

A study to analyse social pressure on female youth for using new media handles in Guwahati

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Abstract

Guwahati has huge populace of youths who use New Media Handles. The youth of today's generation have been living their life with New Media or Social Media Platforms, which has directed them to the habit of using Social Media throughout their life. In this study, the researcher will be only talking about the female youth and how their consumption of social media handles impact or influence them in negative or positive ways. The researcher in this study tries to find out the social pressures on the young female youths and the ways those females deal with the pressures. We all know that our society has set an unattainable standard of beauty for any ordinary female who is fat and coloured and short heightened and the list goes on. Whereas when these ordinary females are exposed to such pictures with the same beauty in their social networking feeds by fashion bloggers, celebrities and supermodels, the young females start feeling pressured of looking just like them, flawless and perfect. Hence such exposure can cause a lot of other pressures. In this study, the researcher analyses the social media pressures on female youth with the aspect of beauty and the ways they deal with it.

Keywords: Guwahati, Populace, generation, supermodels

1. Introduction

Technology has changed the way we interact with people. We are in the era where social media is the only new way to connect themselves and share their ideas, talents, hopes, dreams, feelings and almost every thinking with others, also known as The Digital Era. Social Networking Sites are one of the most essential and popular way to interact for the millennial youth. "Many of the habits that have recently become permeated by social media platforms used to be informal and ephemeral manifestations of social life. Talking to friends, exchanging gossip, showing holiday pictures, scribbling notes, checking on a friend's well-being, or watching a neighbour's home video used to be casual, evanescent (speech) acts, commonly shared only with selected individuals. A major change is that through social media, these casual speech acts have turned into formalized inscriptions, which, once embedded in the larger economy of wider publics, take on a different value. Utterances previously expressed offhandedly are now released into a public domain where they can have far-reaching and long-lasting effects. Social media platforms have unquestionably altered the nature of private and public communication." (Dijck, 2013) [9]. This enhanced technology through which Social Media happened, and made a lot of pressure on young females in different aspects.

1.1 Social Media

The word social media has been popular for some time now. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein describe social media as "a crowd of web-built apps that create an ideology based on the foundation of mechanics of Web 2.0 and allowing the formation and trade in client created substance. (Andreas Kaplan, 2010) [4]. Social media is an attentive piece of the new age society. The best way to define social media will be to separate it from newspapers and the audio-

visual medium of television or radio. It is a group of online communication channels devoted to information, connection, substance, and coordinated effort. Sites and applications committed to discussions, micro-blogging, social system administration, social bookmarking, social 'curation' and wikis are among the distinctive social media. Social media has been advancing rapidly, offering new and significant approaches to individuals around the globe. Presently, social media is developing into an indispensable part of our daily lives. The social system administration is presently a genuine worldwide sensation. (Qureshi, 2016) [23]

Social media includes web-based and mobile technologies used to turn communication into interactive dialogue between organizations, communities, and individuals. Social media is ubiquitously accessible and enabled by scalable communication techniques. Technologies include blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music sharing, crowd sourcing and voice over IP, to name a few. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms. Social media started with the basic telecommunication system in the late 1950's. It was further developed in 1979 with the name of BBS or the electronic Bulletin Board System by Ward Christensen. These Bulletin Board Systems were small servers powered from a personal computer attached to a telephone modem, where one person could dial in and get access. "Later Usenet was established in 1980. It was the most widely used internet discussion system. Users here could read and post messages to one or more categories, known as newsgroups. Usenet resembled for BBS in many respects and is the precursor to the various internet forums being used today." (Kanwar, 2012) [14] The first commercial online services to go live in the year 1979 were CompuServe and The Source, which were owned

by large corporate companies. CompuServe was one of the ways for true social interaction before the internet became the new normal. These online services allowed their users to share files and send and receive text messages or communicate with friends, living kilometres away, instantly through messages, via email. Next it was America Online (AOL) which was founded in 1983 and had also played a very important role in the success of social media.

Although the internet had existed as a network since the late 1960's, the World Wide Web (WWW) became publicly available only on 6th August 1991, (Kanwar, 2012)^[14] when Tim Berners-Lee managed to connect hypertext technology to the Internet, formed the basis of a new type of networked communication. Weblogs, list-servers, and e-mail services helped form online communities or support offline groups. Until the turn of the millennium, networked media were mostly generic services that you could join or actively utilize to build groups, but the service itself would not automatically connect you to others. With the advent of Web 2.0, shortly after the turn of the millennium, online services shifted from offering channels for networked communication to becoming interactive, two-way vehicles for networked sociality (Castells 2007; Manovich 2009). Later the internet relay chat (IRC) was created in August 1983, became rapidly popular among the masses. Since then people started using the hashtags (#) and the at-signs (@) and began "tweeting" their real time status updates, which is now a popular trend on the micro blogging site Twitter. (Kanwar, 2012)^[14]

The IRC was most likely the origin to the concept of the Instant Messaging System called ICQ which was created by four Israeli technologists in the year 1996 for the desktop computers. This technology was quickly bought over by the AOL, which became a mainstream hit with the people as the IM technology helped develop the emotional icons of the social media with the Avatars, which are expressive images used to represent oneself. This is when the abbreviations (A/S/L – Age/Sex/Location) and the emoticons became the common and popular "computer lingo" (language used by the people to express themselves on computers). Much later, the instant messenger feature got incorporated into various email clients like MSN Hotmail, Yahoo, Gmail, etc so that it became easier to chat with the friends on the contact list, in real time (Kanwar, 2012)^[14].

The next huge trend was Napster which was released in June 1999. It made music available for free of cost that could be easily downloaded in the MP3 format. Napster's place was soon replaced by other applications like BitTorrent technology, which offered a legal way to share files. BitTorrent is still the most well-known software to download files of any kind (Kanwar, 2012)^[14] (Sundheim, 2011)^[27].

At first, *Classmate.com*, which was founded in 1995, a social networking site connected people to their long-lost school buddies and create a virtual reunion, which became very successful in the US. Another platform called *SixDegrees.com* came up in the year 1997. This site allowed users to create and list their profiles, invite friends, provide a list of friends, and then contact them, also create groups.

Then in 2002 after the launch of a site called *Friendster* was when social networking hit the internet and became what it is today. The site features shared traits like one of an online dating site even though it isn't about dating.

A year later, in 2003, other social networking sites like LinkedIn, My Space, and Facebook were introduced. The digital platform which was started with simple email messages has now grown into a universe of its own with social networking sites like Google+, Reddit, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Vine, Telegram, and TikTok attracting millions of Indians to involve it in their daily life activity. Orkut is one of the first huge social media websites with a user share of 64 percent in India was owned by Google

Later, the internet was much handier as the data packs got relatively inexpensive and hence Indians are taking up the digital lifestyle. Indian customers have escaped the desktop generation and moved directly to smartphones, which is progressively turning into the primary screen. In 2020, WhatsApp and TikTok mobile apps had the highest downloads from India throughout the world. A huge number of internet users are millennials and gen Z in India.

The social networking websites have evolved as a combination of personalized media experience, within social context of participation. The practices that differentiate social networking sites from other types of computer-mediated communication are uses of profiles, friends and comments or testimonials—profiles are publicly viewed, friends are publicly articulated, and comments are publicly visible (Boyd, 2007) (Ahmad, 2011)^[2]

India has made significant strides in communication and networking. India has been quick in embracing technological advancements in the arena of communications, both at the infrastructural and social level. It has witnessed the use of pigeons, post office, newspapers, telephones, radio, TV, and now; computers and SNSs. (Mitra, 2016)^[20] As the Internet becomes crucial for young Indians to excel in education and socialise, it's not surprising to see an increase in this category of users. Moreover, the influx of several e-commerce portals has attracted throngs of women across ages to the Internet. Sites like Flipkart, Amazon, Myntra, Zivame, Pepperfry, Urban Ladder, Snapdeal & etc. have been big trend setters. (Ajiz, 2014)

1.2. Beauty

Beauty has no single definition. It is a nuanced concept with various implied meanings and very real effects for those who do not conform to its standards. Beauty comes in different ways and the perception of beauty has been changing throughout history, leaving young women in continuous search for the ideal. The trends of beauty have been continuously changing and it can be seen in various media, like sculptures in the pre-camera age, to commercial advertisements and now the images in social media platforms. Beauty ideals are the women who are always changing and making sure that not everyone can be beautiful. Continuous exposure to social media platforms is the way to expecting characteristics like body dissatisfaction, eating disorder, and thin body ideals, especially among adolescent girls. Most of the analysis by different research authors have found that higher exposure to social media consumption has resulted in higher negative body image, self-dissatisfaction, and inappropriate eating behaviours.

The modern dated and broadly consented specification is majorly interpreted through white models who are not representative of ethnic diversity and minority communities.

Today's beauty ideal which is believed and raised by Western Media or Social Media is a woman who is light or white-skinned, extremely tall and thin, with a small waist, flat stomach, narrow hips, long legs, large breasts, and toned muscles. When these models upload images of themselves, in various Social Media platforms, showing off their perfect body assets, they also put a lot of effort on their makeups and clothes to look like the perfect ideal in the eyes of the other ordinary young female audiences, making them feel negative about their body.

The companies that allow the participation of minority women in media industries, but these women are comparatively lighter skinned, with light brown or blond hair that is long and straight. Even celebrities like Beyoncé, Halle Berry, Rihanna, Priyanka Chopra, and several other women of colour, are also not exempted from the pressure to keep themselves to the narrow-minded definition of beauty. They have also been whitewashed and anglicized, with lighter colours, straighter hair, lighter makeup, coloured contacts, and often shrinking figures in many films, shows, and other public gatherings. (Ahuja, 2019) ^[3]

The average body size of women depicted in media since ancient history has been gradually getting smaller. Many female celebrities or beauty ideals had to meet the medical way of diagnosed with severe eating disorders. Many of them also have had to do surgeries just to fit the ideal beauty icon in the fashion industry. Thinness is always encouraged and awarded for young women and mostly these are the women who are presented on social media and various public shows. The obese young females in different places have always been feeling left out or teased among their friends and family.

With the continuous increase in the use of technology and digital modification techniques, the ideal beauty icon is changing from reality as photoshopping and editing images are getting easier to do. Appealing models or any beauty ideal are positioned to be natural and effortless but the truth is that the natural look is itself a fake, which is created by digital enhancements. Social media has pushed people to an extent where they sacrifice their personal identity i.e., "Genetic Reality" just to look like someone's ideal beauty i.e. "Artificial Beauty". Genetic Reality is the most regular and ordinary one where young women are not genetically inclined to resemble the flawless models that appear in social media platforms. Whereas Artificial Beauty is the preferred look that is made out or dependent on various factors like lighting, make-up, and airbrushing. All of these when put together creates an unattainable standard for ordinary young women.

1.3. Youth

Youth being enthusiastic, vibrant, innovative and dynamic in nature is the most important section of the population. Youth shows strong passion, motivation and will power which also make them the most valuable human resource for promoting economic, cultural, and political development of a nation.

Conventionally, period from adolescence to middle age is termed as youth. The National Youth Policy initially (in 2003) defined the youth as in the age group 13-35. However, the Government of India, National Youth Policy, 2014 modified it and defined 'youth' as persons in the age group of 15-29 years. (Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, 2017). In this research I have taken the age

group of 18-29 as youth in order to show the impact of social media on them.

Youth constitute almost a third of the world's population. India today has one of the largest populations of young and skilled professionals. The youth of today's era has been and will continue to live their life with the use of social media. This continuous use of social media has impacted a youth in various ways. It has led them to think about their own beauty, the way they dress or talk, the people they are friends with and many more. It has also caused them to isolate themselves from their families and friends.

Youth, whether male or female are known for their modern dressing pattern and craze for fashions. Fashion and beauty is a huge influence of youth culture, especially in relation to young people's attitudes and behaviours. Youth also face peer pressure both positive and negative. At this age involvement with peers increases and can offer a sense of physical, emotional and social comfort. Being part of a peer group can be a source of acceptance, affection and a place for experimentation. For e.g. to be a part of some peer culture means conforming to certain unwritten rules such as dress code. Thus, youth culture shapes young people's lives. (Bindya. M. Yohannan, 2013) ^[5]

1.4. Impact of Social Media on Young Women

Social Media has been super innovative over the last decade. It has promoted diversity and created a space to show different perceptions of beauty. Social media's principal message of "you do you" has been forgotten by today's generation as capitalist forces and sociocultural norms are pushing everyone to 'look the same' (Ahuja, 2019) ^[3]. Being the ideal beauty icon of social media has pushed the ordinary young women to put on artificial makeup. The significance of social media in our lives is rapidly growing day by day, also making its impact globally and influencing the situations. Expectedly, its impact on individuals, especially youth or also called Gen Z, is inevitable.

The female young people nowadays feel that social media and its sites have become a "necessity". It has now become more of "I Need" and not of "I Want" because of their easy accessibility, the connection they provide, the information they provide, and all the other things they wish to do or see or try, can watch in these social media platforms and also learn the way to do things.

When the other ordinary female youths cannot match the unrealistic standards of beauty, it negatively affects her self-esteem and her perception of her body. Many of the young girls who see and observe images of bloggers or celebrities or models with lavish lifestyles, perfect bodies, and pretty faces in social media platforms, start judging themselves and get dissatisfied with their own body and self-esteem. Continued viewing of images and videos on social media can lead them to extreme health problems. It can also affect youths' mental and physical health. The other risk to the youth's or viewer's body image is the lack of self-portrayal on the platform in terms of race, body size, sexuality, and able-bodiedness. These girls then compare themselves, their body and their life, with the so-called "ideals". Thinking and wanting to be like bloggers and celebrities can lead to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, lack of sleep, uneasiness, misery, and mental issues.

The female beauty is largely considered attractive when the girl has physical features like white, young, thin, pretty,

perfect sizes of nose and lips, large-breasted, long-legged, non-disabled body, etc. On top of it, they become the stars of social media by applying tons of makeups and expensive clothes, besides it they even apply beauty filters and editing apps. Seeing these attractive ideals, the young girls feel pressure to look like them and hence they try to copy them in every way. The youths even buy makeup and expensive dresses just to impress their friends and family. The girls who are black tend to buy makeups that would make them fair and expensive stuff, which they think will make them look good. And the young fair looking girls who are fat start dieting and not eating things which will help them get fit and vice versa. The most important point is that because of this pressure to look beautiful, the young girls lose themselves.

1.5. Pressure of Social Media on Young Women to Look Beautiful

The media can cause body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and disordered eating. When girls compare their bodies to what is seen in the media, it increases their chance of having a poor body image. Research has shown that media is negatively associated with self-esteem, meaning that the more a girl views the media the greater chance she will have a lower self-esteem. As for disordered eating, research has shown that constant exposure to unhealthy messages about body image is related to disordered eating behaviours, such as restricting food, bingeing, and purging. When young girls see these unhealthy messages, such as the need to have a thigh gap or flat stomach, it can increase their chance of developing eating disorder behaviours in order to obtain these body types.

Now that adolescents have easy access to seeing celebrities on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, the pressures have grown. Young girls are constantly being subjected to unattainable standards of beauty and the media does a poor job at defining what a 'normal girl' looks like. Female celebrities are constantly photoshopped to perfect their bodies by clearing any flaws in their skin and editing their body parts, such as making their waist thinner and their breasts larger. It is important for young girls to seek out body positive ideals so that they understand that beauty is being yourself and accepting yourself. (Davis, 2016)^[7]

Research Objectives

1. To find the engagement of female youth in social media.
2. To identify the pressure involved in female youth when they are handling social media handles.
3. To identify the strategy used by female youth to deal with the pressure of social media.
4. To see if social media is changing the behaviour of female youth in Guwahati.

Research Questions

1. Are female youth under any pressure when they are using social media handles?
2. Does exposure of the images uploaded in social media platforms by bloggers and celebrities leaves the female youth to think and change about their body?
3. Is Social Media handles influencing the real life of female youth?

4. Would female youth decrease the consumption of Social Media in order to keep themselves healthy and not sacrifice their "Genetic Beauty"?

Methodology

To complete this study, the researcher has chosen both primary and secondary methods. Both the methods will be effective in completing the study. The researcher studied various Secondary data which discusses about the new media handles or platforms and its various social pressures on the Indian female youth. The researcher used the primary approach conducting a survey on female youths of Guwahati to collect the results directly from the respondents by the Questionnaire Method. This study is based only on the quantitative method of data collection to find out the social pressure on young females of Guwahati.

To collect data from respondents, the researcher applied questionnaire. Questionnaire was formulated on Google forms so that it could be simply distributed online. The questionnaire is structured and sticks to a closed-ended question pattern.

The sampling frame in this study is all the female youth in Guwahati who come under the age group of 18-29 years. The researcher has taken a sample size of 100 respondents who belong to the age group of 18-29 years. The youths are the major consumers of social media, and that is why it affects them the most. So, to find out about the social pressure of the youths, I have taken the age group of 18-29 years, because the people feel young in these ages.

To select respondents for the questionnaire, both convenience and snowball sampling are done for the study as it would help in getting a greater number of respondents. The link of the questionnaire was distributed on mainly two of the social media platforms i.e. Instagram and WhatsApp. The study made use of survey method in the form of questionnaire, distributed to the female youth, was created to gather the primary data in the form of a feedback on the topic and to get their sights regarding what and how much pressure does social media puts on them and how do they deal with the pressure.

Analysis

The researcher has collected 100 responses from the female youth of Guwahati who belonged to the age group of 18-29. As per the results 45 percent, which is the largest percentage of the youth belonged to the age group of 21-23. Almost all of them were students. Now, out of 100, 96 of them were regular users of social media and Instagram was the most used social media site among the respondents.

Given the results or responses only 30 percent of the youth out of 100, feels pressurised while using social media handles. The 30 of them may go through many pressures at a time. These female youths mostly feel the pressure to upload pictures and videos which makes them look flawless. The others are the pressure to look good, the pressure to get likes and followers on their uploaded posts and their accounts respectively, the pressure to be fashionable and to change their physical appearance after the consumption of social media. Few of them also feel inferiority complex and has the fear of missing out among their friends and families.

The researcher also identified a few of the ways to fight out these social media pressures they deal with every day.

Everyone has a different strategy to deal with the problems that the society or social media gives us. 50 percent of my respondents always remind themselves that no is perfect or always positive. This can help in calming ourselves which would keep us away from any health problems. The other 37 percent limits their social media consumption, 21 percent cut themselves off completely from social media and the rest of the respondents' deals by talking to friends and families, turning off notifications of all their social media apps, unfollowing certain accounts or people, and also by only uploading pictures and not scrolling through their feeds.

To say that social media is changing the lives and behaviour of everyone around the world won't be wrong. So, after evaluating the responses, I do believe that social media is changing the behaviour of female youth in Guwahati. The change in behaviour can be seen when they are talking to someone in a virtual world. 44 percent of my respondents' behaviour with people is different in the virtual world and 50 percent of my respondents' purchasing behaviour is influenced by social media. This wasn't all like it before social media came into our lives. Then people weren't influenced by strangers who used to show them as beauty icons. Many other changes have been developed after the invention of social media.

Are female youth under any pressure when they are using social media handles? Yes, they are. They are under many pressures which they go through the time they use social media and after that. They want to be like those beauty ideals or achieve the unattainable beauty standard which the society and the world have set for. For instance, being thin with perfect sizes is one of the greatest achievements of an ordinary girl who is fat. The female youths who follow the supermodels and celebrities or the bloggers have always wanted to be like them, having the perfect body with flawless skins and super flawless pictures. Hence, they start having diet foods which can also lead to eating disorders, body dissatisfaction, and other physical and mental health problems.

Exposure of the images uploaded in social media platforms by bloggers and celebrities leave the female youth to think and change about their bodies. Many of the past research have also proved it with their surveys and research that exposure of bloggers and celebrities may lead a lot of women to change their physical appearance. According to the results, 82 percent of my respondents follow celebrities and fashion bloggers, and 64 percent out of 100 are influenced by these celebrities and fashion bloggers. Hence social media is also influencing the real lives of female youth.

“Genetic Reality” also known as genetic beauty, just to look like someone's ideal beauty i.e. “Artificial Beauty”. Genetic Reality is the most regular and ordinary one where young woman are not genetically inclined to resemble the flawless models that appear in social media platforms. Whereas Artificial Beauty is the preferred look that is made out or dependent on various factors like lighting, make-up, and airbrushing. All of these when put together creates an unattainable standard for ordinary young women. So, when analysed the responses 94 out of 100 said that they would decrease the consumptions of Social Media to keep themselves healthy and not sacrifice their “Genetic Beauty”

Conclusion

The central purpose of this study was to find out the social Media pressure which the Indian female youth of Guwahati goes through and the ways they deal with it. The overall research is supported by several theories – Uses and Gratification Theory, Agenda Setting Theory, and Magic Bullet Theory (Hypodermic Needle Theory). The study meant to answer four research questions. (i) Are female youth under any pressure when they are using social media handles? (ii) Does exposure of the images uploaded in social media platforms by bloggers and celebrities leave the female youth to think and change about their body? (iii) Is Social Media handles influencing the real-life of female youth? (iv) Would female youth decrease the consumption of Social Media in order to keep themselves healthy and not sacrifice their “Genetic Beauty”?

The results of the quantitative survey showed that in Guwahati only a smaller percentage of youths were under pressure when they were using social media. There were more than half of my respondents who were influenced by the uploads of fashion bloggers and celebrities. As the youths are influenced by the exposure of uploaded pictures on social media platforms, it will then lead to gradually influence the real life of the youths as well. Genetic beauty is the real beauty or can be said as the real you who has not to be airbrushed. The findings delighted me when more than 90 percent of my respondents agreed to decrease the consumption of social media sites to keep themselves healthy and not sacrifice their “Genetic Beauty”.

The uploaded posts of fashion bloggers or mini-celebrities and celebrities publicise a homogenous and Eurocentric ideal of beauty, which is believed attractive by society and audiences at large. By establishing flawless skin, silky hair, and thin bodies, tall, as the norm, they manage to lower the self-esteem of females who don't have the same physical qualities, and thus don't consider themselves ‘beautiful’. “While it is true that media and society have been having this impact on women for countless years, it is the frequency and ease of accessing social media that make this issue highly relevant today. Through a simple click on their phone, users now have access to new media at an unprecedented rate.” (Ahuja, 2019)^[3]

Social media filters, beauty images, etc which look like a perfect beauty picture can affect countless female youth's self-esteem, confidence, how they see themselves, and could even lead to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Many of my respondents have revealed the pressure they go through while using social media. They feel pressured to look flawless in the pictures they post and also in real life. All the females just want to have the same kind of body which is made of perfect sizes and flawless skin. We live in a society that has high beauty standards and are difficult for any ordinary women to achieve and going on social media should not make them feel worse about their appearance. Spreading awareness about the genetic reality is one way we can stop setting a standard of beauty in society. No other person and their pictures should tell us that we are not beautiful enough. No one should feel envy or pressurised while using social media or seeing another person's beauty and should be happy with what and how we are. To conclude, the youths should celebrate their real self and be confident about being what they are instead of wanting to be like someone else.

Recommendations

- The researcher would suggest the female youths to not compare and feel pressured when exposed to pictures on social media, because no one is perfect, not even the fashion bloggers or celebrities, even if they show themselves to be.
- The youths should celebrate their Genetic Reality instead of wanting an Artificial Beauty because all types of skin and sizes are ideal.
- The researcher would like to suggest Schools and Universities to educate the upcoming youth about social media and their impact and the ways to deal with it.
- The fashion marketers and brands should stop motivating the society's standard of beauty which is not achievable by the ordinary youths and come up with no standard of beauty where every person's beauty would be enough for them.

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