



# The Role of Social Media in Constructing the Digital Identity of Women and Its Impact on Self-Perception

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## Abstract:

Social media has changed how women create and express their identities in daily life. Users curate photographs, share personal stories, and interact with visual trends that influence how they are viewed on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. This study investigates how social media shapes women's digital identities and how it affects how they view themselves. The study examines self-presentation behaviors, exposure to beauty standards, social validation through likes and comments, and involvement in online groups using a quantitative survey method. The goal of the study is to determine if creating a digital identity increases self-esteem and confidence or if it leads to pressure, comparison, and low self-esteem. By examining these relationships, the study draws attention to social media's multifaceted and intricate function.

Keywords: Digital identity, Self-presentation, Self-comparison, Social media and women, Online validation

## 1. Introduction

The quick growth of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok has drastically changed how people view themselves and their identities. These platforms serve as locations for identity performance, affirmation, resistance, and negotiation in addition to being means for communication, especially for women. Social media, in contrast to traditional media, enables women to build visual narratives, share personal experiences, and participate in groups that influence how they perceive themselves.

The term "digital identity" describes how a person's personality, values, appearance, and social roles are represented online. Photographs, descriptions, filters, hashtags, and audience interaction are some of the ways that many women intentionally create their persona. Regular exposure to algorithm-driven material, influencer culture, and idealized beauty standards can affect self-worth, body image, and self-esteem while also reinforcing comparison tendencies.

However, social media also offers areas for empowerment. Women are now able to express their true selves, dispel misconceptions, and create networks of solidarity thanks to movements like Black Lives Matter and online feminist campaigns. Social media can therefore both empower and put pressure on women to shape their online selves.

This study seeks to explore how women construct their digital identities on social media and how this process influences their confidence, body image, and overall self-concept.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the ways in which women create and display their online personas on social media.

- To analyze the factors influencing digital self-presentation (filters, likes, comments, trends, influencers).
- To explore the connection between women's self-perception and the creation of their digital identities.
- To determine whether social validation measures (likes, shares, and follows) influences women's self-esteem
- To identify whether social media acts as a space of empowerment or pressure in shaping women's identities.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1 Social Media Use

##### Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973)

According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, people deliberately choose media sources according to the particular needs and satisfactions they are looking for, including social contact, entertainment, information, and personal identity. According to this idea, people use social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to satisfy psychological demands including escapism, connection, and validation. Social media users are active participants since they can produce and manage material, in contrast to passive media. This hypothesis emphasizes why people use social media and how different users may be motivated by various emotional or psychological demands, which can have an impact on their mental health results.

##### 3.2 Digital Self-Presentation Theory

###### Self-Presentation Theory (Erving Goffman, 1959)

According to Erving Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory, people try to manage their public image in an effort to influence how other people see them, much like performers on a stage.

This is seen on social media sites via the selection of images, messages, and captions targeted at presenting a romanticized image of oneself. This selective disclosure and ongoing self-monitoring may cause people to place an undue emphasis on getting approval from others, frequently in the form of likes, comments, or follows. According to the hypothesis, people create positive online personas to preserve a positive impression, which can lead to anxiety, self-consciousness, or self-criticism when their online persona does not match their actual self. Research indicates that women are more likely to engage in strategic self-presentation, particularly concerning appearance and lifestyle portrayal.

###### 3.3 Social Comparison Theory:

Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory suggests that people have a natural tendency to assess themselves by making comparisons with others to evaluate their own abilities, beliefs, and self-worth. In the realm of social media, this theory is particularly significant, as these platforms offer countless chances for comparison—especially upward comparisons with influencers or friends who showcase idealized portrayals of their lives. Such comparisons can result in feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, and discontent. This theory offers a fundamental insight into how viewing curated content can skew self-perception and heighten susceptibility to negative psychological states.

###### 3.4 Objectification and Body Image

Jing Pan in his research 'The Influence of Social Media on Women's Objectified Body Consciousness and Body Dissatisfaction' in 2021, concluded that women will develop self-surveillance if they are constantly exposed to a lot of idealized pictures, such as those found in ads and social networking sites. In general, women's mental health will be harmed by the idealized and unrealistic pictures found in all facets of online media, which may also lead to physical health issues and body anxiety.

Previous research highlights that social media contributes to self-objectification, where women internalize an observer's perspective of their bodies. Filter culture and influencer imagery reinforce unrealistic standards, leading to appearance anxiety and reduced body confidence.

### 3.5 Social Validation and Psychological Impact

Likes, comments, and follower counts are examples of social validation, according to empirical research. While low participation can have a detrimental impact on mood and self-worth, positive feedback may momentarily increase confidence. Repeated identity performance is encouraged by the reward systems built into social media networks.

### Research Gap

While existing studies examine body image and social comparison, fewer studies focus holistically on how digital identity construction itself shapes women's broader self-perception, integrating both empowering and harmful dimensions. This study aims to bridge that gap.

## 4. Hypotheses

**H0: Even though women value originality and uniqueness, social media use has no substantial impact on women's self-esteem, identity expression, and perception of beauty standards.**

**H1: Even though women value originality and uniqueness, social media use has a substantial impact on women's self-esteem, identity expression, and perception of beauty standards.**

## 5. Research Methodology:

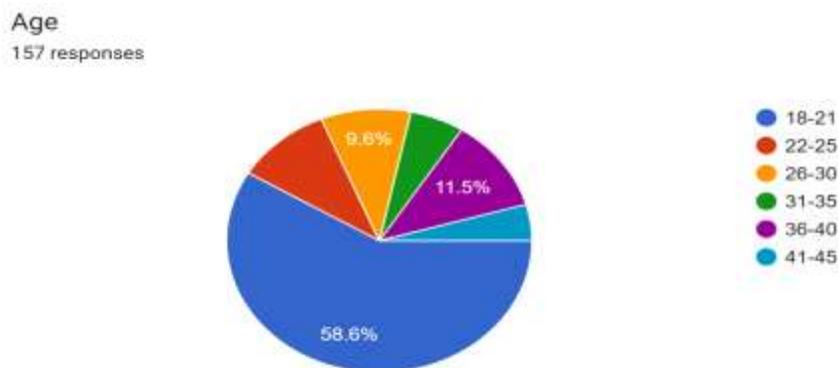
This study will adopt a **quantitative descriptive research design** using a survey method. The design is suitable for examining patterns of digital identity construction and its relationship with women's self-perception. A **cross-sectional survey approach** will be used to collect data from respondents at a single point in time. A study of 157 women respondents was conducted through a Structured questionnaire. Responses are collected through Google forms.

- **Sampling Technique:** Purposive sampling (women who use social media for at least 1 hour daily).
- **Sample Size:** 157 respondents

## 6. Findings of the Study:

### Demographic Profiles of Respondents:

#### I.Age



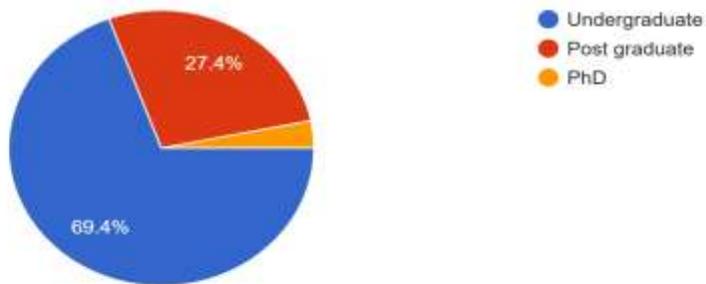
### Interpretation:

In total 157 responses were collected from women. Major women responders of this study aged between 18-25 are the highest users of Social media platforms. This data suggests that women between the age group of 18-25 are the active users of social media platforms. Most of them are students.

### II.Educational Qualification:

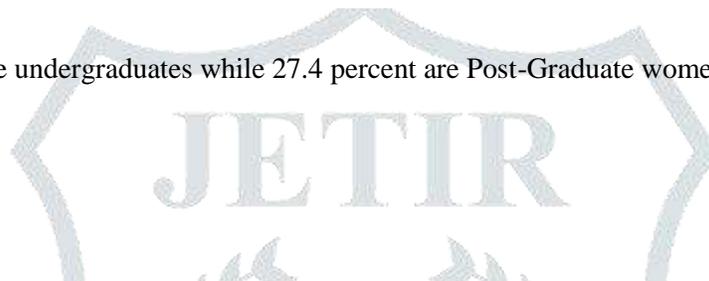
Educational Level

157 responses



Interpretation:

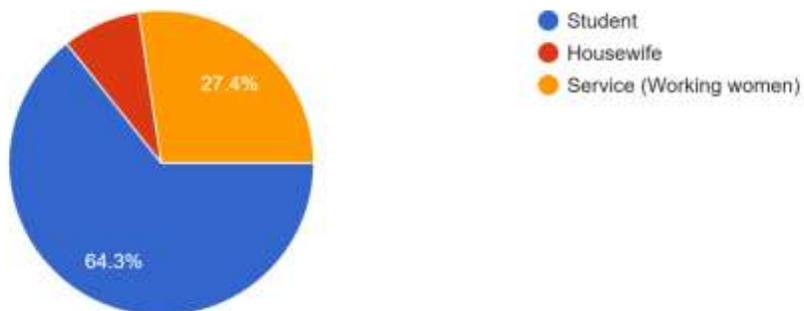
Many responders (69.4 %) are undergraduates while 27.4 percent are Post-Graduate women.



### III.Occupation:

Occupation

157 responses



Interpretation:

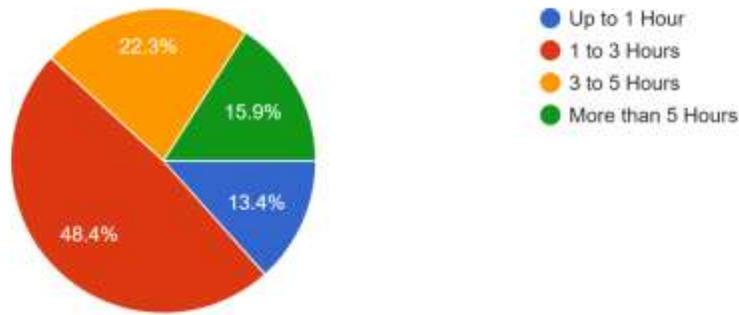
Many responders (64.3 %) are college going students while 27 percent are working women.



### Average Time Spent on Social Media:

## Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media:

157 responses



## Interpretation:

Many responders (48.4 %) spend up to 3 hours daily on social media followed by 22.3 % responders spend up to 5 hours on the social media platforms.



## Most used Platforms:

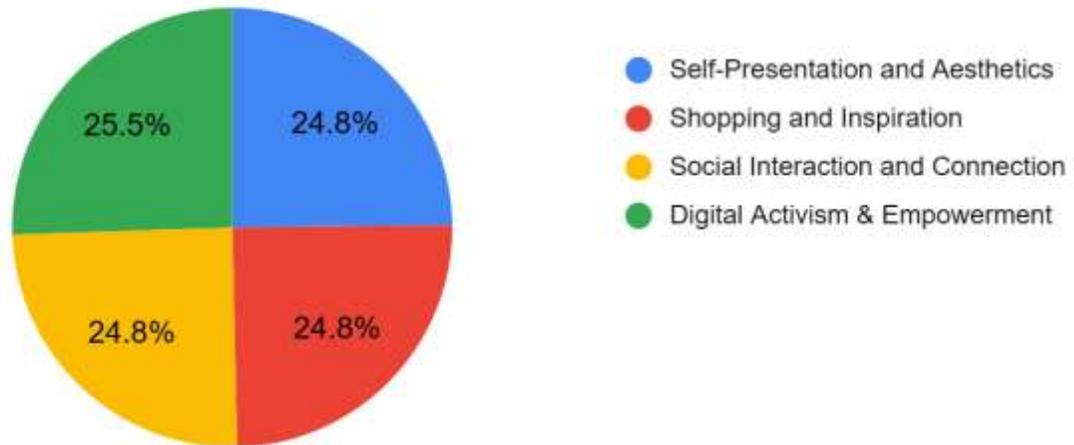
157 responses



Many responders (78.3%) use Instagram the most. It suggests that due to the unique features that Instagram provides, like image filtering, which attracts more women towards the platform. Instagram selfies are simply one aspect of what women are doing. Other women are encouraged to purchase the things that celebrities use and share on Instagram.

**Reasons for Using Social Media :**

Reasons for using social media: 157 responses

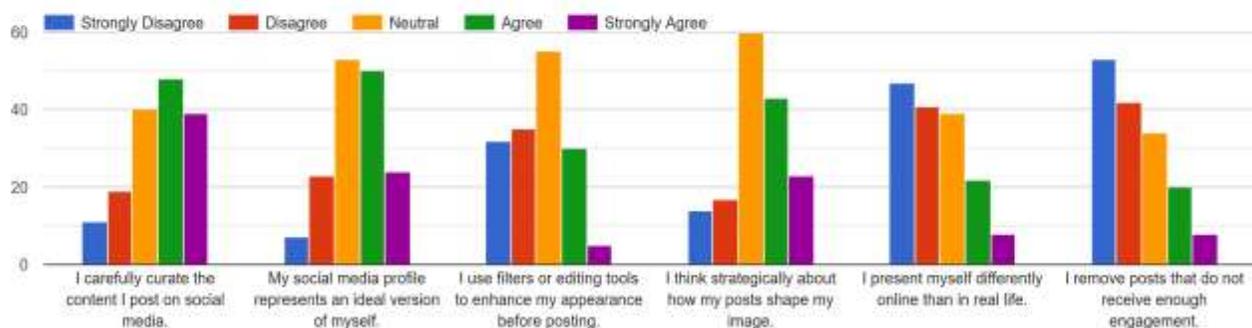


**Interpretation:**

The above diagram shows the equal percentages towards the reasons for using social media the most. It shows that women use social media platforms for diverse reasons and not dominated by one purpose which makes the social media more multi-functional.

**Digital Identity Construction**

(Self Presentation on Social media)



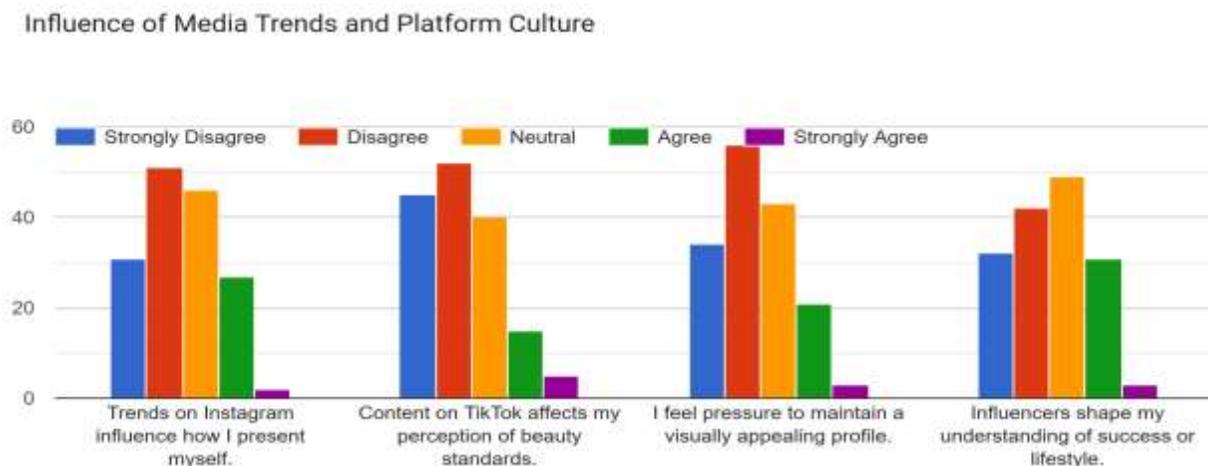
The graphical representation illustrates respondents' opinions regarding the Statement. The response distribution reveals that participants' levels of agreement and disagreement vary. The above graph represents how women present themselves on Social media. Following are the responses for the above graph:

- a) **I carefully curate the content I post on social media:** 31% of the women carefully curate the content that they post on social media.
- b) **My social media profile represents an ideal version of myself:** 34% of the women who gave a Neutral response on their social media profile represent an ideal version of themselves.
- c) **I use filters or editing tools to enhance my appearance before posting:** Only 19% of women use filters or editing tools to enhance their appearance before posting whereas 23% women disagree on the use of filters or editing tools to enhance their appearance before posting. Also 55 % of women have a neutral opinion towards the filers or editing tools for posting the photos on social media.

- d) **I think strategically about how my posts shape my image: Only 27% of women think strategically about how their posts shape their image, and 35 % women have a Neutral attitude towards the same.**
- e) **I present myself differently online than in real life: 30% of women strongly disagree that they present themselves differently online than in real life, whereas only 14 % agree on this statement.**
- f) **I remove posts that do not receive enough engagement: 34% of women show their strong disagreement on removing posts that do not receive enough engagement and only 13 % women showed their agreement towards the same.**

Considering all the answers above, it can be interpreted that the women strike a balance between being real and appearing good. Many women don't have strong opinions about Filtering, strategy, or curating their posts or photos on social media platforms. For women, self-expression and identity matter more than chasing engagement metrics. At the heart of it, many women use social media for social connection, self-expression, and sometimes to enhance their appearance.

#### 4. Influence of Media Trends and Platform Culture

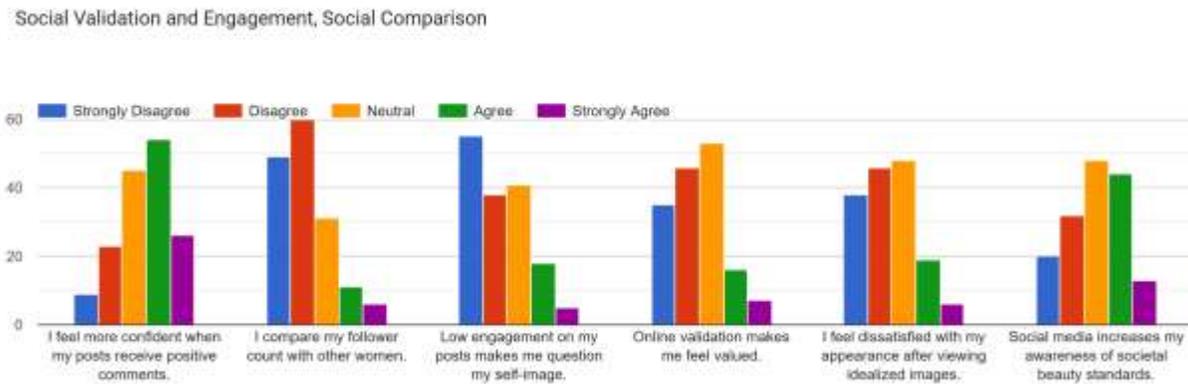


The graphical representation illustrates respondents' opinions regarding the Statement. The response distribution reveals that participants' levels of agreement and disagreement vary. The above graph represents the Influence of Media trends and Platform culture through various statements. The analysis of each statement is given below.

- a) **Trends on Instagram influence how I present myself: 32 % of women disagree on being influenced by Instagram trends to present themselves whereas only 15% women agree that trends on Instagram influence how they present themselves.**
- b) **Content on TikTok affects my perception of beauty standards: 33% of women disagree with being impacted by the content of TikTok to shape their perception of beauty standards whereas only 10 % women showed their agreement towards this statement that content on TikTOK affects their perception of beauty standards.**
- c) **I feel pressure to maintain a visually appealing profile: 27% of women do not feel any pressure to maintain a visually appealing or 'Perfect' profile whereas only 13 % women feel pressure to maintain a visually appealing profile.**
- d) **Influencers shape my understanding of success or lifestyle: 27 % of women disagree on this statement whereas 20% agree that Influencers shape their understanding of success or lifestyle.**

Considering all the above results, it can be interpreted that many women believe in building their own identity in the real world rather than being influenced by the trends on Social media platforms. They have a strong sense of individuality. Again, the content on TikTok does not define the beauty standards for women; they are more critical of unrealistic beauty standards set by social media. The majority of women prioritize their Authenticity rather than struggling to create a Perfect profile on Social media. Influencers on Social media, to an extent, but not dominantly shape the perception of success and lifestyle among women; many women independently define their own Success.

## 5. Social Validation and Engagement, Social Comparison



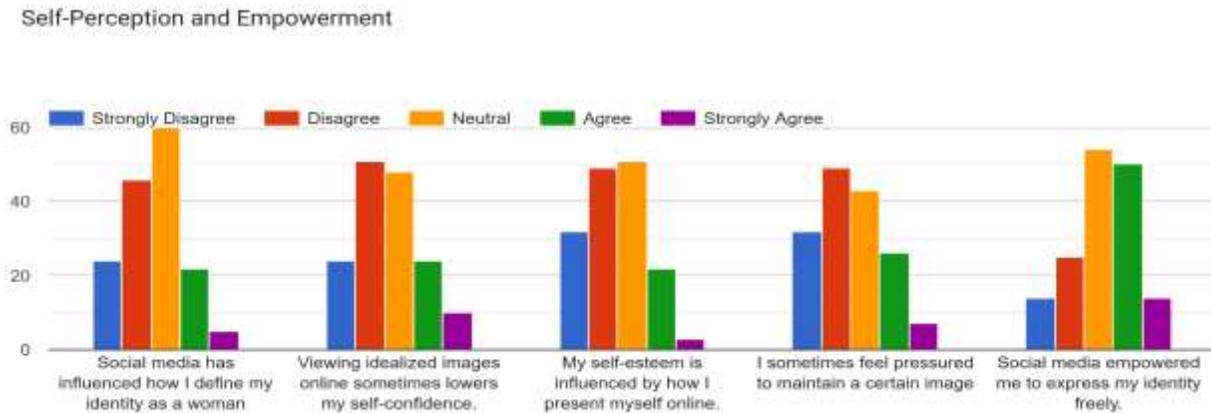
### Interpretation:

The graphical representation illustrates respondents' opinions regarding the Statement. The response distribution reveals that participants' levels of agreement and disagreement vary. The above graph represents the Social Validation and Engagement, Social Comparison. The analysis of each statement is given below.

- I feel more confident when my posts receive positive comments:** 34 % women significantly feel confident when their posts receive positive comments. Only 15% of women do not agree with this statement.
- I compare my follower count with other women:** Over 38 % of women do not compare their followers with other women, however only 7 percent of women do the comparison of their followers with other women.
- Low engagement on my posts makes me question my self-image:** Over 32 percent of women strongly disagree with this statement however only 11 percent women feel questioned about self image due to low engagement on their posts.
- Online validation makes me feel valued:** 29 % women disagree on this statement whereas only 10% women feel valued by online validation. However 34% women are having a neutral stance on this point. Online validation doesn't make any difference to them.
- I feel dissatisfied with my appearance after viewing idealized images:** 29% of women disagree with this statement whereas only 12 % women feel dissatisfied with their appearance after viewing idealized images on social media. However 31 % of women have a neutral stance on this.
- Social media increases my awareness of societal beauty standards:** 28% women showed their agreement on this statement whereas 20 % women disagree on this. However 31% women have a neutral stance on this.

Considering all the above results, it can be interpreted that although positive comments on social media posts make women feel confident or boost their morale, some women do not depend on them. Social media feedback plays a significant role in self-esteem, even if not everyone relies on it. On social media platforms, the majority of women do not believe in comparing themselves with other women's followers, as they strongly believe that their personal expression is more important than competitive metrics. Social media engagements and online validations, in a real sense, do not affect the self-image and value of women, but they help women significantly in raising awareness about societal beauty standards. Yet women largely remain independent, authentic, and resilient over social media validation.

## 6. Self-Perception and Empowerment :



### Interpretation:

The graphical representation illustrates respondents' opinions regarding the Statement. The response distribution reveals that participants' levels of agreement and disagreement vary. The above graph represents how social media influences the self perception among women and empower them. The analysis of each statement is given below.

- Social media has influenced how I define my identity as a woman:** 29% of women do not feel that their identity as a Woman is defined by social media where only 14% women feel that social media defines their identity as a woman. However over 38 % of women have a neutral stance on this statement.
- Viewing an idealized image online sometimes lowers my self-confidence:** 33% of women disagree that viewing idealized images affects their self-confidence whereas only 14% women feel that their self confidence lowers down after viewing the idealized images on social media.
- My self-esteem is influenced by how I present myself online:** 31% women do not feel that their self presentation influences self esteem, whereas only 14% women feel that their self-esteem is influenced by how they present themselves online.
- I sometimes feel pressured to maintain a certain image:** 31 % of women do not feel pressured to maintain a certain image of themselves on social media whereas only 17 % women feel the pressure of maintaining a certain image on social media platforms.
- Social media empowered me to express my identity freely:** 33% women strongly feel that social media empowered them to freely express their identity freely where only 16% women do not feel in the same manner. However 34% women have a neutral stand on this.

Considering the above mentioned results, it can be stated that women are not entirely dependent on Social media to drive or define their identities. The unrealistic representations on social media does not affect the confidence level of women. The Self- presentation on social media platforms do not impact the self esteem among women. Many women consider social media as a tool to express their genuine identity freely.

### CONCLUSION:

Considering the above finding, it can be concluded that Social media plays a moderate role in shaping women's identity, self-perception, and engagement with beauty standards. The majority of women use Social media with a balanced approach, where they value authenticity, self-expression, and social connection more than curated personalities on social media platforms. In a true sense, it is found that women use social media platforms' engagement metrics to maintain their authenticity.

The results suggest that many women prioritize presenting their Real identities on social media rather than creating a strategically filtered identity through various posts entirely to gain attention. It is found that women consider social media platforms just as a space for communication, self-expression, and creativity. Their existence on social media platforms does not contribute to their self-validation and comparison. The majority of women tend to demonstrate a strong sense of individuality in the real world, rather than allowing social media trends to dictate a sense of success, lifestyle, or beauty.

The study also indicates that even though positive comments on social media accounts boost the confidence among women, they still do not entirely rely on social media for their online validation to drive their self-worth.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that social media has a limited influence on women's identity and self-esteem. A significant proportion of respondents reported that social media does not define their identity as a woman, and many do not experience reduced confidence when exposed to idealized online images. Similarly, most women do not feel pressured to maintain a particular online image, nor do they believe that their self-esteem is strongly tied to their online presentation.

Overall, the study concludes that while social media can encourage self-expression and occasionally enhance confidence, women largely remain independent, resilient, and authentic in shaping their identities. Rather than being controlled by social media trends or validation systems, many women actively maintain critical awareness and personal autonomy, using social media as a tool for expression rather than as a determinant of their self-worth.

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358121664\\_The\\_Influence\\_of\\_Social\\_Media\\_on\\_Women's\\_Objectified\\_Body\\_Consciousness\\_and\\_Body\\_Dissatisfaction](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358121664_The_Influence_of_Social_Media_on_Women's_Objectified_Body_Consciousness_and_Body_Dissatisfaction)