



THE PRESSURE TO LOOK PERFECT IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how social media influences people's desire to present themselves and their lives as perfect. It further examines how this pressure may contribute to anxiety, stress, lack of confidence, peer pressure, and social comparison among people in society, particularly young people. The article also discusses the influence of social media on changing beauty standards through filters, editing applications, influencers, and unrealistic representations of appearance. Further, it examines the role of the legal and regulatory framework in addressing misleading advertisements and exaggerated beauty claims relating to beauty products and treatments. In this context, the article discusses the relevance of mechanisms such as the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) and the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) in protecting consumers from misleading advertisements. Finally, the article emphasises the importance of maintaining a balance between individual choice, self-expression, and the growing influence of social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Beauty Standards, Peer Pressure, Misleading Advertisements, Consumer Protection.

INTRODUCTION

In the present time, the increasing use of social media has become an important part of people's lives. Social media has influenced people of almost all age groups; however, its impact can be particularly observed among teenagers and young people. The younger generation is exposed to a wide range of new information, ideas, and knowledge through social media. At the same time, the pressure associated with social media is also increasing.

This growing pressure can contribute to anxiety, anger, peer pressure, and the constant pressure

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to look perfect among teenagers and young people. Social media often creates an expectation that individuals should present a perfect appearance and a perfect life online. Because of this pressure, many young people may become increasingly comparative about their real lives and appearance.

By observing the lifestyle and appearance of others on social media, young people may wish to live a similar life and present themselves in a similar manner. Thus, social media can influence not only how people view others but also how they perceive and present themselves. The pressure to appear perfect on social media has therefore become an important social concern in the digital age.

CHANGING BEAUTY STANDARDS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In the digital age, changing beauty standards have become a significant and sensitive issue. Social media has greatly influenced the way people perceive themselves. Editing applications, filters, AI-generated videos, and influencer culture have contributed to the changing perception of beauty. Western beauty trends, such as glass skin, are also becoming popular and influencing people's perceptions of beauty.

Social media, filters, and editing applications have changed the definition of beauty by making digitally altered appearances appear natural and desirable. This has contributed to the promotion of filtered and edited photographs, unrealistic beauty standards, and the digitalisation of beauty.

Terms such as “Snapchat dysmorphia” have emerged in discussions about the influence of social media and filters on people's perceptions of their appearance. Influencer culture and beauty marketing have also played an important role in changing beauty standards among people.

SOCIAL MEDIA, PEER PRESSURE AND THE CULTURE OF COMPARISON

With the increasing use of social media, it has become an important part of people's lives. Nowadays, most people use social media and spend a considerable amount of time on it. People often create and present a particular image of themselves on social media. They may compare themselves with others and feel that their own lives are not as good or attractive as those presented online.

As this culture of comparison continues, people may begin to compare themselves with the whole society. They may feel the need to compete with others, even though what they see on social media may represent only an unreal or idealised part of people's lives. Social media often shows only selected and positive aspects of life, which can create the impression that everyone else is living a better or more successful life.

Likes, comments and followers on social media can also influence how people perceive their own worth and achievements. In this process, some people may forget their own happiness and become more concerned with social approval. This pressure is particularly relevant to teenagers and young people, who may feel the need to maintain a certain image in order to fit into society and social trends.¹

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Through the excessive use of social media, many children and young people are seriously affected by its consequences. However, in many cases, they may not recognise or accept these effects, or they may not want to tell anyone about them. They may also hesitate to talk about the anxiety and peer pressure they experience.

Today's generation faces considerable pressure through social media. Young people may feel the need to present themselves as perfect on digital platforms and to maintain a certain image. This pressure can have an impact on children's and young people's confidence and may contribute to anxiety and emotional pressure.

Excessive focus on appearance can also affect their studies and daily activities. Constant concern about appearance and unrealistic beauty standards may become a significant part of the lives of teenagers and young people. Overall, the increasing influence of social media can affect the daily lives and well-being of young people.

ADVERTISING, MISLEADING BEAUTY CLAIMS AND LEGAL PROTECTION

Whenever any beauty product, treatment, or related service is advertised, care should be taken to ensure that the advertisement is not misleading. Advertisements should provide truthful and substantiated information rather than creating unrealistic expectations among consumers.

¹ American Psychological Association, 'Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence' (2023) <<https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-u-se>> accessed 29 September 2026.

Influencers and advertisers should also avoid promoting beauty products or treatments through exaggerated or misleading claims, as such advertisements may influence consumers and create unrealistic expectations about their appearance.

Where advertisements contain misleading claims, the applicable legal and regulatory framework may intervene to protect consumers. In India, the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has issued the Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements, 2022. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), through its self-regulatory Code, also requires advertisements to be truthful and safeguards consumers against misleading representations and claims.²

INDIVIDUAL CHOICE, SELF-EXPRESSION AND THE NEED FOR BALANCE

There is no inherent problem with using filters, editing applications, beauty products or following influencers, as these may be matters of individual choice and self-expression. A person may choose to use them willingly, enjoy them, and feel comfortable and confident with their choices. However, a difference arises when such choices are made primarily because of the unrealistic lifestyle and appearance standards created by social media.

When individuals make these choices according to their own willingness and preferences, they may find enjoyment and satisfaction in them. However, when they feel compelled to follow social-media trends or unrealistic standards to gain social approval, they may instead experience anxiety, lack of confidence, peer pressure, and stress. In such circumstances, the activity may no longer represent genuine personal choice but may become a consequence of social pressure.

Therefore, in the digital age, it is important to maintain a balance between individual choice and the growing influence of social media. Social media should not determine how a person must look or live. Individual choices should remain based on personal preference rather than pressure to conform to unrealistic standards.

² Central Consumer Protection Authority, Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements, 2022

CONCLUSION

As we conclude this article, it can be observed that in the digital era, where people have become increasingly dependent on digital platforms for various purposes, social media plays a crucial role in society. It provides opportunities to learn, build connections, and communicate easily with others. At the same time, however, social media can also contribute to various forms of mental and emotional pressure, particularly through the expectation of presenting a perfect life and a perfect appearance.

Social media often encourages people to showcase only the positive and seemingly perfect aspects of their lives. This can create unrealistic expectations and increase the pressure to look or live perfectly. Therefore, while social media offers several opportunities for learning, connection, and self-expression, its influence should be approached with awareness and balance. Individual choices should not be determined solely by unrealistic standards created on digital platforms.