The Impact of Social Media Beauty Standards and the Social Media Influencers on Perception of Beauty Products by Young Women in Cairo, Egypt

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Abstract

In the times of the internet and social media, most people make social media a big part of their lives and how they live their lives, especially young women. It is no secret that women generally care about how they look and how people see them. However, most young women care about how people see them way more than others, which leads them to try out different things to reach the beauty standards and follow standards available on social media. This study is a qualitative based study to explore the role of social media beauty standards and the social influencers' impact on young women's perception of beauty products in Cairo, Egypt. Findings from this study revealed three main themes based on the respondents' responses during the interview sessions. It highlighted the social media influencers' impact on young women, their promotion ways and methods of beauty products, the curiosity of the young women and the trust they have in the beauty influencers whom they follow. All these themes and findings supported the point that shows how beauty influencers have a big impact on young women and they can easily convince them to buy the beauty products. This study contributed to the literature on this topic by exploring the social media beauty standards related to the influencers' impact on young women's perception of beauty products in Cairo, Egypt. Limited past study found in exploring this topic in Egypt. Therefore, the findings will be able to assist future researchers in developing materials relating to this area.

1.0 Introduction

It's fair to say that nowadays, the internet plays a key role in the world's progression, and the phenomena started over the last decade. The development of social media platforms coincided with the rise of the World Wide Web as well as its simplicity of use. People have started to use social media and weblog forums to express the cultural issues impacting them, such as beauty items and general societal illogical beauty standards, putting a heavy toll on their shoulders (Eltigani, 2017).

For more than 10 years, people started relying on smartphones a lot more than anything else, which allowed them to have easy access to any social media platform they want at any time, without having any trouble while doing so. Social media might have a lot of benefits and advantages to it, but besides these advantages, there are also some disadvantages, such as the beauty standards that were set by the users of social media platforms, especially the influencers and celebrities (Yamout, Issa, Ghaddar, 2019). All these beauty standards, which according to social media and the people who set them, consist of having a perfect body, face, skin, and hair, started to affect people's self-esteem, specifically young women because it pressures them and impacts the way they think of how they should look, and how they look at themselves. These beauty standards made the young women unsatisfied with their skin, their colours, the way they look, and their body shapes. It pressured them to attain the unattainable standards of beauty by following unhealthy ways in an attempt to reach these standards. These standards created an unrealistic image of how women should look like and what body shape they should have to be considered "beautiful" according to the social media platforms, and this led to the normal look of women being unacceptable or considered not beautiful (Davis, 2016).

2.0 Literature Review

According to (Henriques & Patnaik, 2020), social media have had a significant influence on the perceptive and cognitive features of physical appearances by supporting thin body forms, clear skin, straight hair, etc., and all of this caused young women and girls to have low self-esteem and health issues.

Besides the influencers of social media help spread these unrealistic beauty standards by showing on social media models with fit bodies, clear and smooth skin, and long and silky hair, and they promote the products that the companies pay them to promote. All of this help to increase the selling of beauty products.

According to some studies and researchers, millennials' purchasing behaviour is mostly impacted by social media and influencers. The statistics show that there are about 72% of millennials buy the beauty products that they see the influencers of Instagram or Facebook promote. Young women and girls are the ones who are impacted by these beauty standards the most. They get criticized and judged for the way they look, which makes them purchase all of these beauty products in an

attempt to achieve unrealistic standards of beauty. This leads to an increase in the selling of beauty products, which benefits beauty products companies (Henriques & Patnaik, 2020).

2.1 Social Media Beauty Standards

Even though there are some advantages to all of the social media platforms, nowadays social media platforms have been doing more damage than good with all of the beauty standards that it promotes and supports, causing young people, especially young women and girls, to have insecurity about the way they look and their physical appearance. Social media keeps pressuring young women and girls to attain unrealistic and unattainable beauty standards, and this is influencing young women heavily, and even destroying some of these women's lives (Obiora, 2021).

2.2 The Influencer's Impact on Young Women's Perceptions

The way young people portray themselves is heavily influenced by identity markers presented by social-media influencers, and the way they represented themselves on social media platforms. Mostly these indications have both good and bad effects. The self-representation of young women and girls has become a significant component, not only within social media but also in reality. Social media influencers impact young women and girls the most. The influencers present the beauty standards of social media on their social media platforms and act as if these standards are the only accepted standards of beauty, and that makes the young women want to be like them and use all the beauty products that the influencers used. Surveys show that 90% of young people have been using social media, with young women and girls having 91% greater involvement than boys, which influences their online presence and have an influence on their online portrayal (Sawmy, 2020).

Women and girls have been recognized for dealing with body image dissatisfaction regarding how they must appear so that it is approved by others and be identified as "beautiful" in their society. They begin to evaluate other people early in life as well as focusing on whatever they want to improve and change about themselves and their looks to achieve the ideal beauty. And because nowadays most people spend most of their time on the internet, they are exposed to photographs as well as other content that match social media's standard "beauty". Women and girls are more likely to identify with an unhealthy lifestyle and other mental illnesses, and they will also be willing to purchase the products that are being promoted by social media influencers just to be able to reach beauty standards (Smith, 2017).

2.3 Issue to Highlight

In the past decade, social media websites and platforms started to become one of the important factors, if not the main factor, that is affecting individuals' health significantly, whether mentally, emotionally, or physically. This is happening because of the benchmarked standard for beauty images that they share and spread among people. The standard pushes individuals, particularly young women and girls, to make some unnecessary decisions, trying to achieve that ideal image and meet social media suggestions (Henriques & Patnaik, 2020).

Generally, people get sick and have health problems, whether genetically or not, but lately, one of the main reasons for many health problems (mental, emotional, and physical problems) that young

women and girls started to have or face in past decades, is the social media beauty standards. The social pressures in the modern age are amongst the most important contributors to previously listed issues affecting the mental health of young women and girls. An unhealthy beauty image, which is an artificial image, as well as unattainable standards, has been formed within the social environment (Gillberg & Bertilsson, 2017).

Aside from social media, the influencers and celebrities of social media are contributing a lot in pressuring young girls about how they should look, how they should dress, what they should eat, etc. to be considered beautiful. Most of the influencers of social media have a huge fan base, meaning that they also have access to a huge segment of the audience, specifically young people, which allows them to promote and advertise the beauty products that they use, or have contracts with the brands to promote for these young people. With the help of social media's ideal image of beauty, the influencers can change the perceptions taken on the beauty products amongst young people, and young girls. The influencers always only mention the benefits and advantages of the beauty products when they promote them. They make it seem like essential products, and when young women and girls see that, they change their perceptions of these products and that makes them want to buy these products so that they can use and be beautiful.

3.0 Methodology

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) described many processes required in the creation of research design by using a research onion. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2016) study design looks almost as though the contours of the study design were developed by previous authors (Kothari, 2004; Creswell, 2014). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2016) approach seemed easier to follow and apply. The research philosophy, strategy for theory creation, methodology, analysis techniques, time horizons and methods, and ethical concerns are the phases involved in developing a research design (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

The interpretivism philosophy and induction approach were applied to this research. The appropriate and most fitting strategy for this study was the standard qualitative research. Qualitative research is the methodological option where the data are acquired through words and voice. The horizontal scope of time is selected to capture the snapshot data. The technique of interview is utilized for the primary data collection.

To collect the necessary data, semi-structured interviews were used and the participants articulated their experiences and shared their answers and opinions regarding the topic for this study. The data and information obtained from the interview sessions were analyzed and examined manually.

4.0 Analysis and Discussion

Upon completion of the data collection, a thematic analysis was used to extract the codes and break the collected data into different categories and themes. Two themes were identified for research question 1 and one theme was identified for research question 2. Following are the details.

Research Question 1: How do the influencers promote beauty products and convince young women to buy them?

Theme 1: Social Media Influencers' Impact

Social media influencers have a huge impact on young women when it comes to beauty products. They can steer the young women's thoughts and ideas towards the products that they are promoting. The influencers know the size of impact they have on young women when it comes to beauty products and they use that to their benefit. Although all the participants in this case study have agreed that the impact of social media influencers on young women is massive, their responses differed between negative and positive. Some thought that even though the effect and impact are massive and can't be missed, they still think that it is a positive impact and that it is helping young women with getting to know the best beauty products that they can use and how to use them. But also, some thought the opposite to that. They responded by expressing how bad the influence is and how the influencers are lying to their followers of young women by using big names and famous products, even though some of these products' quality is getting worse over time. They think that the influencers only care about quantity and not quality, which is why they still promote the products the same way as if the quality is high, even though when sometimes it is not.

Theme 2: Beauty Products Promotion Ways and Methods:

Even though beauty influencers are the main reason that makes young women buy beauty products, the way the beauty products are presented also has an impact too. Young women might not always listen to the beauty influencers, they might see that the influencers are promoting something they already have and that might make them not interested in the product, even if it is a different brand from what they already have. However, the way that the product is presented plays a big role in attracting young women and making them think about buying the product. When young women see that the influencers are using a different way from what they usually use to present a product, they started wanting to know why they are doing that and that would make them interested in the product. However, there are only a handful of ways that the influencers use to promote the beauty product, but that does not mean that they try to renew their ways from time to time. Beauty influencers always try to see what is affecting young women and their followers in general at the time and they try to use that to their benefit and use it as a way to promote beauty products.

Research Question 2: What are the things that make young women follow the influencers and buy the beauty products that they promote?

Theme 1: Young Women's Curiosity and Trust in the Beauty Influencers

To say that people in general, and especially women, are always curious, is an understatement. Following the beauty influencers and always having access to see what they do in their life and what is their lifestyle and how they live their life, make the young women curious and even start to think about what would it be like if they switched places with these influencers. And since they can't switch their lives with them, they try to at least use the things that these influencers say they use and show how they use them, and that includes beauty products. It might not be possible for young women to buy all the things that the beauty influencers buy, or live a similar life to theirs,

but they can still use the same beauty products that these influencers use and promote because it is more possible for the young women to buy these beauty products. Curiosity leads young women to want to buy the beauty product and use it and see if they will have the same results from using it as the beauty influencers who promoted the product said they had. Besides that, trust is one of the main factors that contribute to this. When young women trust the beauty influencers they follow, they will buy any product that these influencers promote without doubting the product or questioning it. The trust factor plays a bigger role in convincing young women to buy the products. When young women trust the beauty influencer they follow and always take their words about the products they promote, they tend to be convinced faster in buying the products that they see the influencers have. The influencers use this as a strategy to make the young women believe that they need these beauty products and that it is essential for them to have them look beautiful, even when this is not entirely true.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was aiming to explore and discuss the impact of social media beauty standards and beauty influencers' impact on young women's perceptions regarding beauty products in Cairo, Egypt. Findings from this study showed that the impact of beauty influencers is huge and it is unavoidable, especially in the current world when access to the internet and social media platforms is very easy and available at all times. In addition to that, the curiosity of the young women and the level of trust that they have in the beauty influencers from social media is one of the biggest reasons as to how the influencers can impact young women and change their perspective about beauty products.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that more studies be done via interview sessions with a larger number of respondents or perform a mixed methods approach to further validate the results. A similar study also must be done using a survey questionnaire, to leverage large respondents. This approach may help the study's universal applicability even more. Future research should examine the subject both specifically and generically. A more accurate assessment of the influence can be obtained by comparing young women who follow beauty influencers and have become overly attached to them with young women who do not show much interest in them. It is also recommended that future research examine the short- and long-term effects of social media's beauty standards related to influencers' influence on young women's perceptions of beauty products not just in Cairo but also in other geographical areas.

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