

The Influence of Instagram Filters on Body Image Dissatisfaction among UK and Chinese Female Aged 18-23 Years: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract: The research paper is based on analyzing the influence of Instagram filters on the users in overcoming the dissatisfaction of their body image in the social media. The research has been focused on the female users of Instagram in China and in the UK in the age group of 18 and 23 years. A quantitative approach has been taken and a survey among 120 participants have been conducted to understand the viewpoints of these users and how effectively they have been using the filters of Instagram to shape their body image. Statistical methods have been used to evaluate the data and with the help charts and tables, the findings have been narrated. It has been found that the participants of the research show a sign of satisfaction if they use the Instagram filters as per their editing needs. This boosts up their confidence to be a part of the social media.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Instagram is widely used because most users find it to be more engaging than other similar social media platforms. Instagram facilitates effective visual content with effective visual experiences for the users (Bertini et al. 2020)[4]. Young females tend to apply Instagram filters before uploading a picture of them on the platform to attract wider audiences. This helps them to look desirable before other followers on the social media platform. The main purpose of such filters is to engage the users towards the platform and urge them to post attractive pictures on posts that can attract wider audiences in large numbers. Pedalino and Camerini (2022) stated that idealized body images that are been shared on Instagram are associated with impacting the body satisfaction of young females and lead to social comparison[15]. Due to such reasons, this research has chosen young females in the UK and China within the age group 18-23 years.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

The previous studies carried out on body dissatisfaction have mostly examined the impact on diversified spectrums such as the impact of body dissatisfaction over cultures, body dissatisfaction, and body comparison with that of media images for both males and females, body dissatisfaction amongst females in America, differences between behavioral and psychological implications between males and females due to body dissatisfaction, and other factors. The main purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between Instagram filters and body image dissatisfaction. The findings of this study would seek answers on whether the use of Instagram filters correlates with body image dissatisfaction amongst UK and Chinese females aged 18-23 years, concerning overall frequency, nature of perception, use of specific filters, and other important factors.

1.3 Research Objectives

- To determine the correlation between the use of Instagram filters and body image dissatisfaction among UK and Chinese females aged 18-23 years
- To assess the frequency of Instagram filter usage among UK and Chinese females aged 18-23 years
- To explore the perception of UK and Chinese females aged 18-23 years regarding the

influence of Instagram filters on their body image

1.4 Rationale for the Study

With the rapid advancement in social media platforms in the digital era, there has been advancement as well as challenges faced by popular social media platforms such as Instagram. Sherlock and Wagstaff (2019) explained that young females tend to get emotionally and psychologically affected by the comments they receive on their posts, and this somewhat influences their use of image filters to look in a certain way[17]. This is the chief rationale behind choosing the age group 18-23 years of age for young females in UK and China. This further stands suitable in terms of the relevance of the topic in the current digital age. It would further help to give a clear overview of the potential implications of the finding of the current study and accordingly shape social media policies and practices for the future.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social comparison theory

The social comparison theory is often used as an indicator to identify the main aspects that body satisfaction and social comparisons among people. Scully et al. (2023) examined the impact of social media networking platforms on the mental health of young adults, especially adolescent girls[16]. The authors examined the impact of appearance-related activities exhibited by the users such as surfing across the follower pages and coming across pictures of their friends, and the corresponding impact on body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction is associated with overall time spent on social comparisons, and upward social comparisons with female targets actively staying online on social media networking platforms (Fox & Vendemia 2016)[9]. Social comparison essentially involves the utilization of information associated with different intentions of comparison.

2.2 Objectification theory

The objectification theory establishes the fact that sexual objectification of females is most likely to impact their mental health and affect them disproportionately. Women often start to suffer from depression, sexual dysfunction, and other issues upon getting objectified (Moradi & Huang 2008; Ko & Wei 2020)[13-14]. The objectification theory had its roots in feminist theories and supposes that socio-cultural factors including gender roles, cultural concerns on the appearance of females, social and economic success for idealized appearance, and female objectification in media impact females psychologically (Calogero et al. 2011)[7]. The body is considered a symbol of personal success or failure in Western cultures. Dakanalis and Riva (2013) stated that most individuals consider beauty and slenderness as indicators of happiness and social acceptability[8]. Individuals who have internalized media ideals are generally more vulnerable to body shaming (Aubrey et al. 2009)[2]. The socio-cultural parameters and media pressure are important factors that influence body-related dissatisfaction among young males and females, including that body shaming.

2.3 Impact of Instagram filters on body satisfaction among women in China

Further research on the use of Instagram filter has shown the impact of social media on body image dissatisfaction among Chinese population. Zhang (2012) investigated how young Chinese females negotiate beauty and body image under the influence of mass media[20]. While investigating the chief themes, it was realized that Chinese women believed that the ideal beautiful Chinese woman should have a tall and thin body, big eyes, fair skin, with inner beauty. The author explored further and found out that both image issues are centralized in the daily experiences of Chinese women and the women were under cultural, societal, familial, and peer pressure to pursue physical beauty. Furthermore, it was understood that media influences play essential roles upon influencing the perception of Chinese population groups about beauty and form multi-layered presumptions. Chinese women even believe that media creates a boundary of extreme beauty standards across the media platforms for all active users that influences their perceptions about beauty.

2.4 Role of visual content, including filter on Instagram in shaping body image perception

The effect of body-positive Instagram captions on the body image of women involves challenges of narrow beauty ideals and the promotion of acceptance of all body forms. Tiggemann et al. (2020) said that many users post body-positive images and captions on Instagram platforms, but they tend not to affect body dissatisfaction or body appreciation [18]. The authors further reviewed and found out that there was an effect of image type, the average images somewhat led to less body dissatisfaction and greater body appreciation than the thin images posted on the social media platform. Females who were high on thin-ideal internalization and body-positive captions on average images were driven to get greater body appreciation, but the women received less appreciation when they posted thin images. This indicated that visual imagery of Instagram posts acts as a more potent contributor to body image than any text.

2.5 Association between filter usage and body image dissatisfaction

The mainstream media has negative impacts on the body image of women while they are redirected by intentions of effortful posing, self-promotion before others, and engagement. It has been realized that most participants put substantial effort into all content that they post on the Instagram platform or any similar social media platform (Hendrickse et al. 2017) [11]. Being self-conscious also leads young females to respond to beauty ideals and compare self-beauty with others while displaying photos about themselves (Burnette et al. 2017) [5]. It was realized that young college students mostly tried to adhere to beauty standards and tried to measure up to such ideals and this was the main reason for body dissatisfaction among them. It further explained the association between the use of filters in social media platforms and corresponding implications in the form of body image dissatisfaction. The problems were further aggravated since the respondents or the young college students frequently compared their looks and the overall number of likes or comments on their posts (Baker et al. 2019) [3]. Many youngsters who suffer from low self-esteem and poor body image tend to apply filters on their pictures before posting them on social media platforms to seek comments and likes from their followers.

2.6 Filters can create unrealistic beauty standards and promote dissatisfaction with one's appearance

The most important factor contributing to the negative effects of Instagram filters on body image perception is unrealistic beauty standards. Most social media platforms including Instagram feature images of people having perfect faces and bodies without visible flaws, by using filters and photo editing tools to enhance their appearance (Verrastro et al. 2020) [19]. This results in the development of unrealistic beauty standards amongst people and leads to situations of body dissatisfaction among young males and females (Gelsinger 2021; Agyare et al. 2022) [1] [10]. Young women who are conscious about how they look start to suffer from low self-esteem (Caldeira & De Ridder 2017) [6]. In this manner, filters create unrealistic beauty standards and promote dissatisfaction with one's appearance.

2.7 Body image dissatisfaction among UK females aged 18-23 and its connection to Instagram filters

While there have been several types of research carried out in the past about body image dissatisfaction among males and females living in the United Kingdom. However, there have been limited focuses on how Instagram filters have been causing body image dissatisfaction amongst females living in the UK. This research will socially delve deeper into such areas that would help to gather ideas about the correlation between the use of Instagram filters and body image dissatisfaction among UK females aged 18-23, frequency of Instagram filter usage, user perception, and most popular filters associated with higher levels of body image dissatisfaction.

2.8 Research Gaps

The current review of literature has helped to gather relevant information about why and how

Instagram filters cause body image dissatisfaction amongst young females residing in the United Kingdom within the selected age group. However, most of the information is based on qualitative facts with a very limited understanding of the overall percentage of females in the UK, or other countries of the world been impacted. This is the main research gap that poses a limitation of knowledge. Through the current search, there would be further research into the quantitative factors associated with the chosen research topic on the influence of Instagram filters on body image dissatisfaction.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current research study is based on both exploratory as well as descriptive research designs to explore Instagram image filters to modify the original images by young females living in the UK and in China. The main advantage of using an exploratory research design is that it would help to increase the understanding of the research topic while the key advantage of using a descriptive research design will also help this research to interpret research data findings drawn through a primary quantitative survey.

3.2 Research Approach

This research has used deductive research approach so that the research can be started by assuming the fact that the use of Instagram filters leads to body image dissatisfaction amongst the females living in the UK and China, especially young females aged 18-23 years of age. The main benefit of selecting this research method is to use the main theories associated with body image dissatisfaction, and examine further to test the critical observations of the research.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size, inclusion/exclusion criteria, determination of sample size, and power analysis

This research study has chosen a simple random sampling to gather primary quantitative data, and further interpret all data. It has been done by selecting samples from the specific demographics living in the United Kingdom and in China, which means young females who stay active on Instagram and are conscious about their physical appearance before the world across digital spaces. At present, the current research is based on overall number of 120 respondents (n=120 respondents) to take part in this research. The inclusion criteria were those young females residing in the UK and China, and falling within the age group 18-23 years of age, young females within the UK and China spend considerable time surfing Instagram, and they are particular about their physical appearance and how they perceive them. Based on these facts, the inclusion criteria have been rightly selected for this research study.

3.4 Data Analysis and measurement of variables

The current research has used correlation analysis to interpret the primary quantitative research data findings. In the case of the correlation analysis method, the main emphasis has been given to examining the relationship between the variables of the research. Furthermore, the research study has referred to regression analysis. Some of the most important variables for this research are 'Instagram filters', 'body image dissatisfaction among UK and Chinese young females', and 'Influence of image filters on body image dissatisfaction for the females in UK and China'.

3.5 Data analysis tools

Researchers increase the effectiveness of research by relying on effective software tools for data collection and analysis especially in primary quantitative research. The current research would use ANOVA to carry out coding using software for further interpretation and analysis of data gathered through correlation and regression. ANOVA analysis would further help to seek ideas on how the chosen respondent groups respond to the research with a null hypothesis (Judd et al. 2017)[12]. In terms of a statistically significant result, it was understood that the findings of the research from two

populations differ from each other.

4. Findings

The primary research has been conducted among the females of UK and China within the age range of 18 and 23 years. Further analysis of the findings can be discussed below (See Figure 1):

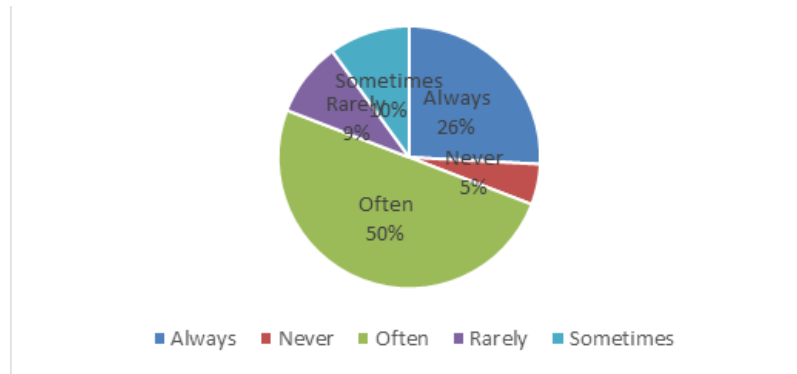


Figure 1: Count of How frequently do you use image filters when posting a picture on Instagram?

Analysis: From the above findings, it can be said that 50% of the respondent often use the filters while posting pictures on the Instagram, while just 5% never use the same. On the other hand, 26% said that they always use the filters, 9% rarely used it and 10% sometimes. Therefore, it can be said that the women in UK and China have the tendency to use Instagram filters (See Figure 2).

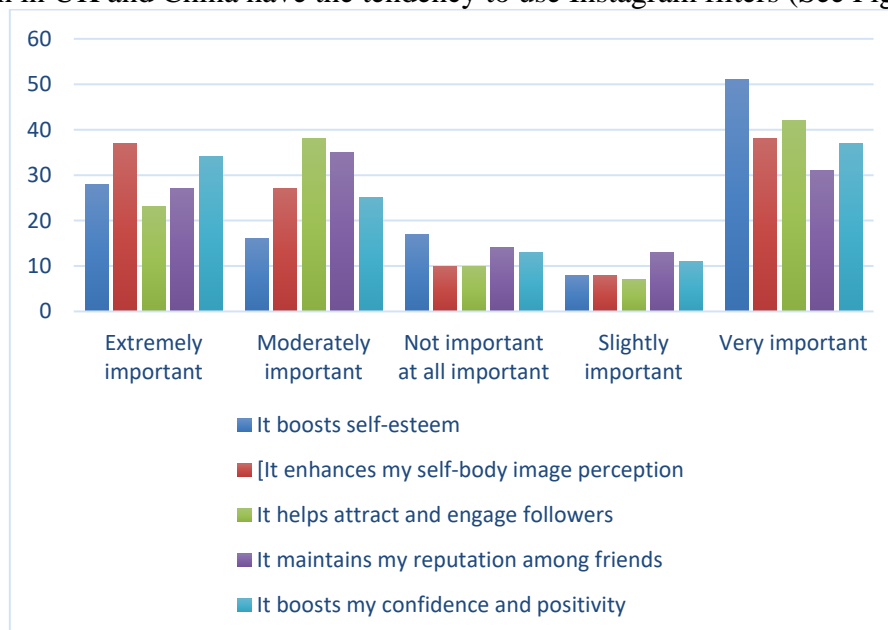


Figure 2: Count of which of the following aspects of Instagram filters do you consider important?

It has been found that the respondents consider it extremely important that Instagram filters boost their self-esteem along with their confidence and positivity. It was moderately important for them to enhance their body image perception. These results imply that respondents' perceptions and uses of Instagram filters differ (See Figure 3).

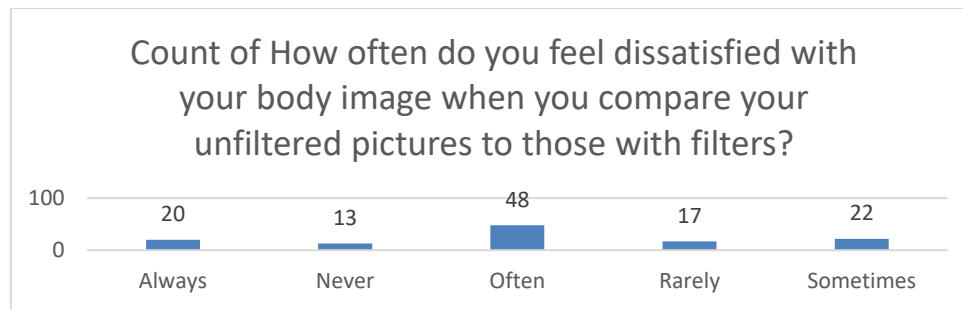


Figure 3: Count of How often do you feel dissatisfied with your body image when you compare your unfiltered pictures to those with filters?

Thus, the respondents (48%) are often dissatisfied with their body image if they are not using the filters to enhance the image. In terms of other options, the response range is almost close to each other (See Figure 4).

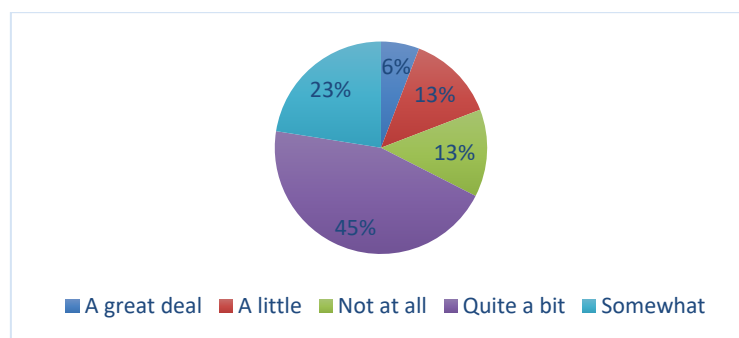


Figure 4: Count of to what extent do you believe that Instagram filters have influenced your perception of your physical appearance?

Almost 45% said that the filters have quite a bit influenced the perception of their physical appearance that has helped them to perceive themselves better among others in the digital world, while just 6% said that it has somewhat influenced their appearance. Thus, most of them trust the filters for improving their image.

5. Conclusion

Instagram is widely popular among the females of United Kingdom and China. many Instagram filters that allow users to interact with the brand to get an experience of how the product might look on their face or body or within the surrounding environment. This further impacts the extent of body satisfaction of the females towards themselves. Under such situations, the influences are even banned from using filters while posting their images on their Instagram profiles. The main reason behind the popularity of Instagram is attributed to its aspect of engaging users through effective visual content with effective visual experiences. However, it was simultaneously realized through the research that body dissatisfaction is caused due to multiple reasons and not just influenced by the use of Instagram filters. Further, factors such as “improving self-body image perception”, “improving self-esteem” and “maintaining reputation among friends” can positive impact on the perceptions of the bodies of the respondents.

Findings from the secondary research show that Instagram filters encourage users to modify the original image and urge them to present a modified version to their followers. The users use skin-altering filters to transform original images into more likable forms. Through the primary survey findings it was found out that although Instagram filters play a great role in influencing the body dissatisfaction of females, it was inferred that the usage of filters is not the only factor that influences the perceptions of women. The real body image contains parameters such as perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about the physical appearance of a person. Furthermore, most individuals are driven by the adaptive value of comparing themselves and their beauty with others, which causes a sense of competition. Thus, the ideal body image contains internalized ideals about self-physical appearance

that further impacts the perceptions of a person toward body dissatisfaction.

6. Limitations and future research

This research mainly gathered data drawn through primary quantitative data findings which limited understanding of the reasons why females from UK and China within the age group of 18 and 23 years relied on Instagram filters, how body dissatisfaction can be managed, and other qualitative aspects of concern. Furthermore, Instagram is highly popular throughout the world and not just in the UK or China, not just amongst the young females residing in the UK and China. In future research, such aspects need to be critically researched by adopting both primary quantitative as well as secondary qualitative research techniques.

The current research topic would serve useful for media students who are pursuing media studies, to get an overview of the impact of social media platforms such as Instagram on individuals and their perceptions of themselves. The data acquired through this research would further be relevant to the media professionals, and social media platforms to be very cautious about factors that can cast a direct influence on the individuals based on what they post, and how they modify the original images.

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