Excessive Editing of Selfies on Social Media: The Illusion of Sustainability in Mental Health among Female Adolescents

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Abstract

The advent of social media has transformed how female adolescents perceive and present themselves, leading many to engage in excessive editing of their selfies. This practice is often seen as a means to boost their mental well-being by enhancing their self-image. However, this reliance on edited images may create a false sense of sustainability regarding their mental health. This study aims to explore the relationship between excessive selfie editing on social media and appearance-related anxiety in female adolescents. Employing a quantitative descriptive correlational design, the research involved 150 high school students, selected through a snowball sampling method, to examine the connection between their photo editing behaviors and psychological outcomes. Two validated instruments were utilized for data collection: the Selfie Editing Behavior Scale and the Appearance Anxiety Scale. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between the frequency of selfie editing and the levels of appearance anxiety experienced by the participants. These findings suggest that while adolescents may seek satisfaction through image enhancement, such practices can exacerbate insecurities and adversely affect their mental health over time.

Keywords: *Social Media, Self-Perception, Selfie Enhancement, Appearance Anxiety, Female Adolescents.*

Introduction

Literature Review

The growing influence of social media in the lives of female adolescents has fundamentally changed how they view themselves and their bodies (McLean el al., 2015). As visual-centric platforms become essential for self-expression and validation, the practices of photo editing and enhancement have become common means for creating an idealized self-image (Fastoso et al., 2021). However, this trend raises significant concerns about the psychological consequences of such practices, particularly regarding appearance-related anxiety and self-esteem. With the increasing reliance on social media for personal validation, the psychological ramifications of photo enhancement practices are becoming more pronounced (Tiggemann et. al., 2020). Many female adolescents believe that improving their images results in a more positive self-image, leading to a fleeting sense of confidence. Yet, this superficial confidence often conceals deeper insecurities and anxiety about their appearance. This intricate relationship between self-presentation and self-perception is particularly troubling in a time when social media sets the benchmarks for beauty standards (Boursier et al., 2020). For female adolescents, the combination of photo editing tools and social comparison dynamics has notably reshaped how they navigate self-image, beauty, and social validation in the digital landscape. Furthermore, understanding this dynamic is crucial for developing effective interventions that promote healthier self-image practices and mental well-being, fostering resilience in an environment dominated by unrealistic beauty ideals (Ozimek et al., 2023).

The pervasive influence of visually driven content on social media significantly intensifies the pressure on adolescents, particularly young women, to conform to specific beauty ideals (Jarman et al., 2024). As these platforms become central to self-expression and validation, the widespread use of filters and editing applications allows users to craft idealized and often distorted representations of their bodies. This practice can have detrimental effects on self-esteem and mental health, contributing to a distorted sense of self-worth (Thai et al., 2021). Unattainable images frequently encountered on social media are linked to a range of body image disorders, including appearance anxiety, eating disorders, and depression, particularly among adolescent girls who are at a critical stage of developing their self-identity. Research indicates that individuals

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who heavily engage with social media platforms frequently report higher levels of body dissatisfaction, primarily stemming from social comparisons made with peers and celebrities (Perloff, 2014; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Tylka et al., 2023). For female adolescents, these comparisons can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, leading to a warped perception of what constitutes a healthy and natural body. This distortion not only encourages unhealthy behaviors, such as extreme dieting and cosmetic procedures, but also contributes to the illusion of mental health sustainability through the manipulation of one's appearance (Puglia, 2017).

Exposure to objectifying media is intricately linked to sustained engagement in image editing behaviors among young women. Research indicates that women often spend more time enhancing their images after viewing objectifying content compared to those exposed to more natural representations (Kostyrka-Allchorne et al., 2023). Profiles that prominently feature digitally altered images tend to correlate with negative shifts in perceived attractiveness and overall mood, complicating the intricate relationship between social media usage, body image, and emotional well-being (Almohammed et al., 2023). The pervasive availability of image editing applications has fundamentally altered how young women interact with their physical appearance, enabling modifications to facial and body features through various filters and specialized software. As Wolfe and Yakabovits (2024) highlight, the integration of these tools into mobile technology has led to an increased frequency of encounters with altered images on social media platforms. This phenomenon creates a pervasive sense of pressure among young women to enhance their own photographs, which can adversely affect their mood and self-perception.

The relentless pursuit of an idealized self-image, driven by social media culture, contributes significantly to the internalization of unrealistic beauty standards. This ongoing struggle not only fosters appearance-related anxiety but also leads to decreased self-esteem, underscoring the urgent need for awareness and intervention strategies that address the psychological ramifications of these media practices (Hilty et al., 2023). As we navigate an increasingly image-driven landscape, it is critical to cultivate resilience among young women, promoting healthy self-acceptance and challenging the unrealistic norms perpetuated by digital platforms (Scully et al., 2023).

Social media enables selective self-presentation, wherein users strategically choose, edit, and share images that conform to societal beauty standards. Fox and Vendemia (2016) reveal that these behaviors, particularly among women, reinforce existing sociocultural pressures surrounding body image. The act of editing photos before sharing them online serves not only as a method of enhancing physical attributes but also as a means of navigating the complex social hierarchies and comparisons prevalent in digital spaces. Such comparisons, whether upward or downward, can intensify feelings of inadequacy, especially when individuals are confronted with curated images of peers or celebrities who embody idealized beauty norms.

The psychological effects of engaging with edited images extend beyond immediate emotional responses. Research by McComb et al. (2021) suggests that even when disclaimers are attached to edited photos, indicating that an image has been manipulated, young women still experience declines in body satisfaction, mood, and self-confidence after exposure to such content. This finding highlights that while disclaimers may raise awareness regarding the authenticity of digital images, they do little to mitigate the damaging effects of comparison. The ongoing engagement with idealized and unattainable standards perpetuates a cycle of dissatisfaction, in which young women increasingly rely on photo editing to align their self-presentation with societal ideals. Fardouly and Holland (2018) underscore the inherent complexity of social media interactions, suggesting that the digital environments young women navigate are not merely spaces for communication but also arenas for continuous comparison and validation. The minimal impact of disclaimers attached to idealized images on body dissatisfaction illustrates the depth of social media's influence on self-perception. The immersive nature of these platforms means that young women's mental health and body image are consistently shaped by the standards portrayed and reinforced by their peers, influencers, and the media.

By focusing on female adolescents, the study addresses a demographic that is particularly susceptible to the pressures of social comparison and the unrealistic beauty standards perpetuated by social media. The study

aim to inform the development of educational programs and psychological interventions that promote healthier social media practices. These initiatives can enhance awareness of the potential mental health risks associated with excessive photo editing while encouraging positive self-image practices, ultimately contributing to the sustainability of mental well-being in the digital era. The significance of this study lies in addressing a pressing issue in today's digital age-the connection between social media photo editing and appearance-related anxiety among female adolescents. With the rising reliance on social media for self-expression and validation, particularly among young women, it is vital to comprehend how these platforms influence mental health and self-perception. This research offers valuable insights into how digital self-representation through photo editing practices can contribute to or mitigate mental health challenges, such as anxiety regarding physical appearance. This study aims to investigate the complex relationship between excessive editing of selfies on social media and appearance-related anxiety among female adolescents.

The impact of social media on the self-perception and mental health of female adolescents has been extensively explored in previous research, highlighting the role of excessive selfie editing in shaping these dynamics (McGovern et al., 2022; Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022; Abbas & Dodeen, 2022; Pedalino & Camerini, 2022). Numerous studies have illustrated that engagement with altered images cultivates unrealistic beauty standards and fosters a culture of social comparison (Spitzer et al., 2023; Hernández-Serrano et al., 2023; Gioia et al., 2024). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among young women, who often feel pressured to conform to idealized portrayals of beauty showcased on various platforms. The reliance on digital enhancements as a means of self-presentation is frequently linked to increased appearance-related anxiety and lowered self-esteem (Vanhoffelen et al., 2023). The literature suggests that while many adolescents perceive selfie editing as a method for enhancing self-worth and gaining social validation, these practices may paradoxically lead to a cycle of self-doubt and dissatisfaction with their unedited selves (Maricuțoiu & Zogmaister, 2023). Central to this discourse is the notion of self-representation and the psychological implications of curating an idealized self-image in digital spaces. Research indicates that the pervasive nature of social media platforms exacerbates feelings of inadequacy, as young women often engage in constant comparisons with peers and influencers (Rafiq & Linden, 2024). This ongoing scrutiny can distort their perceptions of beauty and body image, reinforcing the internalization of unattainable standards. Moreover, the literature emphasizes the role of social validation in driving editing behaviors; adolescents may seek affirmation through likes and comments on their curated images, further entrenching their reliance on these practices (Lyu et al., 2023). Understanding these theoretical underpinnings is essential for addressing the complexities of appearance-related anxiety and mental health sustainability in an increasingly image-driven society.

Methodology

Research Design

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the correlational relationship between excessive photo editing on social media and appearance-related anxiety among female adolescents in high school. Specifically, the research seeks to explore how frequent engagement in photo editing behaviors may contribute to heightened concerns about physical appearance, and how these practices affects the mental well-being of adolescents. By examining this relationship, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological implications of digital self-presentation and its role in shaping appearance-related anxiety. The study design for this study is grounded in a descriptive correlational framework, making it well-suited for investigating associations between naturally occurring variables without manipulating them. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the link between two key variables: the frequency of photo editing behaviors and the level of appearance-related anxiety. By leveraging this quantitative methodology, the study systematically quantifies both psychological factors and digital practices among participants. Established scales are employed to collect numerical data, ensuring a high degree of reliability and validity in the analysis. The descriptive element of the design focuses on documenting how female adolescents engage in photo editing on social media, while the correlational component assesses the strength and direction of the relationship between these behaviors and their appearance-related anxiety. In doing so, the

study provides valuable insights into whether more frequent photo editing is associated with heightened levels of anxiety about physical appearance within the sample of 150 high school female adolescents.

Study Participants

The participants for this study were drawn from a sample of 150 female adolescents, with an average age of 17.5 years, all enrolled in the third secondary grade-the final year before entering university-across 10 high schools located in Asyut city, Egypt. This grade level was intentionally selected, as students at this stage face significant social and appearance-related pressures in anticipation of transitioning to university life. To identify participants, the researchers employed a sequential sampling technique. Initially, a small group of students who met the study's criteria was selected and contacted. These participants were then encouraged to refer other students they knew who were actively involved in photo editing on social media. This approach proved effective in reaching a broader group of individuals who might have been missed through traditional sampling methods. As a result, the study was able to focus more comprehensively on adolescents engaging in digital self-presentation practices. This targeted method provided deeper insight into the relationship between photo editing behaviors and appearance-related anxiety within this demographic, enriching the study's focus on participants with relevant experiences in social media image modification.

Ethical Considerations

Given that this study involves sensitive topics and the collection of data related to body image and appearance-related anxiety, strict ethical guidelines were followed to protect the well-being and privacy of all participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before commencing the research. Informed consent was acquired from both the participants and their guardians, as the study involved female adolescents under the age of 18. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of the questions, and their right to withdraw at any stage without facing any penalties.Confidentiality was rigorously maintained throughout the study, with all personal data anonymized to prevent identification of the participants. Collected data were securely stored and only accessible to the research team. Moreover, the participants were provided with resources and referrals for psychological support in case they experienced any discomfort or distress as a result of discussing issues related to their body image or anxiety. These measures ensured that the participants' dignity and psychological safety were prioritized at all times, while also adhering to the ethical standards for research involving minors.

Study Tools

In this study, the Personal Photo Editing Scale and the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale were adapted and refined to align with the specific context and demographic focus of the study, which centered on high school female adolescents. These tools were based on pre-existing scales, such as the Personal Photo Editing Scale (Pham et al., 2022) and the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (Veale et al., 2022), and were modified to better capture the unique psychological and behavioral patterns of this group. The revisions aimed to ensure that the scales remained valid, reliable, and culturally relevant to the experiences of female adolescents engaging in excessive selfie editing.

Personal Photo Editing Scale

The Personal Photo Editing Scale was tailored to assess the extent and motivations behind selfie editing among the participants. The scale, adapted from Pham et al. (2022), was revised to reflect current trends in digital image modification, with a particular focus on social media practices among adolescents. It consists of positively framed items designed to capture a range of editing behaviors, from simple enhancements to more extensive alterations of body and facial features.

The scale's construct validity was evaluated using correlation coefficients between individual items and the overall score, based on a pilot sample of 45 adolescents not involved in the main study. Correlation

coefficients ranged from approximately 0.58 to 0.72, indicating a strong relationship between individual items and the overall construct of photo editing behavior. To ensure reliability, the internal consistency of the scale was measured using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a value of approximately 0.83, indicating a high level of reliability for capturing photo editing behaviors among the participants.

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale

The Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, based on Veale et al. (2022), was employed to measure the levels of appearance-related anxiety in relation to social interactions. This scale was revised to better fit the adolescent demographic by incorporating culturally relevant examples of social pressures and peer comparisons commonly experienced in high school environments. The revised scale consists of eight items, grouped into two dimensions: avoidance (five items) and threat monitoring (three items), all positively framed to ensure clarity and ease of understanding.

To evaluate the scale's construct validity, correlation coefficients were calculated for each item against the total score and its respective dimensions using the same pilot sample of 45 adolescents. The correlation coefficients with the total scale ranged from 0.55 to 0.78, while those corresponding to the two dimensions ranged from 0.50 to 0.73. The scale's internal consistency was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha value of approximately 0.84, indicating strong reliability in measuring appearance-related anxiety among female adolescents.

These modifications ensured that the tools accurately reflected the behaviors and experiences relevant to the study's focus, allowing for the effective investigation of the relationship between selfie editing practices and appearance-related anxiety among high school female adolescents.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were gathered from a sample of 150 female adolescents across 10 high schools in Asyut, Egypt, specifically targeting third-year high school students who are approaching the transition to university. For this study, data collection involved the administration of two key measurement tools: the Personal Photo Editing Scale and the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale. Participants completed these scales in a structured environment, ensuring that they understood the questions and could respond accurately. To analyze the collected data, descriptive statistics were computed to provide an overview of participants' photo editing behaviors and levels of appearance-related anxiety. This analysis facilitated a deeper understanding of the trends and patterns within the dataset, allowing for insights into the extent of selfie editing and its psychological implications. Additionally, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between excessive photo editing and appearance-related anxiety among the participants. This statistical method is well-suited for exploring linear relationships between two continuous variables, providing valuable insights into how editing practices may influence anxiety levels.

Results and Discussions

Correlation between Personal Photo Editing and Social Appearance Anxiety

Table1. Correlation between Personal Photo Editing and Social Appearance Anxiety

Dimensions of Photo Editing	Dimensions of Social Appearance Anxiety	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level (p-value)	Interpretation
Motivation for Photo Editing	Avoidance	0.65	< 0.01	Moderate positive correlation; higher motivation linked to greater avoidance.

Dimensions of Photo Editing	Dimensions of Social Appearance Anxiety	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level (p-value)	Interpretation
Motivation for Photo Editing	Threat Monitoring	0.58	< 0.01	Moderate positive correlation; increased motivation relates to higher threat monitoring.
Frequency of Photo Editing	Avoidance	0.70	< 0.01	Strong positive correlation; more frequent editing correlates with increased avoidance behavior.
Frequency of Photo Editing	Threat Monitoring	0.62	< 0.01	Moderate positive correlation; frequent editing associated with increased anxiety monitoring.
Overall Photo Editing Practices	Overall Social Appearance Anxiety	0.75	< 0.01	Strong positive correlation; overall editing practices significantly relate to social appearance anxiety levels.

The findings reveal significant positive correlations between dimensions of personal photo editing and social appearance anxiety among female adolescents. The strongest correlation, with a coefficient of 0.75 ($p < 0.01$), indicates that as overall photo editing practices increase, so do levels of social appearance anxiety.

Particularly, the frequency of photo editing shows a strong relationship with avoidance behaviors ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that adolescents who frequently edit their images are more likely to avoid social interactions due to concerns about their appearance. Similarly, motivation for photo editing correlates moderately with both avoidance and threat monitoring, highlighting how the reasons behind editing behaviors contribute to anxiety levels.

The findings of this study illuminate the intricate relationship between excessive photo editing behaviors and social appearance anxiety among female adolescents. The positive correlation identified between the dimensions of personal photo editing and various aspects of social appearance anxiety suggests that as young women engage more frequently in photo editing; their anxiety about their physical appearance tends to increase. This trend highlights the potential psychological ramifications of curated online personas, as the pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

Particularly noteworthy is the robust correlation between the frequency of photo editing and avoidance behaviors, which indicates that female adolescents who edit their selfies more often are more likely to avoid social interactions. This avoidance could stem from a fear of judgment regarding their appearance, which may be further heightened by the idealized images they present online. As a result, these young women may find themselves trapped in a cycle where their digital representations fail to align with their self-perception, leading to heightened anxiety and decreased social engagement.

The study also reveals that the motivation behind photo editing plays a significant role in shaping appearance-related anxiety. Specifically, those driven by the desire for social approval or validation through likes and comments are at greater risk of experiencing heightened anxiety. This correlation underscores the impact of social media dynamics on adolescent mental health, suggesting that the quest for external validation can lead to detrimental psychological outcomes.

These correlations underscore the complex dynamics between digital self-representation and mental health, indicating a need for interventions that address these issues among young women navigating social media

landscapes. The data emphasize the importance of fostering healthy self-image practices to mitigate the adverse effects of photo editing on appearance-related anxiety.

Moreover, the findings highlight the need for targeted interventions aimed at fostering a healthier relationship with social media and self-image among female adolescents. By addressing the motivations and behaviors associated with photo editing, mental health programs can better equip young women to navigate the pressures of social comparison and digital self-presentation. Encouraging self-acceptance and realistic portrayals of beauty could mitigate the adverse effects of excessive editing on mental well-being.

Conclusions

The findings of this study provide crucial insights into the experiences of female adolescents regarding excessive photo editing and its relationship with appearance-related anxiety. The sample, consisting of 150 high school students from ten schools in Asyut, Egypt, reveals that a significant number of participants engage in photo editing practices on social media platforms as a response to societal beauty standards and peer comparisons. This tendency underscores the impact of digital self-representation on young women's mental health. The positive correlation identified between the frequency of photo editing and the levels of appearance-related anxiety among participants suggests that excessive reliance on edited images can exacerbate insecurities related to self-image. The results indicate that while the adolescents may perceive editing as a means to enhance their attractiveness, this behavior often leads to greater dissatisfaction with their natural appearance and overall self-worth. Moreover, the study highlights the need for targeted interventions aimed at promoting healthy self-image practices among female adolescents. By addressing the psychological implications of photo editing, educators and mental health professionals can better support young women in navigating the complexities of social media and its influence on their self-perception.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that may affect the interpretation of its results. The sample consisted solely of high school female adolescents from Asyut, Egypt, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or cultural contexts. Additionally, the reliance on self-report measures for assessing photo editing practices and appearance-related anxiety could introduce bias, as participants may be influenced by social desirability or lack of awareness about their behaviors. The cross-sectional design captures data at a single time point, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships between excessive photo editing and appearance anxiety. Furthermore, the study did not consider other relevant variables, such as peer influences and social media engagement patterns, which could significantly affect the relationship between photo editing and appearance anxiety. Future research should explore these additional factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Acknowledgments

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