Journal of Professional & Applied Psychology *Original Article*

The Impact of Exposure to Thin Ideal Celebrities on Young Women's Mood and Body Image

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Abstract

The previous studies have consistently shown that the media's promotion of the thin ideal negatively impacts women's body image and mood. This experimental study examined the effects of Instagram images of thin-ideal versus higher-weight celebrities on young women's mood, body image, and state appearance comparison. A purposive sample of 176 university students (*M*age = 20.43, *SD* = 1.87) was selected, with half exposed to 15 thin-ideal celebrity images (experimental group) and half to 15 higher-weight celebrity images (comparison group). Assessments used the Visual Analog Scale (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995) and the State Appearance Comparison Scale (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Findings demonstrated that thin-ideal celebrity images led to more negative mood, lower body satisfaction, and increased state appearance comparison. State appearance comparison partially mediated the relationship between exposure and both mood and body image. These results highlight the psychological effects of exposure to thin-ideal celebrity images among young women.

Keywords: Body Image, Instagram, Mood, State Appearance Comparison, Thin-Ideal

Received: 26 July 2025; Revised Received: 21 August 2025; Accepted: 26 August 2025

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Introduction

Instagram and other social media applications are rapidly becoming the primary means for people to engage, connect, and share a wide range of content, with an estimate of active users of more than 2 billion worldwide, vast majority in the age range of 18 and 34 (Dhir et al., 2018; Dixon, 2023). One of the most noticeable features of this digital environment is the abundance of photos of celebrities that often reflect traditional beauty standards (Brown & Tiggemann, 2021). Celebrities, known for their roles in entertainment or sports, are prominently featured on Instagram and, with millions of followers, frequently present idealized portrayals of their lifestyles, fashion, and physical appearance. Regular exposure to these images can significantly affect people's mental and physical image, especially for women, and encourage social comparison (Fardouly et al., 2015; McComb & Mills, 2022). Less is known about the psychological effects of young Pakistani women's disclosure to celebrity images through social media, whereas previous research primarily focused on the ramifications of models in magazines and TV ads (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Consequently, there is a need to conduct research into the complex connections between these aesthetically curated pictures and their effects on women's mood, state appearance comparison and perceptions of their bodies.

Given Instagram's widespread use, it is essential to understand how it impacts mood and body image from the standpoint of Social

Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954). According to this theory, when no objective benchmark is available, people evaluate their selves by contrasting their skills, appearance, and social standing with those of others. Emotions, motivation, and behavior are all influenced by these comparisons, which also help to lessen ambiguity regarding one's self-concept. In the context of body image, upward comparisons—which take place when people evaluate themselves against others who are deemed attractive—cause dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and depressed moods (Laker & Waller, 2021).

Body shape issues have usually been associated with unhealthy eating habits - like restrictive dieting, binge eating, and food-guilt - that raise the risk of eating disorders (Mallaram et al., 2023; Suhag & Rauniyar, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024). Earlier thought to be experienced only by Western women, such disorders are nowadays also found among non-Western groups (Kaur et al., 2023). These actions typically stem from internalizing the ideal of thinness and feeling dissatisfied with one's physical appearance (Levine & Murnen, 2009). In Pakistan, women are subject to gender-based stereotypes and societal expectations in both domestic and professional settings, many of which are tied to their physical appearance. Beauty standards - including complexion, facial features, body shape, and clothing - are largely dictated by cultural norms. The desire for the "ideal" figure has intensified due to media portrayals of slender celebrities, culturally prescribed beauty norms, familial pressure, and other societal influences (Batool et al., 2022). Unrealistic ideals of beauty are also increasingly being promoted and endorsed with the increase in use of social media in Pakistan leading to females' battles with disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, and other psychological related problems (Khan et al., 2011). Preliminary experimental studies suggest that even a few images of these idealized perfect bodies on social media lead to immediate increases in women's body dissatisfaction (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). This, subsequently, is linked with a number of health-risk behaviors, such as disordered eating, overexercise, diet pill use, and use of steroids and associated with detrimental mental health concerns, including depressive symptoms and anxiety, as well as low mood and self-esteem. Accordingly, body dissatisfaction is associated with numerous negative health outcomes (Kwan et al., 2023; Larson et al., 2021;Merino et al., 2024).

The concept of body image is multifaceted, encompassing both emotional and cognitive aspects. It includes how people view their bodies and the feelings that go along with these views, which can range from satisfaction to discontent. Body image is considered a variable state influenced by specific contextual circumstances, rather than being labeled a stable trait (Cash, 2002). People who believe that their ideal and actual bodies are very different—often due to thin-idealized Instagram content—are more likely to experience body image disorders and have lower levels of body satisfaction, according to research (Wertheim & Paxton, 2012).

According to Larsen (2000), mood refers to diffuse, unfocused emotional states. Unlike discrete emotions, which typically peak within hours or days, moods are generally less intense but more prolonged. Ranging from feelings of happiness and excitement to depression, anxiety, and irritability, moods influence how individuals perceive their experiences and interact with their environment. Viewing idealistically curated images on digital applications such as Instagram has been associated with negative mood effects, such as decreased self-confidence, irritability, and general dissatisfaction (Nene & Olayemi, 2023).

Tiggemann and McGill (2004) proposed the concept of State Appearance Comparison, in which people judge their physical appearance in certain situations by comparing their appearance with others. The comparison may be done on the basis of beauty or physique. According to research by Tiggemann et al. (2009) and Fardouly et al. (2015), disclosure to thin-ideal images is strongly mediated by appearance comparison, which also has detrimental effects on mood and body image dissatisfaction. This emphasizes the way social comparison has a negative psychological impact.

In the Pakistani context, appearance comparisons are further reinforced by deeply rooted cultural, religious, and familial values. Traditional gender norms emphasize modesty, obedience, and marriageability, which shape how women perceive and present their bodies (Priola & Chaudhry, 2020). Islamic teachings that promote modest dress may reduce overt body exposure and, in some cases, explicit comparison. Moreover, the Pakistani beauty ideal is shaped by a complex interplay of cultural preferences - ranging from fair skin and specific facial features to regionally varied ideals of body shape, where fuller figures are sometimes seen as indicators of health and fertility (Bint-e-Khalil & Ali, 2025). Pakistani women are traditionally shaped to be 'round', but due to their enhanced exposure to globalized beauty images (due to social media like Instagram) the younger women in Pakistan have increasing exposure to thin-ideal imagery that contradicts the local community standards. Instagram's controlled and stylized content facilitate appearance comparing, especially with celebrities and influencers who possess unrealistic beauty standards (Abbasi et al., 2024). This generates internal tension, as stay-at-home women wrestle with reconciling the traditional ideal of modest femininity with the aspirational aesthetics she sees on the Internet. Familial and societal pressures - particularly from older female relatives - further reinforce these norms, often framing physical appearance as central to social approval and marital prospects (Mishra et al., 2023). These norms are also reinforced by the family and society - especially older women relatives - with physical appearance often positioned as a key factor in social sanction and marriage market (Mishra et al., 2023). As such, appearance comparison among Pakistani may not be solely motivated by aesthetics, but can be more rooted in the need to fit in conformity to culturally and emergent globalized standards (Bint-e-Khalil & Ali, 2025). This discrepancy between local values on the one hand and the thin-ideal content shared by Instagram on the other worsen body dissatisfaction and emotional distress, underscoring the need to examine body image concerns and mood outcomes in this population through the culturally contextualized lens of Social Comparison Theory (Nisa et al., 2024).

Sociocultural elements like family and peers have a big influence on body image problems (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). As per the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Image, there are three components of it which contribute to body dissatisfaction and eating pathology. These include media, parents and peers (Thompson, 1999). In addition to being directly influenced by media, parents and peers emerging body image problems and eating disorder psychopathology in women are also indirectly impacted by mediated relationships with appearance comparisons and internalization of the thin ideal. However, now the role of media is also being highlighted in negative emotions and lower body satisfaction by promoting idealistic beauty norms (Slater & Fardouly, 2019). This model offers a helpful perspective on how seeing thin-ideal images can affect mood and body image in women. This study examines how idealized images on a highly visual

platform like Instagram contribute to negative mood and body image issues by focusing on the media component of the Tripartite Influence Model. It accomplishes this by exploring the mediating effect of state appearance comparison, one of the primary psychological processes by which media power functions. By applying the Tripartite Model to Pakistan's digital and cultural environment, the research gains a more subtle insight into how beauty standard-related sociocultural pressures become amplified on social media sites.

The Present Study

This study's main objective is to find out how young Pakistani women's disclosure to thin-ideal celebrity photos on Instagram affects their mood, body image, and appearance comparison. In connection with that exposure, it also aims to explore the ways in which state appearance comparison mediates the mood and body image of young women.

Thin-ideal representations, especially by celebrities and influencers, have been shown to have a deleterious impact on mood and body satisfaction of women in Western samples. Experimental studies have shown that looking at pictures of celebrities or peers on Instagram dramatically raises negative affect and body dissatisfaction, with appearance comparison acting as a major mediating factor (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Kim & Chock, 2015). Although some international research has also looked at counteractive tactics like media literacy or exposure to parodic content, these findings primarily come from Western samples and have limited applicability outside of Western cultures.

Even though media consumption is at an all-time high and beauty standards are clearly pervasive in Pakistan, the majority of evidence on social media's psychological impact, especially Instagram, is cross-sectional or correlational (Bilal et al., 2021). There is very limited and scarce published indigenous literature on the causal relationship social media use has on the mental health of the users. Many studies have examined body image dissatisfaction in Pakistan, but few empirical studies specifically use our local celebrity figures to evaluate the impact of photos of thin-ideal looking celebrities on body satisfaction and mood, among other outcomes (Khan et al., 2011).

Numerous important methodological and contextual gaps are addressed through this study. Firstly, by employing an experimental design, it allows for a more rigorous examination of causality than previous correlational studies. Secondly, the current study includes an active comparison group instead of comparing to a passive control group, which allows for a more robust test of whether thin-ideal images have different effects than other kinds of content. Thirdly, the study focuses on South Asian celebrities in particular, who have a greater influence on beauty standards than anonymous fashion models because of their media prominence and cultural relatability.

This study contributes towards emerging but relatively underdeveloped domain of research on the psychological effects of digital media in South Asian contexts by carrying out an experimental investigation into the impact of being exposed to photos of thin-ideal celebrities on high visual apps like Instagram. In addition to mechanisms like appearance comparison that help identify vulnerable groups, the study's findings will provide insight into psychological processes that raise the likelihood of body dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms.

In a larger sense, this study can direct the creation of culturally aware interventions meant to encourage digital literacy and responsible social media use. It also affects Pakistani policymakers, educators, influencers, and mental health professionals. Therefore, this study can play a pivotal role

in developing a positive self-image and lessen internalization of non-representational standards of beauty shown on digital platforms thereby promoting diverse and inclusive beauty representations.

In the light of previous studies, following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Participants exposed to thin ideal celebrity images are likely to experience more negative mood, body image concerns and state appearance comparisons compared to those exposed to images of celebrities with a higher body weight.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): State appearance comparison will mediate the relationship between celebrity images, negative mood and body image among young women.

Method

Participants

Young women made up the study's sample. Using a one-tailed test, a medium effect size of d =.50, and α =.05 the sample comprised of 176 young women to assess differences, if significant, between the two groups, experimental group i.e., exposed to ideal celebrity photos and comparison group i.e., exposed to higher body weight celebrity images. A G*Power3 power analysis was used to determine this (Faul et al., 2007). Participants who were not on the inclusion criteria were excluded from the final sample which entailed of 168 young women aged 18 to 25 (*M*age = 20.43, *SD* = 1.87), selected from a Pakistani university with a semi-government enrollment exclusively for women in Lahore. To ensure that the sample accurately represented the study's target demographic, participants were selected through the use of purposeful sampling.

Materials

Two sets of fifteen photos each curated specifically for the study included: one set featuring thin idealized celebrity images for the experimental group and the other set featuring celebrity images with higher body weight for the comparison group. The pictures featured a range of angles, from close-ups of the celebrities to full-body pictures.

The images came from popular public celebrity Instagram accounts and any pertinent remarks or descriptions were taken out. The final pictures for the thin-ideal condition were chosen from a variety of celebrity pictures. Five celebrities were chosen, with three images of each celebrity included for the experimental group. Prior to finalizing the study's photographs, five independent female raters, ranging in age from 18 to 25, evaluated the images using a 7-point Likert scale (0 = not at all; 7 = very much) based on attributes such as thinness, attractiveness, and image quality. Images that scored below 4 on any of the parameters were eliminated. This method was adapted from Slater and Fardouly (2019). To ensure consistency across conditions, a similar procedure was followed for selecting images of celebrities with higher body weight. Body Mass Index (BMI) was calculated for all five selected celebrities using their reported height and weight available on Wikipedia. For the purpose of this study, celebrities categorized as “higher body weight” were defined as those with a BMI ranging from 25 to 29.9, which corresponds to the Overweight/Pre-obese category

Manipulation Check

The names of the celebrities included in the study were presented in a headline made using PowerPoint before each pair of sets of faces was shown to the two groups. Finally, participants were asked to indicate how familiar they were with the number of celebrities presented (on a scale from 0 = not at to 5 = to completely). Comparison and experimental groups were also asked to identify the five celebrities that had been modeled.

To determine the effectiveness of the experiment, this approach aimed to see if well-known celebrities were easier to

remember than unknown ones. Participants were more likely to recall thin-ideal body-type celebrities by the end of the study than those who were depicted in the celebrity group but had a higher body weight.

Measures

Demographic Form

Demographic Information sheet was made by the researcher to collect important participant data related to the study. This included details like age, height, weight, education level, Instagram usage duration, and to rule out any preexisting physiological and psychological ailments.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants (N=168)

Variables	Group 1 (Experimental)				Group 2 (Comparison)				Full sample			
	M	*SD*	*n*	*%*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*%*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*%*
Age	20.43	1.99	------	------	20.44	1.75	------	------	20.43	1.87	------	------
Instagram Use												
Years Active on Instagram	5.73	2.40	------	------	5.83	2.07	------	------	5.78	2.24	------	------
Time Spent on Instagram per day												
2 hours	------	------	36	42.90	------	------	32	38.10	------	------	68	40.50
3-4 hours	------	------	35	41.70	-----	-----	34	40.50	-----	-----	69	41.10
5-7 hours	------	------	8	9.50	-----	-----	9	10.70	-----	-----	17	10.10
8-10 hours	------	------	5	6.00	-----	-----	9	10.70	-----	-----	14	8.30
Check Instagram per day												
Once a day	------	------	12	14.30	------	------	5	6.00	------	------	17	10.10
Every few hours	------	------	27	32.10	------	------	25	29.80	------	------	52	31.00
Every hour	------	------	18	21.40	------	------	22	26.20	------	------	40	23.80
Every 30 minutes	------	------	21	25.00	------	------	22	26.20	------	------	43	25.60
Every 2 minutes	------	------	4	4.80	------	------	4	4.80	------	------	8	4.80
Every minute	------	------	2	2.40	------	------	6	7.10	------	------	8	4.80
BMI	20.81	2.95	------	------	20.89	3.14	------	------	20.85	3.04	------	------
Height	5.37	.27	------	------	5.38	.20	------	------	5.38	.24	------	------
Weight	54.39	9.32	------	------	54.82	9.09	------	------	54.61	9.18	------	------

State Appearance Comparison Scale (SACS; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). The SACS is a 3-item measure assessing the extent to which participants engaged in appearance comparison during the task. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much), with total scores ranging from 3 to 21. Higher scores indicate greater appearance comparison. An example item is: *"To what extent did you think about your own appearance in the last fifteen minutes?"* In the present study, the internal consistency was $\alpha = .83$.

Visual Analogue Scale (VAS; Heinberg & Thompson, 1995). The VAS was used to assess participants' mood (five items: anxiety, anger, confidence, depression, happiness) and body dissatisfaction (four items: body shape, weight, physical appearance, facial features). Each item consisted of a 100 mm horizontal line anchored at 0 (not at all) and 100 (very much). Scores were recorded to the nearest millimeter. Composite scores ranged from 0–500 for mood and 0–400 for body dissatisfaction, with higher scores reflecting

more negative states. Example items include: "How depressed do you feel RIGHT NOW?" and "How dissatisfied are you RIGHT NOW with your physical appearance?" Internal consistency in this study was α = .79 (mood) and α = .91 (body dissatisfaction).

Procedure

Approval was obtained from the authors' institution, and permission for assessment tools was secured from their authors. Participants were told the study was about Instagram usage and celebrity familiarity, without revealing the actual objectives, to reduce demand characteristics and socially desirable responses. Four confederates assisted with group setup, questionnaire distribution, compliance monitoring, and collection. After the study, participants were debriefed about the true objectives and informed of potential benefits, such as insights into social media and body image. Written informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw and the confidentiality of their data.

A between-subjects experimental design was used. Eligible participants (BMI 18.5–24.9, daily Instagram users, proficient in English) were recruited from an all-female university in Lahore. Exclusion criteria included psychology majors, self-reported psychological disorders, ongoing therapy, and non-South Asian identity. A total of 176 participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group viewed thin-ideal celebrity images, while the comparison group viewed higher-weight celebrity images. The comparison group functioned as an active condition to evaluate the direction and magnitude of thin-ideal effects.

Participants were organized by natural classroom clusters, with two classes (n=88) assigned to each condition. Confederates obtained instructor permission, introduced the study, and administered paper-and-pencil questionnaires during class under researcher supervision. Data were collected in classroom settings to maintain consistency and comfort, with exclusions applied before analysis for those not meeting inclusion criteria.

Each participant viewed 15 Instagram images (five celebrities, 10 seconds per image). Assessments were conducted pre- and post-exposure. Sessions for both groups were held between 9:00–11:00 a.m. to minimize fatigue and control external variables.

Results

SPSS version 24 was utilized for data analysis. To assess participants' sociodemographic traits, several descriptive statistics were calculated. Numerical measures of skewness and kurtosis were used to assess data normality, and all values fell within the usual range of ±1.96. After being identified as significant cases with extreme outliers, the responses of eight of the 176 participants were removed from the dataset. Consequently, data from 168 participants was examined. Independent samples t-test was used to assess both groups for their equivalence pre intervention, in addition to comparing significant differences between the experimental and comparison groups in terms of the psychological outcomes after viewing the celebrity images. Additionally, to analyze whether state appearance comparison acted as a mediator simple mediation analysis by Hayes (2013) was employed.

Table 2

Group Differences in State Appearance Comparison, Mood, and Body Image among Young Females at Pre-test (N=168)

	Experimental		**Comparison**				**95% *CI***	
Variable	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***t(df)***	***p***	***LL***	***UL***
1. SACS	3.10	1.35	3.29	1.31	-.93 (166)	.355	-.60	.22
2.Mood	28.07	17.11	28.62	15.82	-.22 (166)	.830	-5.57	4.47
3.Body Image	26.67	23.69	32.85	22.38	-1.74 (166)	.084	-13.21	.83

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Note. SACS = State Appearance Comparison Scale; Group 1=Experimental, Group 2= Comparison *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit

Table 3

Group Differences in State Appearance Comparison, Mood, and Body Image among Young Females at Post-test (N=168)

Post-test

	Experimental		**Comparison**				**95% *CI***		
Variable	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***t(df)***	***p***	***LL***	***UL***	**Cohen's *d***
1. SACS	3.52	1.76	2.78	1.54	2.90 (166)	.004**	.24	1.24	.45
2.Mood	28.17	21.06	20.26	15.93	2.74 (154.54)	.007**	2.21	13.60	.42
3.Body Image	33.15	29.30	22.94	20.17	2.63 (147.23)	.009**	2.54	17.88	.41

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Note. SACS = State Appearance Comparison Scale; Group 1=Experimental, Group 2= Comparison *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit

According to Table 2 results, there are no notable group differences in the outcome variables which indicates that both groups' SACS, mood, and body image did not significantly differ before they saw the celebrity pictures. On the other hand, SACS, mood, and body image data in Table 3 show significant group differences. This suggests that after viewing the thin-ideal celebrity Instagram photos, the experimental group showed significantly more negative mood, higher state appearance comparisons, and body image concerns.

Table 4

Indirect Effect of State Appearance Comparison on Mood and Body Image towards Exposure to Celebrity Images on Instagram (N=168)

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable			95% CI	
		B	*p*	LL	UL
Direct Effects					
Mood	Exposure to Celebrity Images [a]	-7.90**	.007	-13.59	-2.22
Body Image	Exposure to Celebrity Images [a]	-10.21**	.009	-17.87	-2.54
SACS	Exposure to Celebrity Images [a]	-.74**	.004	-1.25	-.24
Mood	SACS	3.75***	<.001	2.11	5.38
Body Image	SACS	9.07***	<.001	7.20	10.94
Indirect Effects					
Mood	Exposure to Celebrity Images through SACS	-2.78	-	-5.47	-.72
Body Image	Exposure to Celebrity Images through SACS	-6.73	-	-11.62	-2.22

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Note. SACS = State Appearance Comparison Scale; Group 1=Experimental, Group 2= Comparison; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit

[a] = Coding for Exposure to Celebrity Images (Experimental=1, Comparison=2)

Figure 1

Emerged Mediation Model Showing State Appearance Comparison as Mediator between Exposure to Celebrity Images and Mood among Young Women

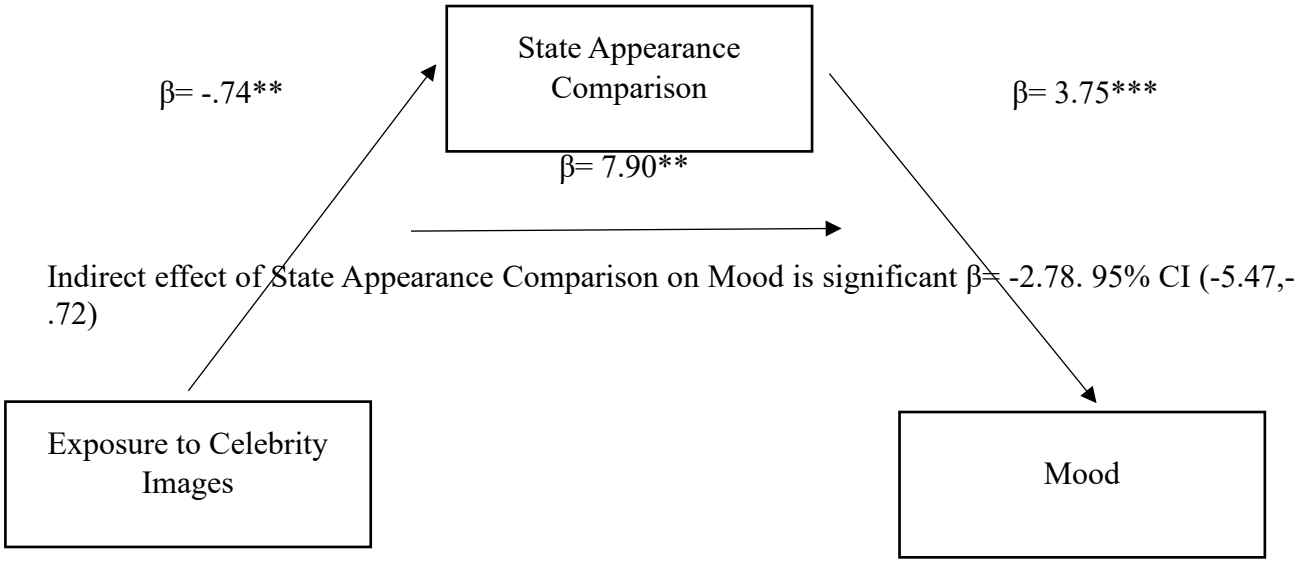
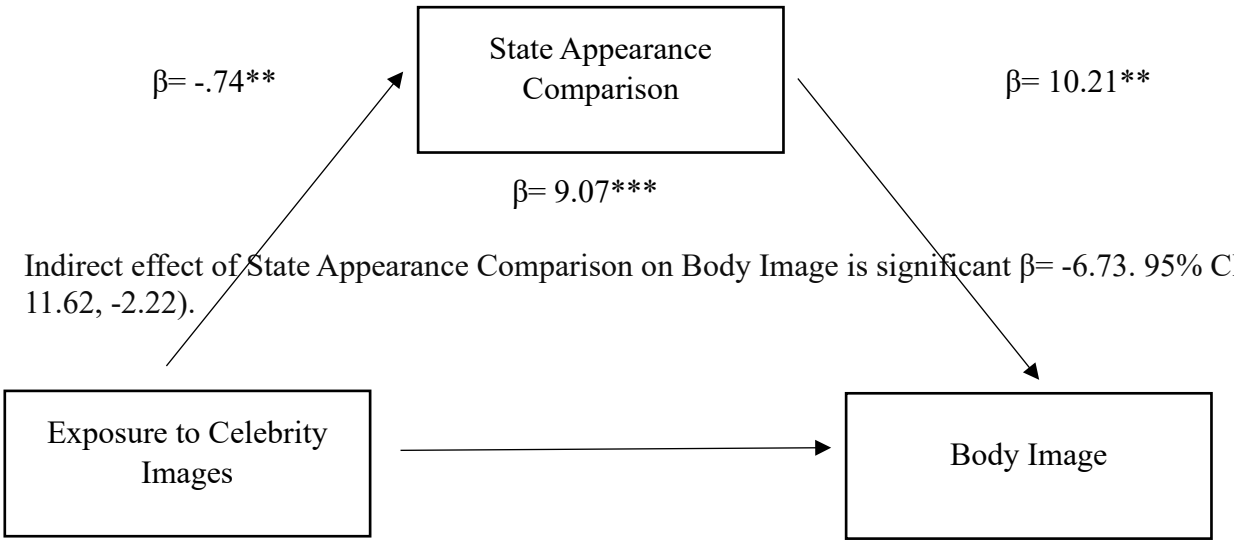


Figure 2

Emerged Mediation Model Showing State Appearance Comparison as Mediator between Exposure to Celebrity Images and Body Image among Young Women



SPSS Macro Process by Hayes (2013) was used to investigate the mediating function of SACS in terms of celebrity photos and body image and mood. The direct, indirect, and total effects were estimated using a bias-corrected nonparametric bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples.

Table 4 presents the results, which show that celebrity image exposure (the independent variable) has a significant direct effect and negatively affects state appearance comparison (the mediator). After being exposed to thin ideal celebrities, the experimental group demonstrated heightened state appearance comparison as opposed to the comparison group. Furthermore, it emerged that mood, body image, and dependent variables were all directly, significantly, and positively impacted by State Appearance Comparison. More precisely, higher state appearance comparison scores were associated with body image issues and negative mood. When experimental group is compared to the comparison group, the former reported decreased body satisfaction and increased negative mood. Furthermore, body image and mood had a significant and negative impact on viewing images of celebrities. State appearance comparison additionally demonstrated an indirect and significant effect on mood and body image, indicating that it partially mediated the relationship between young women's exposure to these negative outcomes and celebrity image exposure.

Discussion

The present findings support the hypotheses that, in comparison to group shown higher body weight celebrity images, those who were shown celebrity images of thin-ideal experienced significantly more negative mood, lower body satisfaction, and increased appearance comparison. These findings are congruous with previous empirical studies that demonstrate the negative effects of media portrayals of thinness, whether from magazines or social media, on women. Disclosure of these images resulted in women having heightened state self-

objectification, reduced body satisfaction and felt more anxious about their appearance and showed more negative moods. On the other hand, people who looked at neutral stimulus did not experience the same negative mood (Harper & Tiggemann, 2007; Nagar & Virk, 2017; Papageorgiou et al., 2022). In contrast to images that emphasize thin ideal body types, earlier empirical studies have revealed that control images exposure namely beautiful landscape or humorous parodies—significantly improved mood and body image (Anixiadis et al., 2019; Slater & Fardouly, 2019).

The primary sources of adolescent influence according to Tripartite Influence Model of Body Dissatisfaction are media, parents and peers (Keery et al., 2004). In particular, female characters in the media frequently have idealized and attractive body shapes, which can result in viewers experiencing body image problems (Keery et al., 2004). Because of the power of the media, these platforms must make it their business to ensure that the media they promote does not contribute to body dissatisfaction or promote unrealistic expectations of beauty standards. They are at the forefront of this, and they must be mindful of the images they present, in particular, the idealized images that their algorithms frequently promote as part of positive self-identity, making media platforms responsible for their influence, particularly if this influence impacts on their audience's psychological well-being. The current findings can also be interpreted in light of Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. Participants in the experimental group may have made upward comparisons after viewing Instagram images of thin-ideal celebrities. This could have added to their negative mood, increased their dissatisfaction with their bodies and elevated their state appearance comparison.

These results suggest that, similar to how women in Western countries perceive it, young Pakistani women's exposure to thin-idealized celebrity images fuels their negative emotions and body dissatisfaction. Studies show that women in Pakistan experience greater anxiety about their bodies, partly due to the patriarchal social system. Male dominant cultures put undue pressure on women to conform according to the societal beauty standards thereby increasing the scrutiny of their bodies by the society. Their self-esteem, confidence, and mental and emotional well-being are all negatively impacted by this pressure (Khan et al., 2011). As hypothesized, state appearance comparison mediated the relation between exposure to celebrity images and negative mood and body dissatisfaction. In accordance with earlier research that demonstrated that peer photos or ideal-body representations of women in magazines or on social media significantly influenced self-objectification, with appearance comparisons acting as a mediating factor (Fardouly et al., 2015). Tiggemann and Slater (2003) found that participants' levels of social comparison and body dissatisfaction increased when they watched music videos with slender women. Higher degrees of appearance comparison were related to higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Barbierik et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, young women evaluate their physique and how much they measure up to cultural beauty ideals by comparing their bodies. The findings are interpreted within the cultural context of Pakistan, where beauty ideals are increasingly shaped by globalized thin-ideal standards, yet still intersect with local cultural norms regarding body shape and appearance. This integration highlights how Westernized celebrity images on social media may amplify body dissatisfaction in young Pakistani women, who are negotiating both traditional and globalized standards of beauty. Western beauty standards that reach Pakistani women via a variety of media platforms can have an effect on a person’s

views of themselves, both their bodies and beauty, and result in an increase in appearance comparison and self-objectification (Batool et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2011).

Limitations and Suggestions

This study is limited because it relied on the self-report method to assess participants' social media usage. This method may have some artefacts due to memory biases and participants' ignorance. Self-reported individual use of social media may not be same as the measured behavioral indicators of actual use, based on careful surveillance of subjects' Internet activity (Marengo et al., 2018). In the future, less biased methods of evaluation must be used to avoid limitations of self-report. It could be smartphone apps, or digital tracking tools that baseline real usage patterns, so that we can gain a more accurate understanding of time on social media. The present study was not a legitimate experiment, and thus, did not use random assignment of individual participants to an experimental and a control group, potentially threatening the internal validity of the study. To enhance internal validity, we suggest the use of random assignment in future studies so that if differences exist post-group, they are more likely to be related to the experimental manipulation rather than pre- (between group) differences. Both groups showed some changes in mood and body-related outcomes, though effects were stronger in the experimental group, indicating that the higher body weight group functioned as an active comparison rather than a true control. Future studies should include a third, truly neutral group (e.g., exposed to nature images) alongside these groups to better isolate the specific effects of thin-ideal imagery. This would help establish stronger causal relationships between exposure to celebrity images and the outcomes being measured. The study's findings only apply to English-speaking, college-bound, urban middle-class young women in Lahore, Pakistan. Future research should examine how different groups in Pakistan, such as rural and less educated women, are impacted by media portrayals of thinness.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In contrast to images of celebrities with a higher body weight, young women in Lahore, Pakistan, shown thin-ideal photos reported feeling more depressed, less satisfied with their bodies, and comparing their appearances more. Furthermore, the link between disclosure of celebrity image and negative mood and perceived body dissatisfaction was found to be mediated by comparison of state appearance. Mass media plays an important role in impacting mood and body image of young women, which is in line with previous correlational and experimental studies. Therefore, the responsible role of mass media should be the main focus of efforts to lessen or prevent these detrimental psychological effects among young women. The significance of Social Comparison Theory is also explained by these findings, which suggest that appearance comparison is the underlying process through which mass media negatively affects mood and body image in young women. This theory helps in explaining why some young women are more susceptible than others to the exaggerated portrayals of beauty standards through the media.

The results have a number of implications. With the established knowledge of partial mediation by state appearance comparison in relation to thin-ideal celebrity exposure and two psychological outcomes – mood and body image future research should examine additional psychological factors that may mediate this relationship. Future research may also examine whether exposure to celebrity images of the slender ideal has a long-term impact on outcome variables. It is speculated that negative mood and body

image problems may not be permanently impacted by being exposed to thin-ideal pictures of celebrities on digital media for brief and infrequent durations. However, lengthy and continuous exposure is likely to have a more significant impact, potentially requiring psychotherapy to address dysfunctional responses to media images. According to this research, it might be crucial for educational institutions to educate young ladies to the possible dangers of continuously being exposed to media representations of the idealized thin body. The current results also emphasize the necessity of creating a culturally appropriate cognitive-behavioral treatment intervention that incorporates elements meant to lessen appearance comparison tendencies. This intervention was first validated by Cash and Strachan (2002). Education about the potential threat of being exposed to images that portray thin-ideal image should be provided to young women combined with digital media literacy and other psychoeducational interventions.

Ethics Statement

All the ethical standards of APA were met. Informed consent was taken in written form from all the respondents to participate in this study.

Contribution of Authors

Shifa Nadeem: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft,
Sara Asad: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

Source of Funding

The authors declared no source of funding.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [S.N.] upon the reasonable request.

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