicating that irrespective of daily Instagram usage, individuals still felt some degree of pressure to be thin.

2. Table 2 shows the results of cross-tabulating respondents' feelings of pressure from Instagram to diet with their average daily time spent on the platform. The findings reveal that 60% of respondents who spend two or more hours on Instagram per day strongly agreed that they felt pressure to diet. This suggests that prolonged exposure to Instagram content is associated with increased pressure to diet. This pressure may indirectly promote the "thin ideal," where individuals feel the need to be thin or lose weight. The consequences of such pressure include eating disorders and body dissatisfaction. Overall, 36.9% of respondents experienced clear pressure to diet, while 24.3% mostly 'agreed', and only 3.9% 'disagreed's with the statement. These findings indicate that regardless of daily Instagram usage, respondents still felt some level of pressure to diet from the platform.

III. Body image comparison * Time spent on Instagram

Body image comparison * Time spent on Instagram Cross tabulation											
		Time spent on Instagram									
		Two hours or more		More than an hour		20-50 minutes		Less than 20 minutes		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I compare	SA	6	60	9	39.1	11	31.4	8	22.9	34	33
my body	MA	3	30	3	13	8	22.9	8	22.9	22	21.4
with	N	1	10	4	17.4	5	14.3	6	17.1	16	15.5
people on	MD	0	0	6	26.1	8	22.9	6	17.1	20	19.4
Instagram	SD	0	0	1	4.3	3	8.6	7	20	11	10.7
Total		10	100	23	100	35	100	35	100	103	100

Table.3

IV. Desired Body Ideal* Time spent on Instagram

Desired Body Ideal* Time spent on Instagram Cross tabulation											
		Time spent on Instagram									
		Two hours or more		More than an hour		20-50 minutes		Less than 20 minutes		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I would	SA	4	40	4	17.4	7	20.0	4	11.4	19	18.4
like to	MA	3	30	8	34.8	9	25.7	6	17.4	26	25.4
have body	N	3	30	4	17.4	8	22.9	7	20	22	21.4
like	MD	0	0	6	26.1	9	25.7	12	34.3	27	26.2
models	SD	0	0	1	4.3	2	5.7	6	17.1	9	8.7
Total		10	100.0	23	100.0	35	100.0	35	100.0	103	100.0

Table. 4

Table 3 and 4 are the results received for two internalization items when cross tabulated with average time spent on Instagram.

1. Table 3 displays the cross-tabulated results of respondents' body comparison on Instagram with their average daily time spent on the platform. The findings indicate that 60% of respondents who spend two or more hours on Instagram per day compare their bodies to those of others on the platform. This suggests that prolonged exposure to Instagram content leads to a higher likelihood of body comparisons. It is important to note that among respondents who spend two or more hours on Instagram, none disagreed with the statement (60% strongly agreed, 30% mostly agreed), indicating that they indeed compare their bodies to others on Instagram. However, it is worth noting that 33% of all respondents strongly agreed with the statement, while only 10.7% strongly disagreed, indicating that body comparisons occur regardless of daily Instagram usage.

2. Table 4 presents the cross-tabulated results of respondents' desire for their body to resemble models/influencers/people on Instagram, along with their average daily time spent on the platform. The findings reveal that 40% of respondents who spend two or more hours on Instagram per day strongly agreed with the statement. This suggests that constant exposure to these individuals on Instagram can lead to a desire to achieve similar body appearances, potentially resulting in body dissatisfaction. It is noteworthy that among respondents who spend two or more hours on Instagram, none disagreed with the statement (although 30% chose 'Neither agree nor disagree').

Tables 1,2,3, and 4 all direct the attention to the impact of Instagram on a person's self. The results highlight that increased time spent on Instagram is associated with greater pressure to be thin, dieting, body comparisons, and a desire to resemble Instagram models/influencers/people. This study sheds light on the similar effects of Instagram on both females and males, emphasizing the detrimental impact on young adults' physical and mental well-being. Over time, these effects can lead to harmful repercussions, as young adults with greater Instagram exposure experience heightened social comparison and pressure related to their appearance.

V. Identification of Current body shape or size * Ideal body shape

			Current body shape or size * Ideal body shape or size Cross tabulation										
			Ideal body shape or size											
		2		3		4		5		6		8		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Current body shape or size	2	3	42.9	5	16.1	6	12.8	0	0	0	0	1	100	15	14.6
	3	1	14.3	10	32.3	11	23.4	2	13.3	0	0	0	0	24	23.3
	4	2	28.6	10	32.3	12	25.5	3	20	0	0	0	0	27	26.2
	5	1	14.3	5	16.1	14	29.8	2	13.3	1	50	0	0	23	22.3
	6	0	0	1	3.2	3	6.4	4	26.7	0	0	0	0	8	7.8
	7	0	0	0	0	1	2.1	3	20	1	50	0	0	5	4.9
	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total		7	100	31	100	47	100	15	100	2	100	1	100	103	100

Table 5

*1=Extreme Thinness, 2=Very Very Thin, 3=Very Thin, 4=Thin, 5=Medium, 6=Fat, 7=Very Fat, 8=Very Very Fat. 9=Extreme obesity.

Table 5 showcases the data received when respondents were asked to choose the "ideal" body type as per Figure.1. The survey utilized a figure rating scale that ranged from extreme thinness to extreme obesity. This was done to analyse which body types are regarded as the "ideal" body type. The analysis of the data suggests that there is a widespread inclination towards body types 3 and 4 among the respondents. 31 out of the 103 respondents chose body type 3 as the ideal, 47 out of 103 chose body type 4 as the ideal. Based on the data, it is clear that the majority of respondents indicated a preference for thinner body shapes, as evidenced by their choices of "ideal" body type falling within the range of 2, 3, 4 and 5 (Very Very Thin to Thin and Medium) on the scale. This could be the reestablishment of how 'thin' is idealized.

The study reveals that the majority of respondents self-report an average or normal body size and express a preference for an ideal body image that aligns with their current perception. This suggests a general inclination towards body congruence, where individuals aspire to achieve an ideal body shape that closely corresponds to their perceived current body size. However, when asked about their ideal body type, they express a preference for a slightly altered figure rather than their current body type.

Despite feeling that they are within the range of their current body type, they aspire to attain a more favourable body shape as their ideal. This suggests a desire for improvement or refinement in their body image, even among those who are generally content with their current body size

VI. Ideal body shape or size * Gender of respondents

Ideal body shape or size * Gender of respondents -Cross tabulation								
		Gender of respondents						
		Female		Male		Total		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
Current body shape or size	2	5	42.9	2	5.4	7	6.8	
	3	26	14.3	5	13.5	31	30.1	
	4	28	28.6	19	51.4	47	45.6	
	5	4	14.3	11	29.7	15	14.6	
	6	2	0	0	0	2	1.9	
	8	1	0	0	0	1	1	
Total		66	100	37	100	103	100	

Table 6

*1=Extreme Thinness, 2=Very Very Thin, 3=Very Thin, 4=Thin, 5=Medium, 6=Fat, 7=Very Fat, 8=Very Very Fat. 9=Extreme obesity.

Table 6 highlights the cross-tabulated data on respondents' gender and their preferred body shape from Figure 1. Notably, 81.8% of female respondents selected body shapes 3 and 4, while only 64.9% of male respondents chose them. Additionally, no male respondents opted for body shapes 6 and 8, unlike 4.5% of female respondents. This discrepancy, as shown in Table 6 suggests variations in the internalization of ideal body images between male and female Instagram users. It emphasizes the influence of Instagram on body image ideals and how this impact may differ based on gender. While previous studies have predominantly focused on females, this study sheds light on the similar effects experienced by males.

These findings indicate a potential relationship between Instagram use, internalization of appearance ideals, body image dissatisfaction, and societal pressure to conform to beauty standards. The results also demonstrate gender-based differences in Instagram-mediated attitudes towards appearance-related factors, influenced by the time spent on the platform and individuals' idealized body images.

5. Limitations and future directions

1. The findings of the study need to be examined in light of the fact that the study was limited to a small sample size consisting of Instagram using students from different universities between the ages of 19 and 21 from Kochi. Future researches should focus on examining the long-term effects of media images (including other social media platforms) on different population samples such as adolescent and preadolescents from both urban and rural settings of Kochi and India in whole.
2. The measures used in this study has not been used in much researches on Indian population.
3. The collected data was only cross tabulated to get conclusions, no causal links were tested among the variables.
4. In this study, the focus was confined to the relationship between the use of Instagram, body image dissatisfaction, and appearance-ideal internalization; however further studies should also account for personal, psychological and emotional variables in relation to the ones assessed in the present work.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly indicates that majority of Instagram using young adults in experience body dissatisfaction. It suggests that there is a relationship between the 'use of Instagram', 'appearance ideal internalization', 'body image dissatisfaction' and the 'social pressure' to adhere to the constructed appearance standards. The study also showcased difference in Instagram mediated attitude towards appearance-related variables between female and male samples on the basis of the amount of time spent on Instagram and their idealized body images.

From the findings it can be argued that continuous exposure to content on Instagram or the extensive use of this photo-sharing social media platform can have detrimental effects on the physical, mental or emotional health of young adults. The study also portrays how Instagram can be a major source on propagating 'idealized' images and is a prime cause of internalization of appearance standards that can be unrealistic. It promotes the 'thin-ideal' belief which is injected into the sociocultural attitudes of its users.

The results of this study lines up with the concepts of cultivation theory in communication and media studies. As the theory suggests, long term exposure to media (here Instagram) shapes individuals' perceptions of reality and influences their attitudes, leading to a 'cultivation' of a worldview. Exposure to content on appearance and body types on Instagram thereby consciously or otherwise, is cultivating an 'ideal'.

Moreover, the study also examined how Instagram can create bodily dissatisfaction and has a major impact on its users. The findings also portrayed how Instagram users have felt pressure from it to be thin, to diet etc. and has also led them to comparing their bodies to those of models/influencers/people on Instagram. The findings also suggest that males are also subjected to the impact of Instagram. However, a conscious use of Instagram can change this scenario. Spread of proper awareness on the repercussions of prolonged exposure to media could be the foundation to changes in perception and internalized beliefs. Furthermore, all national and international developmental professional organizations should begin promoting natural and realistic bodies in order to influence future generations to be inspired by healthy and positive body images rather than edited and unrealistic ones.

Overall, the study emphasizes the detrimental effects of Instagram on body image and self-perception, particularly among young adults, and the importance of understanding these influences to address the challenges posed by unrealistic beauty standards and societal pressures. These findings can contribute to raising awareness about the potential negative consequences of excessive social media usage on mental health and body satisfaction, encouraging further research and potential interventions to promote a healthier relationship with body image and self-esteem.

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