Social Media Dysmorphia among Youth: A Study

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Abstract: *Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook are visual based social media platforms that are popular among youth. The perception of beauty is fluid within society and can morph based on cultural practices and societal interaction, such as social media exposure. The exposure to digital conference platforms has increased significantly, leading users to check their appearance constantly and find flaws in their perceived virtual appearance. Beauty filters are a popular type of content used by youth on social media apps. Beauty filter is a photo editing tool that allows users to smooth out their skin, brighter their lips, eyes, contour their nose, change their jawline and cheekbones. Social Media Dysmorphia is a new type of dysmorphia caused by using different filters on social media. People's perceptions of their bodies are affected by social media's filters, flawless photos, and idealized bodies that are radically distinct from reality. This condition causes individuals to seek cosmetic surgery to resemble to the filtered images of themselves. People may find it difficult to accept their physical attributes and try to fit in with the idealized bodies and filters that are promoted on social media. The media's portrayal of the "ideal" body can result in problems like disordered eating, body image dissatisfaction, feelings of shame and guilt, unhappiness, and anxiety. This paper explores the relationship between face filters, body dissatisfaction and self-esteem through the lens of Social Comparison Theory (SCT), Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and Objectification Theory (OT).*

Keywords: *Social Media, Beauty Filters, Dysmorphia.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

A number of tools have been made to social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, and others. Entertainment and recreation were the only goals of social media platforms a few years ago. These social media platforms were made for sharing and expressing individual interests, posting pictures of various celebrations and events attended by people from different cultures, exchanging ideas and stories, conversing with people across great distances, and expressing emotions. However, social media is now an internal entity since it has developed into a public supplement. Users who are experiencing a disassociation between their bodies and mind have been greatly impacted by the recent enhancements to social communication platforms. It is more probable for users of social media platforms to brand themselves, promote their own companies and beliefs, be recognized as celebrities, and hope to become 'viral' (Ospina, 2019).

Social media is shaped by tools enabling users to share information, opinions, interests, and interact. These tools include social networking platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly twitter), and Instagram and facilitate communication over the Internet (Selimi & Useini, 2019). Especially prevalent among young people, social media platforms accelerate communication and allow them to expand their social circles. These opportunities provided by the internet make life easier and communication more accessible (Selim & Ali, 2023). Social media has become a fundamental tool in daily communication, enabling people to connect with individuals from different places, cultures, and lifestyles.

The majority of people between the ages of 15 and 24, referred to as youths, are too accountable for their anxieties and social media has become an integral part of their lives. The United Nations Organization (UNO) defines youth as those in the age group of 15 to 24, and all of its statistics are based on this definition. Since Instagram models X (formerly twitter) celebrities, and Facebook celebrities are no longer surprising, today's youth have developed their minds to the point where they may be perfect from every angle. Youth who are distressed by thoughts of flaws and imperfections in their faces and bodies frequently exhibit this kind of behaviour. Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem,

and annoyance can result from hormone-induced dysmorphic behaviour as well as internal and external distractions. Aside from using a series of filters, quality, theme purpose, hashtags, and captions, users may also share photographs using a series of filters, quality, theme purpose, hashtags, and captions, and the use of credits has grown fashionable. The effects of social media have quickly become a popular subject of study and inquiry, but given the rapid cultural and technological advancements within this new form of media, there are constantly new features and areas to explore. One of those new areas are face filters. Face filters, also known as lenses or effects, are a type of Augmented Reality (AR) that changes the user's face in real-time on their screen. AR technology was first introduced on Snapchat in 2015 (Indestry, 2021) and has since spread to other popular visual social media platforms.

Social media has transformed people's perceptions of celebrities, icons, friends, family, and themselves. Face filters can instantly improve appearance by reducing nose size, slimming faces, and more. Face filters offer simple ways to change one's appearance and can be used for various visual effects, not just beauty. Utilizing uncapped access to changing one's appearance may negatively impact body image and self-esteem.

Although face filters are fairly new and understudied in academia, scrutiny of face filters has raised concerns in the press and among parents (Burnell et al., 2021). According to Kelly (2020), people are increasingly seeking cosmetic surgery after being inspired by filtered photos of themselves. In the short time face filters have been integrated into social media, they have made. Social media filters, paired with an overabundance of selfies, alter a person's perception of beauty and may trigger social media dysmorphia. Currently, anyone with a smartphone, tablet, or computer can use filters or editing tools to almost instantly remove flaws in their appearance. Many people enjoy the ability to change their appearance instantly because we live in a society that values instant gratification.

"According to what beauty expresses in society, people try to put their bodies into this idealized body shape", (Aslan D., 2004).

The main objectives of this paper are :
➢ To determine the usage of filters among youth.
➢ To study the factors responsible for body dysmorphia through social media.
➢ To analyse the social, emotional and psychological influence caused because of using social media filters.

1.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK :
The present study is grounded in the following key theories to understand the impact of the usage of beauty filters on body image, self-esteem, and mental health of youth.
❖ **Social Comparison Theory**
❖ **Uses and Gratification Theory**
❖ **Objectification Theory**
These theories collectively provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of beauty filter usage on body image, self-esteem, and mental health.

Social Comparison Theory: Leon Festinger, a psychologist, initially created the Social Comparison Theory in 1954. Festinger (1954) asserted that people are naturally motivated to assess themselves. In accordance with this drive, people look for objective circumstances to evaluate their skills. In the absence of these circumstances, people turn to evaluating themselves by contrasting themselves with others. (Tıraş & Kaya, 2021).

This theory which is called the Social Comparison Theory," is said to happen automatically when people see pictures of themselves or their relatives that they want to be like. As a result, people are inspired to accomplish those objectives. (S. H. Aslan, 2001). Similarly, social comparisons on social media are linked to anxiety and depression (Feinstein et al., 2013; Lee, 2014), body image issues (Powell et al., 2018), and low self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2015), despite the fact that social comparison is founded on self-development motivations (Wills, 1981) and a negative mindset are linked to outcomes (Lee, 2014; Lim & Yang, 2015). (Ceyhan & Büyükmumcu, 2020)

According to Festinger and Katz's (1954) still relevant theory, people will assess themselves by contrasting them with one another. According to Bessenoff (2006), those who internalize the media's thin-ideal body image or who suffer from body dissatisfaction are especially vulnerable to social comparison.

The "ideal" body images presented in the media can lead to eating behaviour and body image problems among youth, as well as body/self-confidence, feelings of guilt and shame, unhappiness, anxiety, and depression. It is reported that these negative emotions are especially related to bulimic symptoms (Aslan S.H., 2001).

This theory has been increasingly applied to understand social dysmorphia, particularly among youth, in the context of heightened social media use and cultural influences. Distorted views of oneself in social situations, frequently stimulated by feelings of inadequacy or irrational expectations regarding behavior, status, or appearance, are referred to

as social dysmorphia. Social comparison theory provides a framework for analyzing how constant exposure to idealized images and curated lifestyles contributes to these distortions.

Uses and Gratification Theory:

The 1940s saw the inception of the Uses and Gratification Theory (De Oliveira et al., 2016). Katz et al. (1973) assert that the Uses and Gratification Theory explains why people use social networking sites and other media to satisfy their needs and is founded on the genesis of social and psychological needs. Television has previously been the main focus of the Uses and Gratification framework (Bantz, 1982; Eastman, 1979; Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961), and traditional media (Armstrong and Rubin, 1989).

Information, education, guidance, advice, diversion, relaxation, social contact, value reinforcement, cultural satisfaction, emotional release, identity formation, identity confirmation, lifestyle expression, security, sexual arousal, and filling time are among the 16 gratifications that users and audiences can obtain from the media, according to Denis McQuail (2010).

The relationship between media choice and user satisfaction is attempted to be explained by Elihu Katz's theory of Uses and Gratifications (Ozer, 2016). The Uses and Gratifications approach states that in order to satisfy needs and offer satisfaction, attention must be paid to mass media content (McQuail & Windahl, 1997).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) offers a valuable framework for understanding how youth engage with social media and how this engagement relates to social dysmorphia. This theory is especially pertinent to the study of social dysmorphia, a psychological condition marked by an inflated perception of oneself in social situations that is frequently influenced by media. Youth actively choose social media platforms and content based on their emotional and social needs. However, the algorithm-driven nature of these platforms tends to reinforce exposure to idealized or unattainable norms, magnifying social dysmorphia.

Objectification Theory:

The Objectification Theory was first coined by professors of psychology, Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in 1997. The theory entails in a socio-cultural context. Mass media, as a whole creates or leads to an establishment of an environment, where female bodies are objectified on the basis of aesthetic and feminine attributes. Women are being programmed to internalise and accept an external view of their physical selves as magazines, newspapers, television, and billboards inundate the public with digitally altered images of women promoting hourglass figures, perfect, pore-free skin, and European facial features. The consequences of this self-objectification may be detrimental to the person. Regular self-objectification by women has been linked to symptoms such as anxiety, disordered eating, low body esteem, and increased body shame.

Objectification Theory is highly relevant to understanding social media dysmorphia, particularly among youth. The theory explains how cultural practices of objectifying bodies, especially women's bodies, lead individuals to internalize an observer's perspective of themselves, fostering body surveillance and dissatisfaction. Social media amplifies these dynamics by promoting environments where appearance is central and often idealized.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

This study offers a systematic review of various works concerning the relationship between social media filters and body dysmorphia in youth, organized in chronological order.

R. Raj, A.Arashpreet, D,Devedi, S.F.H. Pantho, P. Bara, Agnihotri, B.K. (2022) in their study on **Body dysmorphia and social media impact** reveals how social media encompasses a mental effect on low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and body dysmorphia. The authors argue that portrayals on social media platforms often appear superficial and unrealistic, contributing to misleading standards of beauty. Beauty filters, originally introduced as entertaining social experiments, have, according to the study, escalated into a psychological concern impacting users across demographics. The widespread use of photo shopped and edited images have elevated beauty standards to nearly unachievable levels, making it challenging for users to accept their natural appearance.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the role of social media influencers, who often exacerbate these issues by promoting pseudoscientific diets and incomplete information as trending solutions. These practices can have adverse effects, with some trends leading to serious health risks such as disordered eating patterns and illnesses like anorexia. The authors conclude that the cumulative impact of these factors contributes significantly to mental health challenges among social media users, particularly the youth.

H. Erum, Z.Fatima (2023) in their study **on How False Social Media Beauty Standards Lead to Body Dysmorphia** reveals how social media apps digitization of the female body through technological advancements and the use of photo editing tools have led to the creation of unrealistic beauty standards**.**

This study extensively explored how societal expectations have long socialized women from a young age to fulfil idealized roles of mothers and wives. This social conditioning imposes a set of standards that women feel compelled to meet, leading to a "selection process" where those who deviate from the idealized image may experience insecurity and self-doubt. Studies reveal that the process itself, along with the constant comparison to these expectations, has resulted in negative body image and body dissatisfaction among women.

Repeated exposure to media and cultural messages promoting narrow beauty ideals has amplified this issue, with many women internalizing unrealistic standards of physical appearance. Consequently, many women experience a persistent dissatisfaction with their bodies, which in severe cases manifests as Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). BDD is a mental health condition marked by an obsessive focus on perceived flaws, often minor or imagined, in one's appearance. Research has shown that the hyper-objectification of young women, exacerbated by media, has contributed significantly to the prevalence of body image issues among women.

D. Simi, G. Pratati, M. Kaajal, M. Nilanjana (2024) in their study on **Psycho-social effects of social media & peer-pressure on body image** reveals the impact of social media and various media channels on mental health and body image. Using an interview-based research method, the study investigates how social media and peer influence shape body image perceptions. Data was gathered from individuals aged 15 to 25; those who are active social media users but have no previous history of eating disorders or body dysmorphia; using a purposive sampling strategy. The participants provided diverse perspectives on social media's influence on body image, reflecting the complex and multifaceted relationship between media exposure and self-perception.

A significant finding from the responses indicates that while many participants believe social media reinforces unattainable beauty standards, others acknowledge its potential benefits, such as providing platforms for body positivity and self-acceptance. Participants noted that peer influence, along with traditional media, social media, and even pornography, has a substantial impact on their body perceptions and self-image, with social comparisons often resulting in body dissatisfaction.

The study also reveals the detrimental effects of filters and photo manipulation on social media, as these tools can perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards and harm individuals' body image. Although recognized as recreational tools by some participants, these filters frequently blur the line between reality and fantasy, contributing to increased self-comparison and insecurities.

Furthermore, respondents emphasized the need for balanced media content that promotes both mental and physical well-being. Many participants suggested limiting exposure to content that reinforces negative self-perception, advocating instead for media that encourages healthy body image, realistic standards, and inclusive representation. This research underscores the importance of critical media consumption and the role of positive online spaces in counteracting the adverse effects of social media on body image and mental health.

S.Niharika (2024) in their study on **THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BODY IMAGE, SELF ESTEEM AND SOCIAL APPEARANCE ANXIETY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS** reveals the effect of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and X on self-presentation and interpersonal communication. These platforms allow users to selectively highlight the most positive aspects of their lives, constructing idealized online personas with just a few clicks. This selective self-presentation, combined with the prevalence of heavily manipulated and filtered images, has fostered unrealistic beauty standards and intensified the phenomenon of "social comparison."

Young adults are particularly vulnerable to these dynamics, as they are frequently exposed to images and posts depicting flawless skin, perfectly sculpted bodies, and seemingly effortless beauty. These images are often extensively edited, filtered, or otherwise altered, creating an unrealistic portrayal of physical appearance and lifestyle that can be difficult, if not impossible, to attain in real life. Research indicates that repeated exposure to such idealized imagery can lead young users to internalize these standards, often resulting in negative self-comparisons and feelings of inadequacy.

Moreover, the study emphasizes on excessive social media use, especially when motivated by self-comparison, is closely associated with diminished self-esteem and heightened social anxiety. Social media interactions, marked by likes, comments, and follower counts, have become perceived markers of social validation. As a result, users may develop a heightened need for external validation and experience discomfort or insecurity when such approval is lacking. This dependency on social feedback can contribute to feelings of worthlessness and self-doubt, affecting both mental health and self-worth.

3. OBJECTIVES:
- ➢ To determine the usage of filters among youth.
- ➢ To study the factors responsible for body dysmorphia through social media.
- ➢ To analyse the social, emotional and psychological influence caused because of using social media filters.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The paper seeks to explore and understand the social media dysmorphia among youth of Kashmir. The universe of the study constituted of the youth in the age range of 15-24.

A Google survey-based questionnaire was designed to collect primary data, keeping into consideration the objectives of the study. In this paper, data was collected sequentially to allow the researcher to obtain a clear insight into the issue under study. The survey consisted of questions on the level of usage of social media apps, beauty filters, their influence, challenges as well as other factors associated with it. Both open and close-ended questions were incorporated. Questionnaires were distributed via google form and the fieldwork took place over a period of 1 month (1 October, 2024-1 November, 2024)

For this paper, respondents were selected, which include 60 Questionnaires as the sample. Age was the main criterion for selecting the sample as the study was carried on youth. The sample of respondents was chosen using purposive type of sampling. The data was then analysed, tabulated and interpreted.

4.1 FOCUS OF THE STUDY:

The rise of digital media has profoundly altered self-perception, especially among youth who spend significant time on platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook. Social media filters, once novel, have become a widespread part of online interaction, transforming how young people see themselves and others.

This study aims to understand how the widespread use of social media filters affects self-perception, body image, and mental health among youth. By focusing on the psychological and emotional consequences of filter use, this study seeks to find potential risks, such as body dysmorphia and low self-esteem, associated with viewing oneself primarily through an altered lens.

5. ANALYSIS / FINDINGS:

Data provided by the respondents is presented under the following headings:

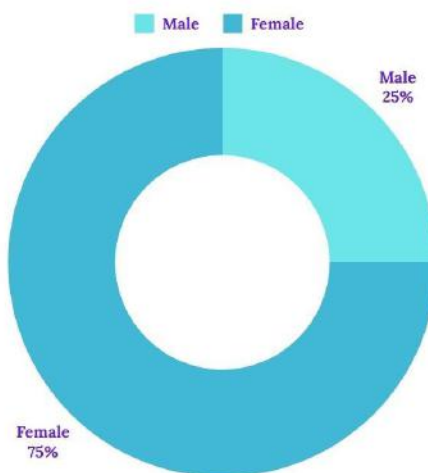> **Demographic Information**

Gender distribution of the Respondents:

Figure 1
Gender Distribution of the Respondents
Table 1

Gender Distribution of the Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	15	25%
Female	45	75%
Total	**60**	**100%**

45 (75%) respondents, who responded to the survey, were females, followed by 15 (25%) male depicted in Figure 1.

➢ **Age distribution of the Respondents:**
Age is one of the most important inscriptive factors of stratification and differentiation found in all the societies. After infancy period, age grade become increasingly reflective of economic and cultural factors (Rao, 2001).
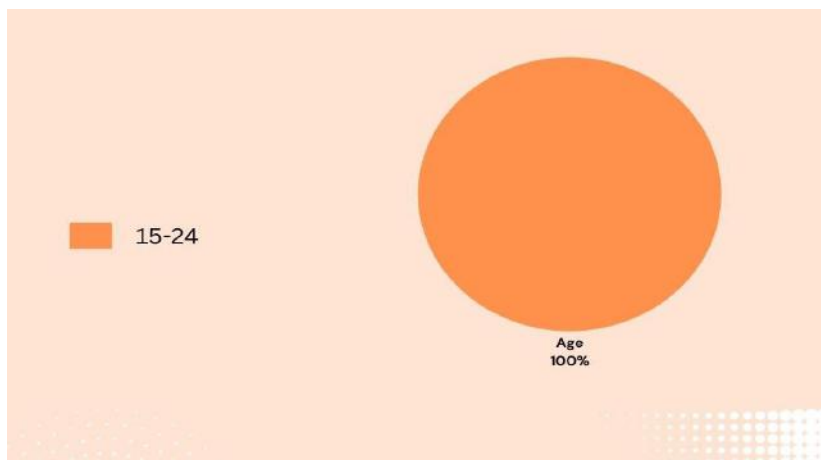

Figure 2
Age Distribution of the Respondents

Table 2

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
15-24	60	100%
Total	**60**	**100%**

The distribution of the data in table 2 reveals that all the respondents belonged to the above mentioned age group.

➢ **Educational Qualification of the Respondents:**
Education plays an important role in shaping ones personality and in becoming the responsible citizens of the society. Education is the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfil his responsibilities (Dewey).
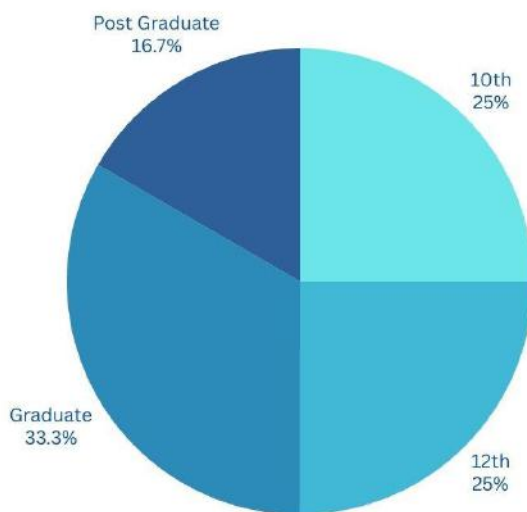

Figure 3
Distribution of the Respondents by Educational Qualification

Table 3

Educational Qualification of the Respondents	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
10th	15	25%
12th	15	25%
Graduate	20	33.3%
Post Graduate	10	16.7%
Total	**60**	**100%**

The educational qualification of the respondents revealed in Figure 3 reflects that 20 respondents (33.3%) were graduates, 10 respondents (16.7%) were Post Graduates, followed by 15 respondents were in 10th class (25%) , and 15 respondents were in 12th class (25%).
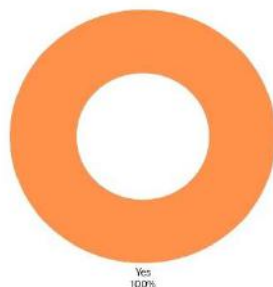
➢ **Do you use any social media platform/s?**

Figure 4
Distribution of the Respondents using Social Media Platform/s

Table 4

Social Media platform User	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	60	100%
No	-	-
Total	**60**	**100**

The distribution of the data in Table 4 reveals that 60 (100%) of the respondent youth use social media platforms.

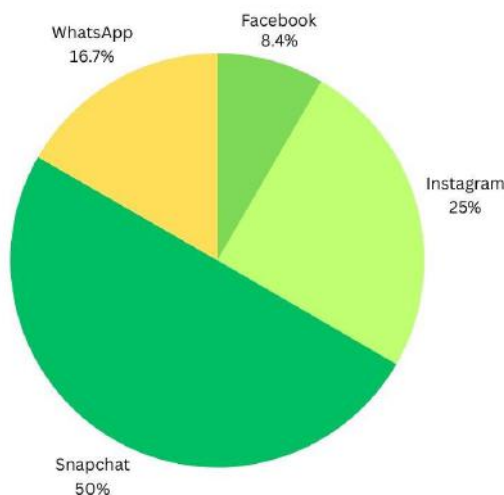➢ **Which social media platform/s do you use?**

Figure 5
Distribution of the Respondents using Different Social Media Platform/s

Table 5

Social Media Platform/s	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Facebook	5	8.4%
Instagram	15	25%
Snapchat	30	50%
WhatsApp	10	16.7%
Any Other (Please Specify)	-	-
Total	**60**	**100%**

The distribution of the data in figure 5 reveals that 30 respondents (50%) are Snapchat users, 15 respondents (25%) are Instagram users. However 10 respondents (16.7%) are WhatsApp users and 5 respondents (8.4%) are Facebook users.

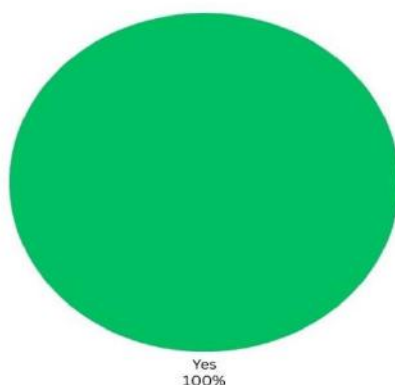➢ **Do you use filters on social media?**

Yes
100%

Figure 6
Distribution of the Respondents using filters on Social Media

Table 6

Respondents using filters on Social Media	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	60	100%
No	-	-
Total	**60**	**100%**

The distribution of the data in Table 6 reveals that 60 (100%) of the respondent youth use filters on social media.
➢ **What prompts you to use these filters?**
Distribution of the Respondents on the basis of Social Media Filter usage Category
Table 7

Respondent Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Social interaction, Self-expression	5	8.3%
Fun, Entertainment	10	16.7%
Beautification, Enhance Appearance, Masculinity, Hide insecurities, Tap into Pretty Privilege	45	75%
Total	**60**	**100%**

The distribution of the data in Table 7 reveals that 45 (75%) of the respondents use filters on social media for beautifying themselves, promoting unrealistic beauty standards, including Camouflaging. Camouflaging is the practice of concealing body parts with clothing, applying makeup to cover imperfections, and/or covering body parts with the hand. 10 (16.7%) of the respondent youth use filters for fun and entertainment followed by 5 (8.3%) using it for self-expression and social interaction.

Additionally, respondents disclosed that they attempt to emulate specific celebrities and models, which exacerbates their body dysmorphia. Beauty filters encourage them to undergo cosmetic procedures like liposuction, fat grafting, and lipofilling that involve injecting and removing body fat.

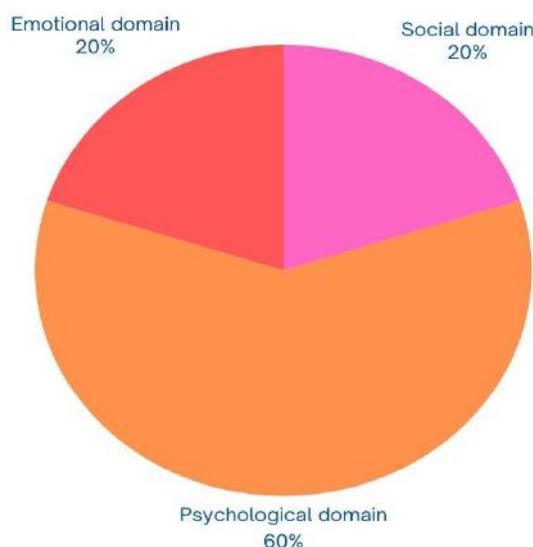➢ **The application of filters influences:**

Figure 7
Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Influence of Applying Filters
Table 8

Influence of Filters	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Social Domain	12	20%
Psychological Domain	36	60%
Emotional Domain	12	20%
Total	**60**	**100%**

The distribution of the data in Table 8 reveals that 26 (60%) of the respondents are psychologically influenced by the application of "filters", 12 (20%) respondents are influenced by the use of filters emotionally and socially.
The responses illustrate a variety of feedback regarding how social media influences anxiety, unrealistic beauty standards, and body image. According to the majority of respondents, social media filters promote unrealistic standards of beauty. Social media photo manipulation and filter use have been interpreted as affecting body image while adhering to unattainable standards. Social media users' insecure body image has been linked to these filters; this phenomenon is sometimes referred to as "filter dysmorphia".
Also, respondents indicated a link between social media filter use and negative outcomes like body dissatisfaction and mental health issues.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:
The present research highlights the significant role that beauty filters play in shaping body image, self-esteem, and mental health among youth. The study found that a majority of females use beauty filters on social media to alter various physical features, such as making their noses more symmetrical, enhancing lips and teeth, evening out skin tone, and enlarging eyes. In contrast, males tend to use filters to conceal flaws, achieve a leaner or more muscular appearance, and project a more masculine image. This phenomenon of digitally enhancing one's appearance on social media platforms is often referred to as "Digital Plastic Surgery."

The study also emphasizes the role of social comparison, which is triggered by exposure to idealized and often unrealistic portrayals of peers, models, and influencers on social media. As noted by Jones (2001), this constant comparison can lead to low body esteem and body image dissatisfaction. The desire to conform to beauty standards that are physically unattainable is a key driver of this issue, as beauty filters raise expectations of perfection to a level that is not achievable by any individual.

In the digital age, social media has become a major platform for communication and connection. However, the psychological effects of social media use have only recently come into focus. The superficial and often misleading portrayals of beauty on these platforms have created a culture where unrealistic beauty standards are normalized. As a result, individuals, particularly youth, may experience body dysmorphia, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

Additionally, social media influencers exacerbate the issue by promoting idealized lifestyles and pseudoscientific beauty and health trends. These influencers, who often present edited or fabricated content, play a role in perpetuating unrealistic standards and encouraging harmful behaviours. This phenomenon has led to serious physical and mental health concerns, such as eating disorders and an unhealthy pursuit of materialism, driven by the desire to achieve an idealized image of beauty and success.

In conclusion, the widespread use of beauty filters on social media has far-reaching implications for body image, mental health, and self-esteem. It is crucial for individuals to develop a critical awareness of the unrealistic nature of these filtered portrayals, and for society to promote a more inclusive, diverse, and realistic representation of beauty. Further research and interventions are needed to help youth navigate the complex relationship between social media use, beauty standards, and mental health, and to encourage healthier self-perceptions and body image resilience in the digital age.

7. LIMITATIONS:
- Since the study's focus was on youth, equivalent studies could be done on other age groups.
- The sample size was restricted to 60 respondents. Sample size can also be increased to ensure more representation of the population under study.

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