



Do It for the “Gram”: A Social Phenomenological Study on Selected Female Instagram Beauty Influencers in Metro Manila

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ABSTRACT: Instagram beauty influencers are often considered “trendsetters” when conforming to beauty ideals. To live up to the label given to them, they perform beauty practices, improve their appearance, and are cautious of the contents they put out. Despite their life mostly revolving online, it is difficult to decipher an influencers’ whole life since their followers only get to see a portion of it, which means that the public eye can easily label them as “perfect.” This research applies the social phenomenology by Schutz and Luckmann (1973), as the theoretical-methodological approach, along with a qualitative-descriptive research design. A one-on-one virtual interview with ten participants was conducted where questions about the beauty standards and their influencer life were asked. The results showed how damaging Western beauty standards’ dominance is not just for ordinary people but also for them. These beauty icons may look as if they have an easy life because of their well-executed posts, yet the results proved otherwise. Consequently, inclusivity is starting to be observed in the beauty community. It was described as overwhelming due to personal circumstances that their influencer life may bring regarding their private events offline.

KEYWORDS: beauty ideals; female Instagram beauty influencers; Instagram; social media; social phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Beauty Ideals and Instagram

Social media is an accessible platform that is known as a convenient way to display information, while also having the power to influence and motivate its users regarding the content they are constantly exposed to (Maher et al., 2014). Individuals, especially teenagers, use social media for various reasons. For instance, teens use Instagram to communicate with their friends, follow celebrities, and even find their identity (Christofferson, 2016). Despite the good effects this platform has, teenagers may also experience damaging impacts, such as self-loathing which can harm one's emotional development. According to Christofferson's (2016) discussion about the 'SNS subculture', women tend to publicly post photos which "in many ways promote eating disorders and other addictions (e.g. drinking alcohol, starvation)" (p. 15). They associated these harmful behaviors as a way to minimize stress and other negative emotional traits (which may be partially true for some), although this might possibly send a wrong message for those who have not tried such things. Thus, this is where social media can contribute to having negative effects on one's well-being and self-esteem especially if they use the platform to seek fitness inspiration and the like (Carrotte et al., 2015).

Media, in general, has the great ability to establish how an ideal body should look like to both men and women. Nonetheless, women are reported to experience heavier and unhealthier effects to body image disturbances compared to men due to the unattainable body ideal shown by the Western media (Nagar & Virk, 2017). The Western media manifest the body ideal, or the beauty standards as a whole, by the domination of size-zero celebrities and models in the industry, and these women often practice risky diets to obtain such body type (Nagar & Virk, 2017). It is believed that colonialism is one of the main reasons why the Philippines and the media's idea of beauty is disturbingly bent. Maverick, thirty-three-year-old research and planning assistant in the country, perfectly explained the impact of colonialism on Filipino women stating that

"Here in the Philippines, I think most people prefer light skin, mestiza (mixed) or Chinese. I really think it's because, for the most part, we've been colonized. The Philippines has been colonized for a long, long time. Like, the Spanish colonized us for three hundred years. Then afterward, the Japanese during World War II, then the Americans. So we have some sort of identity crisis. I don't know if it's an identity crisis so much, as we haven't really fully understood and accepted what it means to be dark-skinned. So that's the perception. And you can see it actually even on TV, in the commercials. They have all this whitening stuff. Down from the lotion and of course other clinics. Beauty clinics are making a killing just to keep white, stuff like that" (Rondilla, 2012).

Lynn, a 42-year-old woman who was another subject in the same study, also shared a similar point of view regarding colonialism's effect on our definition of 'a beautiful skin tone'.

We were told don't be dark. You want to be light because it's considered status quo. You get, I don't know if respect is the word. But you're the one that gets the attention. It's more favorable, more favorable treatment. Whereas if you're dark, you're considered someone who is working out in the field. And people who work out in the fields generally don't have much money. And it just revolves around the whole status, economic status.
(Rondilla, 2012)

Along with women's preference for white skin, it is also a common method for some to put a filter and/or polish their appearance with the help of photo-editing applications (Field et al., 2005). Photo-editing applications, such as Facetune, are capable of removing one's blemishes, changing one's face shape, as well as other characteristics within just a few clicks (Felig, 2020). This act has reached the point where users have already considered it as part of their 'routine' whenever they would like to share a photo online. Besides Instagram, other types of media such as magazines and televisions, expose its audience to idealized thin bodies which brings a negative effect on women's perception of their body image (Kleemans et al., 2016). Thus, social media's, especially Instagram's, definition of beauty standards is now filled with unrealistic body ideals and other idealistic standards of attractiveness caused by the platform's own users, motivating more women to focus and worry about their physical appearance (Felig, 2020). This tampers with a woman's confidence in her physical appearance, especially if she is unaware of the inauthentic nature of the images she is exposed to in the media. Eurocentric beauty standards continue to dominate various media platforms since it is seen as the epitome of beauty; meanwhile, other physical features that do not fit the implemented feminine beauty ideals are deemed as somehow "undesirable" and "less feminine" (Awad et. al, 2014).

Beauty Influencers on Instagram

One of the most popular and used social media platforms is Instagram, which is a hotspot where the affection towards fashion trends is observed the most compared to other platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat (Liu & Suh, 2017). Due to the growth of multiple social media platforms in recent years, it can be seen that the number of social media influencers has started to increase. Through the use of social media platforms, social media influencers represent a type of third-party endorser that influences the attitudes of their followers or viewers (Freberg et al., 2011). With this being said, beauty influencers on Instagram fall into the category of social media influencers.

Influencers gain popularity through their engagement (e.g., content posting, interacting with their audience, etc.) on their respective platforms (Forbes, 2016). According to The Yale Tribune (2017), marketing on Instagram is considered to be effective and successful, especially for millennial audiences. Accordingly, businesses have used Instagram as a means of advertising products, through their accounts and/or with the aid of influencers. As a result, there is a rapid growth of beauty influencers and these individuals are labeled as a relevant source for consumers in terms of distributing informative reviews about products (Kroll, 2015). Influencers are on the rise because of how they can convince the audience (e.g., followers or viewers) through trust and two-way communication (“A New Marketing Royalty: Why Digital Influencers Are On The Rise,” 2017). Having a considerable amount of followers on their social media platforms, influencers are paid by brands to market their products or to attend their events (Abidin, 2016). Considering the platform they have on their respective social media platforms, their opinions or reviews on the beauty products being advertised could influence their followers to buy the said product.

According to Forbes (2016), social media influencers are experts when it comes to electronic word-of-mouth, and it is a tactic they actively apply when it comes to advertising certain products. Hence, their audience would be influenced by their reviews on a particular product and possibly use what the influencer uses in terms of makeup, clothing style and fashion preference, skincare, etc. Therefore, this not only benefits the influencer but also the brand.

Analyzing Life-worlds of Beauty Influencers

This study explores the everyday life-worlds of Filipino beauty influencers on Instagram, which is rooted in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1970). This concept mentions the collective and subjective perceptions of present reality (Husserl, 1970, as cited in Carr, 1970). In understanding this sociological notion of life-worlds, the social phenomenological approach is used for describing how individuals utilize taken-for-granted everyday interactions in producing subjective realities (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). Analyzing social stocks of knowledge—the basis for interactions between people—and life-worlds—the conscious realities that individuals face in the temporary space and time—is vital in looking into the realities, groups of people experience for both are cultural meanings and constructs that vary from individuals depending on familiarity (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). Beauty influencers, through a social phenomenological approach, face varying social stocks of knowledge and life-worlds. Concerning social stocks of knowledge, beauty ideals or standards shape the everyday experiences of influencers relating to their personal life, for it affects not just a woman’s fashion style but also her appearance. For instance, the 1920s era encouraged women to lose weight by engaging in risky activities like unhealthy diets which led to women experiencing eating

disorders and other health issues (Calogero et al., 2007). These social stocks of knowledge are also relative based on culture which then is the basis for socialization (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973).

For instance, Asians, especially Koreans, desire to attain Western facial features as some individuals receive reconstructive cosmetic surgery to achieve such characteristics (Choi, 2018). They also prefer having fair skin and a petite body as a manifestation of beauty (Yan & Bissell, 2014), it was also seen that there were hierarchies when it comes to Asians and others in terms of skin tones (Choi, 2018) as people with lighter skin were treated better (Hunter, 2005, as cited in Choi, 2018). Therefore, skin-lightening cream was used to achieve lighter skin (Jeon, 1987, as cited in Choi, 2018). Moreover, Caucasians lean towards a slim yet curvy body, tanned skin, firm buttocks, and so on (Cunningham et al., 1995). According to a 2007 Nielsen survey, it found that 46% of Chinese, 47% of people in Hong Kong, 46% of Taiwanese, 29% of Koreans, and 24% of Japanese had utilized skin lighteners during the preceding year (Jones, 2013). In social media, women observed that a handful of influencers have a fit body, non-textured skin, white teeth, small waist, silky hair, and other Eurocentric features which are considered Instagram's definition of beauty (Bagautdinova, 2018). Ahuja (2019) also stated that Instagram bloggers, through their posts, "propagate a homogenous and Eurocentric ideal of beauty, which is considered attractive by society and audiences at large" (p. 27). This study explores the social stocks of knowledge through the beauty ideals and standards of modern-day beauty influencers on Instagram. This also looks into how these stocks of knowledge "enable" and/or "constrain" these groups of people.

Regarding the life-worlds of beauty influencers on Instagram, Enli and Thumim (2012) present the duality of online and offline interactions of social media users. This resonates with the dramaturgical presentation of the self by Erving Goffman (1959) for it mentions that individuals manifest nuanced presentations of the self depending on the context of the interaction (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgical Theory emphasizes the idea that humans tend to create a false front to conceal feelings and insecurities with the use of theater terms (Riccio, 2013). Meaning, in every social media account that an individual signs up to, she has the freedom to create a whole new identity just to attract the attention of others (Riccio, 2013). This strategy is common for individuals who put up an online identity because they feel the need to fit in. Riccio (2013) claimed that this theory stresses the idea that human beings tend to act like the life of oneself is similar to a stage play. The dramaturgical theory is linked with the behavior of social media online users since some users form a new identity online because of the desire to be known that way or because of wanting to fit in with the current beauty trends and such. Therefore, this suggests that the confidence of a person and/or how they publicly present themselves is something fickle due to external factors. On the contrary, it should

also be noted that this is seen as a common strategy because creating a “false front” provides the person a sense of control over how others perceive him or her because it gives an individual the chance to avoid unpleasant or embarrassing moments (Elliott, 1982). In the context of beauty standards, these ideals pressure women and young girls alike, which can cause feelings of insecurity that lead to creating a false front or facade. For beauty influencers, online and offline interactions may be varied or nuanced due to their context. Online life-worlds may be dependent on the public sphere while offline life-worlds are more private (Enli & Thumim, 2012). This study further fixates on the collective and intersubjective online and offline life-worlds of beauty influencers on Instagram.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research study aims to describe the perceived beauty standards among female Instagram beauty influencers in Metro Manila as well as their beauty maintenance routines based on their perceived beauty standards. This study also aims to describe their perceived body image and its improvements based on the beauty maintenance routines they have tried and tested as well as their self-esteem derived from their perceived body image.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on Instagram beauty influencers based in Metro Manila. This research study also aims to determine the effects of beauty standards on these influencers. As limited studies are looking into beauty standards, this research expounds on a deeper understanding of beauty standards. Research papers that focus on social media and beauty standards mainly focus on the affected audience, which is the social media users and viewers/followers, and recruit them as their participants. As Instagram beauty influencers have more exposure on the online platform, these people have more experiences and knowledge when it comes to beauty standards on Instagram. This study examines the influencer’s perspective rather than the audience’s perspective. In this study, multiple theories are defined and discussed as it was utilized with regard to the beauty standards and their effects.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized social phenomenology by Schutz and Luckmann (1973) as the theoretical-methodological approach. This approach examined people’s collective and intersubjective realities through their social stocks of knowledge and everyday life-worlds.

Along with this approach, the researchers used a qualitative method of informant interviews through individual virtual meetings. The researchers were able to form their final list of participants through purposive sampling, and focus group discussion (FGD), as the type of interview, was also applied to the influencers during the process. The researchers probe the notions of beauty standards as social stocks of knowledge and day-to-day online and offline life-worlds among female Filipino beauty influencers.

Data collection was conducted from November 21, 2020–December 14, 2020. The informant interview involved ten (10) participants, with seven opting for virtual meetings and the remaining opting for a written interview, as the researchers' theoretical sample (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The selection of participants was based on the purposive sampling criteria of 1) being a millennial female beauty influencer on Instagram based in Metro Manila; 2) having more than 1,000 Instagram followers; 3) currently endorsing/promoting various products and brands that focus on skincare products, fashion clothing, and makeup products on their Instagram account; and 4) having millennial consumers as their target audience.

Concerning ethical considerations, consent forms were sent to the participants before the interviews to obtain their permission to partake in the study. The consent forms stated that the information they would provide would be used in the research paper, yet their responses are confidential, and a pseudonym is used to keep their identity private.

The data analysis involved thematic analysis of the informants' narratives in the virtual meeting and the written interview. The researchers transcribed and encoded the data through open coding, extracted commonalities, and differences in the descriptions, and further classified them based on the study's objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this category, the researchers mentioned a theory and some beauty-related terms along with their operational definitions during the interview process to receive more detailed responses from the informants. In terms of beauty standards, the researchers mentioned the admiration of Filipinos towards Eurocentric beauty standards, such as having fair and flawless skin, a fit body, and possessing Western face features. Moreover, the influencers agreed with its ongoing dominance in the country and the media. All influencers acknowledged its existence, as well as its serious impact on young women.

Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory indicates how influencers can create a false front or facade online due to the pressures of having to adhere to the current beauty standards or to one's desire to be known in a certain way. Creating a false front is done to conceal certain feelings due to poor self-confidence/self-esteem or one would rather opt to hide certain insecurities. Lastly, a maintenance routine is when influencers have mentioned the routines they are used to, such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle by

working out for their constraints to enable adhering to the beauty standards. As Instagram beauty influencers, they create contents to be posted on Instagram in collaboration with numerous brands. Thus, the need to plan a schedule has been a part of their routine for each day to be more organized and to deal with it with less pressure, helping them avoid burnout.

Beauty Standards as Social Stocks of Knowledge

Western beauty standards are considered the epitome of beauty, pressuring women to attain fair skin, a thin body, and a youthful appearance to feel "attractive" and labeled as such (Mckay et al., 2018). Most participants have mentioned how the beauty community on Instagram has been more inclusive; however, beauty standards continue to be present. They commonly said having non-textured skin (e.g., no acne), a thin figure, and fair skin is something they constantly see and try to adhere to in everyday life. One stated,

"First, you have to be fit. Then [you have to have] flawless skin, no imperfections, basically something like that. No imperfections, perfect body, perfect skin, and a perfect lifestyle such as being rich."
(Lara, 22, beauty influencer, Written Interview, November 25, 2020).

Four (4) participants noticed the dominance of Western feminine ideals in the beauty influencer industry. Cunningham et al. (1995) claimed that the cross-culturally accepted beauty standard is a woman with Caucasian-like features. This beauty ideal has reached various continents such as Asia and South America. For instance, Murray and Price (2011) noted that the pressure to conform to a beauty standard that is driven by a global economy and a Westernized media juggernaut of cultural pressure fails to provide insight into how Asian females may respond as consumers when faced with endorsers for products who reflect the globalized ideal of Western beauty. (p. 147)

Western beauty standards are also considered as "the dominant archetype" and it is a beauty ideal that diverse subgroups desire to achieve (Yi, 2015). Western features such as having pale skin, big eyes, large breasts, and silky hair are seen as an aspiration by mainstream society (Yi, 2015).

Yan and Bissell (2014) stated that "as western media content permeates societies and cultures worldwide, the globalization of a beauty and appearance ideal is gaining prevalence in non-western as well as western societies" (p. 195). In the present times, the majority of women tend to follow and apply the American/Western beauty standards, and it proceeds to be glorified around the world since it is what they are exposed to the most. Moreover, due to the lack of representation Western beauty standards promote (Ahuja, 2019), the beauty standards surrounding Instagram popularized today are considered to

be unrealistic or unattainable for the majority, thus possibly affecting a woman's body image because females feel pressured to conform to the beauty ideals (McKay et al., 2018). Some participants commented,

"I'm despondent since beauty standards haven't been removed yet. It's like, you should still have Western features for you to be a famous influencer." (Berna, 22, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, December 14, 2020).

"You're right regarding [the existence] of Western beauty because everyone, even the whole makeup industry, sometimes they tailor products in a way that you can use them in a Western-style." (Christine, 22, beauty influencer, Written Interview, November 24, 2020).

Often seen as trendsetters, Instagram beauty influencers tend to feel pressured to conform to the latest trends. Through a social phenomenological approach (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973), their social stocks of knowledge concerning beauty standards have influenced their perception of beauty, affecting their interactions online and offline. Committing to certain beauty practices and maintenance is seen as a requirement; hence, it is labeled as unacceptable to not adhere to it (Widdows, 2017). Beauty maintenance routines are applied predominantly because of the current proliferation of feminine beauty ideals. Such routines may sound harmless, but it brings a detrimental impact on one's physical and mental well-being (Widdows, 2017). Thus, this could explain why the participants are pressured because of the current proliferation of feminine beauty ideals. A participant stated,

"There are times that I feel pressured wherein I think, "do I have to do those looks, too, so I can be noticed or appreciated more by my followers?" I felt that, of course, I did." (Christine, 22, beauty influencer, Written Interview, November 24, 2020).

Everyday Online Life-Worlds of Beauty Influencers in Instagram

Part of the routines of Instagram beauty influencers is content creation. Abidin (2016) stated that influencers are online users who have acquired a large following on multiple social media platforms and are paid to advertise products or attend a particular brand's public events. With that, various routines are performed regarding content creation. A participant shared,

"So set up, of course, what I pay for my equipment, the editing time, the setup time, conceptualizing how to, you know, create content for a product or a brand." (Christine, 22, beauty influencer, Written Interview, November 24, 2020).

Participants also mentioned what routines they accomplish to manage their image online. According to Berna,

"Maintaining a good image, a healthy lifestyle, having a schedule not to burn out, [and] to be mentally prepared is important in Instagram." (Berna, 22, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, December 14, 2020).

Some Instagram beauty influencers may tend to put up a false front online due to the pressure of conforming to beauty standards. Despite both genders having their own imposed beauty standards, research has proven that women tend to be more vulnerable to these existing ideals compared to men (Makowski et al., 2015). This is because of the undeniably higher demand for women to reach beauty standards, which makes one feel anxious about her body image and physical appearance (Widdows, 2017). Over time, Western media has fed and exposed women with unattainable body images with the use of slim models and artificially-enhanced photos (Nagar & Virk, 2017). As noted by Love (1984), women feel immense pressure to conform to feminine beauty ideals and maintain such beauty practices, even though it may be inappropriate and harmful to do so. McKay et al. (2018) discussed that the constant pressure women receive to keep up with the Western beauty standards and the advantages that can be achieved from it have made countless women experience distress in the consumerist, media-driven culture today. Beauty practices and maintenance are seen as part of the social norm, and failure to even minimally groom oneself will leave an unpleasant impression on others. One stated,

"Probably when I first started, I had to fake it. I mean [as] they say, fake it until you make it." (Lara, 22, beauty influencer, Written Interview, November 25, 2020).

However, most participants stated otherwise, such as one participant,

"No, I wanted to stay true and authentic to who I am and share it with the people on social media." (Grace, 22, beauty influencer, Written Interview, November 27, 2020).

Most have pointed out the importance of authenticity, especially when it comes to engaging with their followers. One explained,

"With my posts, I try to be as transparent with them as much as possible so that they could see that there's more to us than what they see on Instagram." (Grace, 22, beauty influencer, Written Interview, November 27, 2020).

Photo-editing applications are also utilized due to the unrealistic beauty standards that pressure women, proving how harmful yet extremely normalized the body ideals on Instagram are (Sullivan, 2014). Some participants commented that there are safe communities in the platform; however, some agree that Instagram can be toxic.

"At the moment, I think Instagram has contributed to this toxic beauty standard as celebrities like Kylie Jenner and younger local e-celebs / influencers that portray themselves as 'too perfect.'" (Mina, 25, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, November 17, 2020).

Offline Life-world: Beyond Instagram

Exposure to beauty ideals can influence the self-esteem of Instagram beauty influencers. The self-esteem and body satisfaction of women that have been exposed to models, even for a short period, may be affected (Dion, 2016). These beauty ideals negatively affect the self-esteem of an individual especially if one does not achieve the said standards. Exposure on Instagram can possibly influence the self-esteem of Instagram beauty influencers. An individual's perceived self-esteem is the overall positive self-evaluation of a person in terms of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem plays a crucial role since it could either make or break the individual, and it also has an important job when it comes to the way one presents themselves to others. Meaning, if one has more confidence in themselves, then they would be more comfortable interacting with others without any worries. Thus, self-esteem can take a toll on how an individual perceives her body image. Being exposed to the contents of several models may cause comparison as a result.

It was also recognized that Instagram gives people the ability to enhance their photos, giving them control over the final image to be posted (Dumas et al., 2017). This is one of the main concerns of Instagram since the enhancement or manipulation of photos would create the 'perfect pictures' and would potentially have a negative influence on the body image of Instagram users (Kleemans et al., 2016). Some mentioned that they felt less confident outside Instagram as they have no control over what other people would see compared to posting online.

"I think I am less confident [outside Instagram] in the sense that I have less control. Because on Instagram, people only

see what you post, right? But, I also feel like I am more confident because when I am outside Instagram, there are more sides to me that I can offer to people. When I'm on Instagram, I have more control, but I only show parts of myself." (Cassie, 24, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, November 25, 2020).

"Outside Instagram, maybe sixty over a hundred [percent of confidence] because in real life, there is no angle that is considered to be nice for you since the public sees all angles of you, which is why I am not that confident in real life." (Bea, 23, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, November 21, 2021).

Social media directly impacts one's mental health with its content and its interactions (Koehler & Parrell, 2020). The longer one stays scrolling through social media, the longer they would be exposed to different content on it, which includes content from various celebrities that may be upholding beauty ideals, which may affect their self-esteem. Instagram influencers have more exposure on Instagram, and they would have to bear the heavyweight of responsibility as an influencer. This may cause them to feel pressured when creating content online as well as during their time for their offline life events. In addition to that, insulting comments towards them regarding their looks, lifestyle, etc. can also affect their self-esteem. According to Pop (2016), negative comments regarding a person's body can lead to poor self-esteem because body image is a potential factor in dictating the confidence of oneself.

Some of the participants pointed out that creating content may sometimes be overwhelming. As Instagram beauty influencers immerse in their online life-worlds, some stated that taking a break may sometimes be necessary for their mental health as the Instagram community has people that may be supportive or the other way around. They also mentioned the struggles they have experienced between their life-worlds online and offline. Some explained,

"When it comes to your mental health, I feel like what's important is that it's no longer effective if it doesn't suit your lifestyle, so if you are in the place where it's not sustainable for you where you feel like you need to take it down a notch because you're very busy, or you don't have time for it, or you're just not into it anymore, then it's okay to step back and to not be as intensive as you used to be." (Cassie, 24, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, November 25, 2020).

"I have observed over the years that there are people that are supportive and there are some that aren't. It's something that can mentally drain you, you know, that there will be people that want to bring you down or can say mean things about what you post or who you portray yourself as but I've learned to cancel those negative energies and focus on the ones that enjoy and like what I post." (Mina, 25, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, November 17, 2020).

Despite the pressure and toxic community brought by the dominance of beauty ideals, numerous influencers mentioned these influencers experience self-love and appreciation. It was pointed out how self-love and appreciation will be of great help in their journey as Instagram beauty influencers. Today, the beauty industry and community have started to embrace diversity; therefore, representation online can all the more be seen in beauty advertisements, beauty products, etc., compared to a few years back. Women with different body types and skin color are more accepted within the beauty community on Instagram. Young girls and women alike who are accustomed to seeing beauty ideals and are pressured to conform to these ideals that are non-inclusive and Westernized now feel more represented and appreciated. Diversity became a stepping stone for people to begin accepting themselves for who they are as well as learning to love themselves. In addition to that, being in a safe and supportive online community can increase their level of self-esteem. Having a strong foundation of self-love and appreciation would be able to help them avoid being influenced and affected by the beauty ideals that they are exposed to. One explained,

"I think that what matters most is that you have to come from that strong foundation of self-love and appreciation for yourself, knowing that what you look like doesn't matter, or rather it doesn't dictate your self-worth or how beautiful you are." (Cassie, 24, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, November 25, 2020).

"Actually, the Instagram community in the Philippines is starting to embrace diversity as [brands or companies] are beginning to recruit individuals with features not just of fair or clear skin." (Sam, 24, beauty influencer, Virtual Interview, November 27, 2021).

Beauty standards or feminine beauty ideals have existed way before social media did, and it has progressively gotten worse over the years. It is no doubt that the rapid escalation of feminine beauty ideals is evident on social media, primarily on Instagram. Women are pressured to conform to the beauty standards present on social media to fit the description of attractiveness or beauty. Being exposed to beauty ideals, such as the thin-ideal, may cause distressing feelings to arise especially when the individual fails to attain or achieve her goal, which then leads to dissatisfaction. Consequently, one can develop body image and self-esteem issues in the passage of time, and one might also seek ways to maintain and improve their beauty, such as possibly creating a false front, applying skin whitening products, and going through weight-loss diets. Numerous studies have shown the linkage between body image and self-esteem. For example, a study by O’dea (2012) discusses how low body image can impact an individual’s self-esteem. If an individual begins to feel insecure about their appearance, there is also a high possibility for their body image to be negatively affected in the long run since the two are closely knitted together (Phillips and Halder, 2019). Moreover, beauty maintenance routines may bring a harmful effect in the long run, yet one will once again evaluate her perceived body image and perceived self-esteem to discover if it has improved or not.

Being exposed to the beauty standards on Instagram may cause an individual to compare oneself to the photos posted on the said platform by beauty influencers and even by their own peers (Kleemans et al., 2016). The comparison of someone more superior to oneself may lead to low self-esteem. Kleemans et al. (2016) also stated that “the comparison with peers might affect their body image in a comparable manner as media images do” (p. 2).

However, comparing oneself may also be an advantage to others, as it would build up their confidence by comparing themselves to someone inferior. Moreover, self-esteem is usually associated with body image since the self-esteem of an individual would depend on how one perceives the body image of oneself (Phillips and Halder, 2019). Hence, having a negative body image would result in having low self-esteem, which would affect the individual not only physically but also psychologically especially in the long run. Lastly, it is also important to note that female influencers think, and sometimes even act, like normal people outside the beauty industry as well. Despite their numerous projects, popularity, and material objects, it is still quite inevitable for them to feel insecure about their physical appearance from time to time due to the continuous proliferation of Western beauty standards. These female beauty influencers tend to deal with their struggles by being transparent to their audience, revealing their physical flaws, and sharing their own stories as to how they overcome such problems. Such simple things help young women embrace their imperfections and look at them with confidence.

CONCLUSION

The main objectives of this research study aimed to describe the perceived beauty standards among female Instagram beauty influencers in Metro Manila, as well as their beauty maintenance routines based on their perceived beauty standards. Moreover, it also aims to describe their perceived body image and its improvements based on the beauty maintenance routines that were tried and tested by them as well as their self-esteem based on their perceived body image. As many research studies focus on the effects of beauty standards on the audience/followers, this research study focuses on Instagram beauty influencers as they are at the forefront of the current beauty trends. Their perspective would aid in determining how beauty standards affect both parties, which are the audience/followers and the social media beauty influencers.

Schutz and Luckmann's (1973) social phenomenological approach was utilized for this research study, which shows how the social stocks of knowledge of the Instagram beauty influencers affect their everyday lives when encountering beauty standards. As this research study only focuses on Metro Manila-based influencers, future researchers can widen the scope of the location and the age range. Future studies may also interview male beauty influencers of the beauty and/or fashion community and focus on the effects of male beauty standards. Moreover, for future research, they may also use other theories and approaches for this topic. Furthermore, a weakness that can be observed in this research study is the lack of background checks done in terms of recruiting participants. The researchers were not able to focus on certain criteria such as social class and the authenticity of the participants' growth as beauty influencers. Apart from that, the researchers were unable to include other factors that contribute to the effects of beauty standards. Future research that can be done to address this to explore other factors (e.g., cultural, social) that contribute to beauty standards and their effects on an individual such as one's culture, beliefs, etc.

Based on the data gathered in this research study, Instagram and the beauty standards promoted on the platform can be toxic and problematic due to its ability to pressure an individual into conforming to beauty ideals. However, recently, the beauty industry on Instagram has started to become more inclusive and diverse. The participants' everyday online and offline life-worlds show the situations encountered as they go on Instagram and its impact on their lives.

The online routines of Instagram beauty influencers typically include content creation and managing their image online. As they have an image to keep, there is an undeniable pressure that may cause them to put up a false front. However, transparency is greatly prioritized when it comes to their audience. Although the platform may have some safe beauty communities, it is still seen as toxic due to beauty standards' power.

When it comes to offline life-worlds, experience is dependent on exposure to beauty ideals. Similarly, these influencers have their routines and events to attend. With the overwhelming responsibilities the influencers carry, rest is of importance to prevent burnout. Moreover, self-love and appreciation are deemed necessary as it is seen as a foundation of their self-worth that significantly helps in their influencer journey.

This study revealed how the 'unrealistic' beauty standards negatively affect women which would bring awareness for individuals, especially for those that are exposed to the said beauty standards. Social media and beauty standards-centered research papers mainly focus on the affected audience and recruit them as their participants. Instagram beauty influencers have more experiences and knowledge on beauty standards on Instagram as they have more exposure on the said platform. This study explored and focused more on the influencer's perspective rather than the audience's perspective. Furthermore, this would give a better understanding of the Instagram beauty influencers' experiences and how they perceive the said beauty standards as well as how those beauty standards affect their lives both online and offline.

In the context of beauty standards online, Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory was included to indicate whether beauty influencers create a false front or facade online to their followers/audience. Based on the data the researchers gathered from the participants, a few participants mentioned that they have created a false front at one point, and some mentioned that they have only kept it to a minimum (e.g., editing their features). The rest mentioned that they have never displayed a false front online. However, all participants stated that it is not the case now and have learned to remain authentic in their influencer journey. Therefore, it can be said that social media beauty influencers do create a false front. However, it is also important to note that creating a false front can less likely occur due to the increase of diversity and inclusivity in the beauty community.

Instagram beauty influencers have a wide exposure on the said platform and with the beauty standards present on Instagram. This would give them a wider knowledge and experience with how Instagram functions as the said social media platform can be used as a way of endorsing different types of products. With this, Instagram beauty influencers who share similar interests endorse numerous products in connection with fashion, make-up, skincare, etc.

With regard to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, all beauty influencers on Instagram have found their niche in the beauty and fashion market, which forms a collective identity among them. Such influencers tend to post similar content due to the common skills they possess such as excellence in make-up, fashion, beauty, and the like. What makes them unique is the personal twist they mix into the content they post, where one's social class position might be an advantage. Thus, a cultural capital that beauty influencers possess which made them a significant symbolic element based on Pierre

Bourdieu's approach is the objectified state since material objects (Huang, 2019) related to their niches, such as beauty and technical equipment, play a big role in terms of their overall performance and even one's self-esteem, thus making them an important component in the study.

Throughout this research, the researchers were able to develop a more in-depth understanding regarding beauty standards evident online and their effects on individuals especially young women and girls alike. Moreover, the researchers were able to perceive a glimpse of the everyday life-worlds, both online and offline, of Instagram beauty influencers as well as see their perspective when it comes to the pressure of adhering to the current beauty trends.

In addition, that is how their perception of beauty shapes their realities. Furthermore, beauty standards continue to persist until today, and many are still pressured to adhere to its ideals. Despite this, the beauty community has started to become more inclusive and diverse, encouraging every individual to no longer adhere to such beauty standards.

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