



Digital Platforms as a Source of Beauty Ideals among Young Women in District Faisalabad

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ABSTRACT

The digital space has become a crucial medium for information, communication and socialisation among young women. Beauty-related posts are everywhere on image-based platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and Facebook, and this exposure has profoundly shaped what it means for young women to be beautiful and attractive. This study focuses on the influence of digital platforms as a source of beauty ideals among young women in District Faisalabad. It looks at how often beauty-related content is seen, the impact of social media influencers and celebrities, and how digital beauty ideals shape the perception of physical beauty. A quantitative research design was used, and data were collected from young women in District Faisalabad through a structured questionnaire. The results are expected to show how digital media increasingly helps to create beauty standards and perceptions of appearance among young women. The research adds to the sociological understanding of how digital culture shapes beauty standards today.



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Introduction

Digital platforms have become a central part of today's social life and have a notable impact on how people communicate, interact, and build their identities. With the rise of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook, appearance and self-presentation have become critical parts of online interaction. Digital platforms differ from traditional media because users can not only view content but also create, alter and distribute images, and so

encounter far more appearance-related information and beauty standards than traditional media ever offered (Fioravanti et al., 2022). Young women are among the heaviest users of image-based social media. They connect with influencers, celebrities and friends on a regular basis, which exposes them to idealised looks, often centred on thin bodies, flawless skin, symmetrical faces and enviable lifestyles. The images shown are frequently manipulated with filters and editing software, creating unrealistic beauty standards that may be difficult to achieve in real life (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Social media sites are also designed to foster validation in the form of likes, comments, shares and followers. These features may become part of the appearance assessment process and can make physical attractiveness a significant element of self-esteem. Social Comparison Theory states that people evaluate themselves by comparing their characteristics with those of others (Verduyn et al., 2020). Because young women are constantly surrounded by carefully selected and edited images in digital environments, appearance comparison becomes a common occurrence. Previous studies indicate that such comparisons are linked to body dissatisfaction, decreased self-esteem, and appearance concerns (Jiotsa et al., 2021; Vuong et al., 2021).

In Pakistan, widespread smartphone use and internet connectivity have led to higher usage of digital platforms among young women. Beauty tips, fashion trends, and lifestyle content are important parts of social media, and online media often perpetuate beauty ideals that favour being fair, thin, and pretty. Digital platforms are consequently having a growing influence on how young women perceive beauty. Empirical studies that focus on this phenomenon in Faisalabad, however, are still limited. The purpose of this study is therefore to explore the role of digital platforms as a source of beauty ideals among young women in District Faisalabad.

Purpose of the Study

the purpose of this study is to find an exploration of the role of the digital platforms as a source of beauty ideals among the young women of District Faisalabad in order to determine which subgroups of the young women show the highest and lowest inclination towards beauty-related content from different digital platforms and its influence on their perceptions of beauty ideals..

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to sociological and media studies literature by examining how digital platforms function as powerful sources of beauty ideals among young women. The study also contributes to the limited body of Pakistani research on digital beauty culture, particularly in the context of Faisalabad. The findings will provide empirical evidence that can be used in future studies related to social media, body image, and youth development. Furthermore, the findings may contribute to national efforts related to Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3) and Gender Equality (SDG 5) by highlighting the impact of digital beauty standards on young women's psychological well-being.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the socio-economic profile of young social media users in District Faisalabad.
2. To examine the level of exposure of young women to beauty-related content from different digital platforms and its influence on their perceptions of beauty ideals.
3. To offer suggestions on how to foster positive body and healthy digital media consumption

Literature Review

Public understandings of beauty have long been shaped by mass media. Sociocultural accounts such as the tripartite influence model hold that media, peers and family transmit appearance ideals, which individuals internalise and then use as benchmarks for evaluating themselves (Vuong et al., 2021). Cultivation theory similarly argues that sustained exposure to repeated media images gradually shapes viewers' perceptions of social reality. Digital platforms intensify these processes. Unlike television or magazines, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok are interactive, personalised and always available, so users are at once audience, producer and evaluator of appearance-related content (Fioravanti et al., 2022). Influencers, whose popularity depends on carefully curated self-presentation, further blur the line between peers, celebrities and advertisers.

Social Comparison Theory is the most frequently used lens for explaining why such exposure matters. People evaluate themselves by comparing with others, and social media supplies an endless stream of comparison targets (Verduyn et al., 2020). Experimental and survey evidence indicates that exposure to appearance-focused content can worsen appearance-related mood and body dissatisfaction among young women, particularly those with a strong tendency to compare their appearance (Fioravanti et al., 2022; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Reviews of the wider evidence conclude that appearance comparison is a key mechanism linking social media use with body dissatisfaction (Jiotsa et al., 2021; Verduyn et al., 2020). Photo-based activities and appearance-focused engagement have also been reported to be more strongly associated with body image concerns than general internet use. Adolescent girls' selfie practices and peer comparison on social media have likewise been linked to how they judge their own attractiveness (Vuong et al., 2021).

A second strand of research concerns the content itself. Images on these platforms are frequently filtered and edited, presenting a standard that is often unattainable without digital alteration. Experimental studies show that adolescent girls and young women who view manipulated or idealised photos report lower body image than those who view unaltered versions (Fioravanti et al., 2022; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Time spent online has been associated with internalisation of the thin ideal and with body surveillance among adolescent girls (Vuong et al., 2021), and "fitspiration" imagery, although framed as healthy, can also lower body satisfaction (Fioravanti et al., 2022). Objectification theory offers an explanation: women who are repeatedly exposed to images that treat bodies as objects to be looked at learn to monitor their own appearance from an observer's perspective.

These processes are linked to self-esteem because social media builds in visible, quantified feedback in the form of likes, comments, shares and follower counts. Where appearance is central to self-worth, such feedback can make attractiveness a source of validation, and discrepancies between one's own appearance and idealised images can become a threat to global self-evaluation (Saiphoo et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020). Body image concerns are therefore typically treated as a proximal outcome of exposure, and lower self-esteem as a wider psychological consequence.

Beauty ideals are also culturally specific. In South Asian settings, the social value attached to lighter skin is well documented, and it shapes both media representations and everyday judgements of attractiveness; among women in Pakistan, colourism and self-rated skin tone have been shown to predict self-esteem (Sharif & Siddique, 2020). The introduction to the present study notes that online media in Pakistan frequently promote ideals of being fair, thin and pretty. It is plausible that in societies where appearance carries social and marital significance, the pressure created by digital beauty content is amplified, although this has been less thoroughly tested empirically. Rising smartphone and internet access has brought large numbers of Pakistani women into these image-centred spaces, yet locally grounded evidence, particularly from district-level and non-metropolitan settings such as Faisalabad, remains scarce.

The evidence is not uniformly negative. Effects reported in experimental and survey work are typically small to moderate, and they depend on individual differences such as trait appearance comparison, internalisation of ideals and media literacy (Fioravanti et al., 2022; Vuong et al., 2021). Users are not passive recipients: they choose what to follow, question what they see, and may use platforms for information and entertainment rather than self-evaluation. Research on body-positive content suggests that platform content can also challenge narrow ideals (Di Michele et al., 2023; Parcell et al., 2022). Much of the literature is also correlational and drawn from Western samples, which limits causal claims and cross-cultural generalisation (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

Several implications follow for the present study. First, digital platforms are plausibly an important source of beauty ideals for young women, both through regular exposure and through the comparison and feedback they enable. Second, exposure is likely to be related to body image concerns and self-esteem, although the strength of these links may differ from that found in Western research. Third, a respondent's own report of being "influenced" may understate subtler effects, since comparison and internalisation often operate without awareness. Finally, it remains unclear whether patterns of use vary by demographic characteristics such as residence and education, or whether platforms are used similarly across social groups. By combining descriptive evidence on exposure with tests of association among exposure, body image and self-esteem, this study addresses these gaps in the Faisalabad context.

H1: Greater exposure to digital beauty content is positively associated with body image concerns among young women.

H2: Greater exposure to digital beauty content is negatively associated with self-esteem.

H3: Greater body image concerns are negatively associated with self-esteem.

H4: There is a significant association between respondents' place of residence (urban/rural) and daily time spent on social media.

H5: There is a significant association between respondents' education level and the main purpose of their social media use.

Methodology

A methodology is a general plan or thinking behind the design, conduct and analysis of a research study.

Research Design

The study used a descriptive and analytical research design. Data were collected through a survey with a structured questionnaire covering respondents' exposure to beauty-related content, their social media usage patterns, and their perceptions of the beauty standards promoted through social media.

Participants

The research sample comprised female students aged 18 years and above at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF). The total number of respondents was 150, selected by simple random sampling from various departments in the university. All were regular users of at least one of the following digital platforms: Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook or YouTube.

Data Collection Methods

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect information on respondents' use of digital platforms, exposure to beauty-related information, preferred social media platforms, interactions with beauty influencers, and beauty ideals. It included statements measuring respondents' attitudes towards digital beauty standards on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarise the quantitative data gathered from the survey. The data were coded and analysed using SPSS software, and the results are presented in tables and interpreted in light of the objectives of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The purpose of the study was explained to all respondents, and their participation was completely voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were carefully maintained. Respondents were told that the information gathered would be used only for academic research, and all participants gave informed consent before data collection.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the 150 respondents that were included in the study are provided in the Table. The largest age group was 27–30 years (36.0%), followed by respondents aged 24–26 years (26.7%). As far as marital status, 40.0% of the respondents

were single, and 36.0% were married. Educationally, most of them had completed intermediate education (36.0%), and 26.7% had a master's degree or above.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–20 Years	24	16.0
	21–23 Years	32	21.3
	24–26 Years	40	26.7
	27–30 Years	54	36.0
Marital Status	Single	60	40.0
	Married	54	36.0
	Divorced	20	13.3
	Widow	16	10.7
Education	Up to Matric	32	21.3
	Intermediate	54	36.0
	Bachelor's	24	16.0
	Master's and Above	40	26.7
Occupation	Student	24	16.0
	Employed	40	26.7
	Self-Employed	54	36.0
	Housewife	32	21.3
Income	Below Rs. 50,000	24	16.0
	Rs. 50,000–70,000	40	26.7
	Rs. 70,000–100,000	32	21.3
	Above Rs. 100,000	54	36.0

Residence	Urban	95	63.3
	Rural	55	36.7
Family System	Nuclear	64	42.7
	Joint	54	36.0
	Extended	32	21.3

Note. f = frequency; % = percentage of total sample.

In terms of occupation, 36.0% were self-employed, 26.7% were employed, 21.3% were housewives and 16.0% were students. As for monthly family income, the largest group of respondents (36.0%) reported an income of more than Rs. 100,000. Most respondents were from urban areas (63.3%), and 36.7% were from rural areas. In terms of family structure, 42.7% lived in nuclear families, 36.0% in joint families and 21.3% in extended families.

This demographic profile suggests that the sample was diverse in socioeconomic and educational status, providing a broad base for examining the effect of digital platforms on body image perception and self-esteem.

Exposure to Digital Beauty Contents

The table shows respondents' attitudes towards the beauty-related content they have seen and interacted with on digital platforms. The majority of respondents (52.0%) agreed that they regularly see beauty-related content on social media, which means that such content is highly visible and is often seen by young women. Engagement with influencer content was moderate: only 26.7% said they follow beauty influencers or content creators, and 52.0% were neutral about them.

On the impact of digital beauty content, 37.3% of respondents disagreed that it affects their personal preferences, while 26.7% agreed and 36.0% were neutral. There was likewise varying disagreement with the statements that social media keeps people informed about beauty and fashion trends and that respondents actively seek beauty information online.

Table 2: Exposure to Digital Beauty Content

Statement	Agree f(%)	Neutral f(%)	Disagree f(%)
I regularly see beauty-related content on social media platforms.	78 (52.0)	32 (21.3)	40 (26.7)
I follow beauty influencers or content creators online.	40 (26.7)	78 (52.0)	32 (21.3)
Digital beauty content influences my personal preferences.	40 (26.7)	54 (36.0)	56 (37.3)
I spend a considerable amount of time viewing beauty-related content.	40 (26.7)	78 (52.0)	32 (21.3)
Social media keeps me updated about	40 (26.7)	54 (36.0)	56 (37.3)

beauty and fashion trends.			
I learn about skincare and makeup through digital platforms.	64 (42.7)	54 (36.0)	32 (21.3)
I actively search for beauty-related information online.	40 (26.7)	54 (36.0)	56 (37.3)
I trust beauty advice shared by influencers.	40 (26.7)	78 (52.0)	32 (21.3)
Advertisements on social media influence my beauty-related decisions.	40 (26.7)	32 (21.3)	78 (52.0)
I prefer social media over traditional media for beauty information.	40 (26.7)	56 (37.3)	54 (36.0)
I engage (like, comment, share) with beauty-related content online.	64 (42.7)	54 (36.0)	32 (21.3)

Note. Scale: 1 = Agree, 3 = Disagree. f = frequency; % = percentage of total sample (N = 150).

The findings also reveal that 42.7% of respondents said they get information about skin care and make-up from digital platforms, which indicates that social media is used as a source of education on skin care and make-up. Similarly, 42.7% said they actively like, comment on, and share beauty-related posts, indicating a relatively high level of engagement with such content.

When asked about their trust in the beauty advice given by influencers, over half of the respondents (52.0%) answered neutrally, which indicates mixed feelings about influencers' credibility. Likewise, most respondents (52.0%) disagreed that social media advertisements affect their beauty decision-making, which implies that they may not regard advertisements as a significant influence on their beauty choices.

Overall, the results suggest that beauty content is seen and readily available on digital platforms for young women. Respondents often rely on social media to find beauty or skincare information and interact with beauty-related content, but they seem wary of how influencers and advertisements affect their own tastes and purchasing decisions. From these findings, it can be inferred that digital platforms are mainly used to access information and entertainment, and do not directly influence beauty attitudes and behaviours.

Social Media Usage Pattern of the Respondents

The Table shows the pattern of social media use among the respondents. Asked how much time they spend on social media every day, 42.7% (64) reported spending less than 1 hour a day and 36.0% (54) spent 4-6 hours a day. Another 21.3% (32) used social media for 1-3 hours.

Table 3: Social Media Usage Pattern of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily Time Spent on Social Media	Less than 1 hour	64	42.7
	1–3 hours	32	21.3
	4–6 hours	54	36.0
Most Frequently Used Social Media platforms	Instagram	40	26.7
	TikTok	32	21.3
	Facebook	24	16.0
	Snapchat	54	36.0
Main Purpose for Using Social Media	Entertainment	24	16.0
	Information	54	36.0
	Social Interaction	40	26.7
	All of the Above	32	21.3
Frequency of Checking Social Media accounts	Rarely	40	26.7
	Sometimes	54	36.0
	Often	32	21.3
	Very Often	24	16.0
Total Respondents		150	100.0

As for the most used social media platform, 36.0% (54) reported using Snapchat, 26.7% (40) Instagram, 21.3% (32) TikTok and 16.0% (24) Facebook. On the main purpose of social media use, the highest percentage of respondents (54, 36.0%) reported using it to find information. Social interaction was cited by 26.7% (40) of respondents, and 21.3% (32) used it for all the listed purposes. The majority of respondents said their main purpose was entertainment (16.0% or 24).

As for checking social media accounts, 36.0% (54) of those who answered said they check their accounts sometimes, 26.7% (40) rarely, 21.3% (32) often and 16.0% (24) very often. In general, the results suggest that social media is widely used by the respondents and that they prefer Snapchat. The main motivation for using social media seems to be information seeking, and the majority of users check their accounts regularly.

Testing of Hypotheses: Socio-Demographic Correlates of Intention to Adopt

Table 2.3.4 presents chi-square tests examining associations between demographic variables and social media behavior. The first test evaluated whether residence (urban vs. rural) was associated with daily time spent on social media. Results yielded $\chi^2(2) = 0.094$, $p = .954$, indicating no statistically significant association. This suggests that urban and rural women spend comparable amounts of time on social media platforms. The second test examined the relationship between education level and the primary purpose of social media use. The result was $\chi^2(9) = 8.547$, $p = .480$, also non-significant, indicating that women across all

educational levels use social media for similar purposes. These findings suggest that demographic factors such as residence and education do not substantially differentiate social media usage patterns among the respondents.

Chi-Square Test Results: Demographic Variables and Social Media Patterns

Table 4: Test A: Residence × Daily Time Spent on Social Media

	Less than 1 hr	1–3 hrs	4–6 hrs	Total
Urban	40	21	34	95
Rural	24	11	20	55
Total	64	32	54	150

Table 5: Test B: Education Level × Main Purpose of Social Media Use

	Entertainment	Information	Social Interaction	All of Above	Total
Up to Matric	8	12	8	4	32
Intermediate	10	18	14	12	54
Bachelor's	4	8	8	4	24
Master's+	2	16	10	12	40

Table 6: Summary of Chi-square Test

Variable	Chi-square	df	p-value	Decision
Residence × Time Spent	0.094	2	0.954	Not Supported
Education × Purpose of SM Use	8.547	9	0.480	Not Supported

Note. * $p < .05$ (chi-square test of association). Gamma (λ) is the Goodman-Kruskal measure of ordinal association, tested against the null of no association; its p value is reported in the final column. (N = 120).

Digital Beauty Content Exposure, Body Image, and Self-Esteem

Table 7: Pearson Correlation: Digital Beauty Content Exposure, Body Image, and

Variables	r	p-value	Direction	Significance
Digital Exposure → Body Image	0.633	0.000	Positive	Significant*
Digital Exposure → Self-Esteem	-0.393	0.000	Negative	Significant*
Body Image → Self-Esteem	-0.171	0.037	Negative	Significant*

Self-Esteem

Table 7 presents Pearson correlation results examining relationships between digital beauty content exposure, body image perception, and self-esteem. A strong positive correlation was found between digital beauty content exposure and body image perception ($r = 0.633$, $p < .001$), indicating that greater exposure to digital beauty content is significantly associated with heightened body image concerns. A moderate negative correlation was observed between digital beauty content exposure and self-esteem ($r = -0.393$, $p < .001$), suggesting that increased exposure is linked to lower self-esteem levels among respondents. Additionally, a weak but statistically significant negative correlation was found between body image perception and self-esteem ($r = -0.171$, $p = .037$), confirming that negative body image is associated with reduced self-esteem. Collectively, these findings support the thesis argument that digital platforms significantly influence body image and self-esteem in young women.

Discussion

The results show that digital platforms are seen as an important source of beauty ideals for young women. Regularly consuming content about beauty, fashion, influencers and celebrity lifestyles left respondents feeling more aware of the modern beauty ideals they saw on social media.

Moreover, digital platforms give young women a space to watch, contrast, and assess their bodies in comparison with others. Likes, comments, shares and visual content provide social feedback that shapes people's conceptions of attractiveness and beauty. The results indicate that digital platforms are influential in shaping beauty ideals through the way they present particular standards of appearance and encourage appearance comparison.

The results also show that exposure to beauty-related content is related to the formation of beauty perceptions among young women, suggesting that frequent exposure is linked to the development of those perceptions. Digital platforms create virtual environments in which beauty norms are continually created, reinforced and circulated. As a result, such sites have a significant impact on young women's thoughts about beauty, their perception of their own looks, and their view of beauty in the digital era.

Conclusion

This study examined digital platforms as a source of beauty ideals among young women in District Faisalabad. The findings show that beauty-related content is highly visible in respondents' online lives: just over half reported seeing it regularly, and around 43% learn about skincare and makeup through digital platforms and engage with such posts by liking, commenting or sharing. Social media use was widespread and mainly information-oriented, with Snapchat and Instagram the most-used platforms. At the same time, respondents expressed cautious or neutral attitudes towards influencers and largely denied that advertisements shape their beauty decisions.

Despite this self-reported scepticism, the correlational results indicate that digital beauty exposure is meaningfully connected to how young women see themselves. Exposure showed a strong positive association with body image concerns ($r = 0.633$) and a moderate negative association with self-esteem ($r = -0.393$), while body image concerns were weakly but significantly related to lower self-esteem ($r = -0.171$). The chi-square tests found no significant differences in time spent on social media by residence, nor in purpose of use by education, suggesting that exposure to these platforms is fairly uniform across urban and rural, and more and less educated, women. Beauty ideals circulated online therefore appear to reach young women broadly rather than a narrow subgroup.

Taken together, the results suggest that the influence of digital platforms may operate less through conscious persuasion by influencers or advertisers than through routine exposure, comparison and internalised standards of appearance. This is consistent with Social Comparison Theory and with earlier research linking appearance-focused social media use to body dissatisfaction (Jiotsa et al., 2021; Verduyn et al., 2020). Because the design is cross-sectional, however, these findings show association and not causation, and should be interpreted as such (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

The results point to practical directions in line with the study's third objective. Universities, schools and families can promote digital media literacy that helps young women recognise filtered and edited images and the commercial motives behind curated content. Counselling services can incorporate discussions of body image and online comparison. Content creators and platforms can be encouraged to label edited images and to give visibility to diverse and realistic representations of beauty (Harriger et al., 2023; Parcell et al., 2022). Such steps support Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5 by protecting psychological well-being and challenging narrow gender-based appearance norms.

Future research should use longitudinal or experimental designs, include more varied samples across districts and age groups, and examine specific content types and platform features. Overall, the study contributes locally grounded evidence that digital platforms are an important, though not always consciously acknowledged, part of how young women in Faisalabad come to define beauty.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the cross-sectional, correlational design means that no causal direction can be established (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Women with lower self-esteem or greater body concerns may seek out or engage more with beauty content, rather than exposure producing those outcomes. Other variables, such as personality, prior body dissatisfaction, peer and family influences, and offline media use, were not controlled.

Second, the sample of 150 women was drawn from a single institution in one district. This limits generalisability to young women elsewhere in Faisalabad, Punjab or Pakistan. The sample profile also includes married, divorced, widowed and non-student respondents, which is not fully consistent with the description of participants as university students. Clarifying the sampling frame would help readers judge to whom the results apply.

Third, all data were self-reported. Respondents may have under- or over-reported their exposure and influence, and social desirability may have led some to downplay the effect of influencers and advertisements. Self-reports also cannot capture the unconscious comparison processes that theory suggests are important.

Fourth, measurement was limited. Exposure, body image and self-esteem were assessed through questionnaire items, and the reliability and validity of these scales were not reported. Some items used a compressed agree–neutral–disagree format that reduces sensitivity to variation. The study also did not distinguish between types of beauty content (for example, skincare information versus idealised body images) or between platforms.

Finally, the statistical analysis was largely descriptive, with chi-square and Pearson tests. Some chi-square cells had small expected counts, which weakens the reliability of those tests, and multivariate models were not used to examine independent effects or moderators. Sample size notations across tables (N = 150 and N = 120) should also be reconciled. Future studies should address these points with validated scales, larger and more diverse samples, and longitudinal or experimental designs.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles for research with human participants were followed throughout the study. Because body image and self-esteem are sensitive topics, participants were first informed of the study's purpose, the nature of the questions and the intended academic use of the data. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were told that they could decline any question or withdraw at any time without penalty. Written or verbal informed consent was obtained from every participant before data collection began, and only women aged 18 years and above were included.

Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. No names, contact details or other identifying information were collected, and responses were coded numerically for analysis in SPSS. Data were stored securely, accessible only to the research team, and reported only in aggregate form so that no individual respondent could be identified. The information gathered was used solely for academic research purposes.

Given the potential for questions about appearance to cause discomfort, the researchers ensured that the questionnaire was worded neutrally and respectfully, and participants were free to stop at any point. Findings were interpreted and presented without stigmatising any group of women or promoting particular appearance standards.

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